

Sawtooth Interpretive & Historical Association
Oral History Project
Gerald and Freda Nicholson, 1988
Edited transcript
Transcribed by Susan Kim, 2024

Well, maybe, to begin the tape, we can start about how you first came to Stanley.

Gerald: Well, when I first came to Stanley it was back in the '20s. So, it's been quite a few years ago. And we came up to fish, brother, my dad and another person and myself. and then...

Freda: Tell them what kind of car you were driving.

Gerald: Well, it was a master 6 Buick, a '26 model and at that time, the old road, why it came over all right but most of the cars would have to either back up some of the places to get up or they'd have to drag logs down coming down the hill because of the brakes. I spent 72 years here in Idaho but uh...

Freda: My mother marched in the parade when Idaho became a state in 1890. She was 8 years old, and she'd come from Switzerland when she was four.

Gerald: No, my folks came here in around 1910, something like that, from... Dad came from Washington down here and my mother came from Pennsylvan...or Ohio. And uh Dad had been from Indiana originally. And uh, but anyhow we came up here all the time we could come whenever we... and we got to hunting up here. Back in the, oh '40s.

Freda: They settled in, our family, uh his family settled in Magic Valley and mine came there in about '10 in Magic Valley. Ten, between '10 and '14.

Gerald: Back in the '40s we, of course she was married... I was married to another lady, and she passed away of cancer. And uh then we met. She had been married. We met in uh, what was it, the last of '50s, wasn't it? We met. '50... or '60. '60. And, we had two... I had two boys and she had two girls. And we put them... there was two out of high school and two in high school. We put them together and uh they... Two of them live, the girls live in Twin Falls area and one boy lives in Boise and the other lives in Tacoma. The oldest boy was a head trainer for Chicago Cubs for a while and then he then he stepped(?) with Seattle Mariners and now he's with the Pacific Lutheran College in Parkland. He's a training instructor there. He teaches athletic training and is also the trainer for the... all the athletics there.

So, what year was it again that you came to Stanley?

Gerald: We came up here in '64 and bought. And then we came in '65 and I built quite a few buildings around. And then in '68 we came up to stay. And we've been here since then.

And you're here all year round?

Gerald: Yeah.

What kind of activities do you do here...?

Gerald: Well, when we, when I was younger, I snowmobiled and stuff like that. And of course we was active in all of the organizations. Back in '70 when, well before that, back in the '60s they started talking Park. And uh, the people, there

was a chamber of commerce then here. And uh, at that time there was people here in town that wanted a Park and the people on the outside, the ranchers and all, didn't want a Park. And most all the ranchers that was up here at that time kept their stock here, they didn't move them out. There was a lot of stock came in all right, but there were... the ranchers that lived here had their stock and kept them here. And uh, so they organized a Sawtooth Valley Association because they, instead of staying in and fighting the people in the chamber on the Park they organized the other. And so, when we came up, we was all... we got into that organization. I was in both of them, but I seen what was going on. So, we went to the Sawtooth National... Sawtooth Valley Association and fought the Park and took the lesser of two evils, that was National Recreation. And uh... we won out against people; well Sierra Club was one of the biggest organizations that came in here for Park. They wanted the Park in here in the worst way. And uh, we spent uh, oh maybe \$300, \$350 is all we had to spend. And we beat the whole works there. We had hearings in Sun Valley and uh everybody that represented anybody could get up and speak. Well, they let us have about 3 minutes and they let the Sierra Club have 15. Our uh, our representatives here was Frank Church, as a senator, and Orville Hansen, as a uh representative. So, he was doing whatever Frank Church wanted, and Frank Church and uh Cecil Andrus wanted the Park here in the worst way. And we kept it from going to Park and uh in the, in the years since then, why we've more or less, well, after we won that then the chamber, the people was in the chamber down here, got out. And so, we went back to the chamber and done away with the other organization. And now we've had a chamber ever since and it's been active and maybe not too big at times, but uh it was still here and uh work. And now it looks like we're going to be able to work with Sun Valley and Ketchum and Hailey and those towns where we never did before. They uh, they came up here, well I went down there one day to a meeting and um the uh owner of the uh Sun Valley and his manager and all them was sitting there and they made the comment that they was going to want, they wanted to work with us because we had scenery over here that they didn't have. And they had the accommodations, but they didn't, they just wanted the people to be able... like they're doing now... bring them over here on buses and uh let them see the country and stay for dinner and if they, some of them wanted to stay fine but then they'd bus them back over to Sun Valley, which is fine. And we've done quite a bit of uh business with them in the rock shop from those people. And, uh...

So, was this the kind of Park they were making for what Yellowstone is?

Gerald: Yeah. They wanted it just to close it off. You oughta... it was back there in the '70s, uh one, that we had the hearings over there and there was some of the most asinine statements made at that meeting. Some of the people wanted to fence it all off and just let such few come in.

How big was the land?

Gerald: Well, what is it, we've got... what the heck is it. How many acres is there in this?

Freda: I don't know, I could look it up.

Gerald: 700,000. Uh. see the uh, the Park starts over there where the North Fork, the headquarters is, and it comes on up through and comes over Galena summit. It doesn't take in all of Alturas Canyon, but it takes in part of it. It takes in uh, it keeps going toward the uh divide up here between here and the uh Payette River and when it gets on top, then it just goes right down the rim till out here, oh about uh 12, 14 miles west of town on 21 it comes down to there, where is a little divide there that the water on the other side goes to the Middle Fork and on this side comes back to the Salmon River, the main Salmon. And that is the dividing line. Then it goes out north here and swings back down to the river here and about a... and stays within a quarter of a mile all the way down the river to uh, oh pretty near to where Cypress is at down there. Cypress is outside of it and the mines and stuff up on Yankee Fork is all on the outside. Then it cuts across, takes in East Fork and all of the uh Boulder Mountains and the uh peaks on the head waters of the Lost River and then it cuts back into headquarters over there. It takes it, that's the area it takes. And uh now the Sun Valley groups and uh they, they've come, uh they wanted the Park at one time. They've changed their mind. They said, well they don't want to see a Park. They'd like to see a little more, maybe a wilderness area. All of this area back here is wilderness, and this back here isn't wilderness, they're trying to make a wilderness, like to get some of them to make a wilderness out of that, you see.

That's tough, can't do anything in wilderness.

Gerald: Well, uh that's what we've got. I will show you a chart we've got out in the laundromat comparing a Park and the National Recreation. Now in the National Recreation, they like to have you sign in so they where you're at and if they have to hunt you up for some reason or other. But you can go any place you want to. You don't have to stay on any trails, any roads, or nothing. Now, in the Park you have to stay on designated trails and roads. You can't go anyplace except on that and this other way you've got the whole country to go to.

Freda: Well, it's difficult economically to be, for Custer County, because Custer County is already 95% federal land and so that doesn't relieve much for the people to make a living off of.

How many um property owners in 1971 at the time?

Gerald: About the same amount as there is now. The forest service, see the park service they'd a come in, they'd a bought all of the uh ranches, everything out. And they told us, I asked the head guy out of Seattle, he was here and telling us, I asked him, I says what are you going to do with all these meadows up here. He said within one generation, we'll own everything up here. And uh I asked him what he's going to do about the meadows, I says there is no natural meadows here, they're all man-made. Oh, we'll hire somebody to irrigate them. You know what'd happen, about 3, 4 years they'd decide that there's a lot of foolishness and let it go to sagebrush. And then I said well what are you going to do about Stanley? Oh, we'll go down the river and build a new town and just free(?) you out. And so that was, that was the reason we don't want a Park in here we know what they're going, their plans are. And they even stated that they would close 75.

Your rock hounding, when, how long have you had an interest...

Gerald: Well that started when we built this building, or bought this building and uh made the rock, the laundromat out there. And the post office there, we had the back porch. And her brother took early retirement. And he'd been in it for, well that was in about '74 or something like that, so he'd been in it 20 years or better. And we decided, when he didn't have anything else to do, we'd just help(?) him up here and set up shop. And that's when we got started and got, and that's when I got interested in it. And, of course, I've done lots of different things and I was raised in a blacksmith shop and a few things like that so none of that kind of stuff ever bothered me. And I done, even engineering work on highways and stuff like that, carpentered, so I've always used my hands.

What are your hobbies now for the winter months?

Gerald: Oh, I've been building cabinets uh for in here. And I've got a shop out behind out there just setting by, that uh I've got electric welders, acetylene welders, table saws and the whole works in there. And when the weather's not too cold, I'll work out there. And so, it's uh, I'm not in need of anything to do. I can figure out lots of things I like to do. And uh so I just uh, it's like some of the friends around here they more or less retired and they haven't got anything to do but set and gripe.

Did you run a laundromat?

Gerald: We own a laundromat and we're, was hoping the post office would move out this spring but they're not going to move out till fall. We've still got two more years of contract with them, but they're going to build to cross the street and uh so they'll be moving out and I'll move the rock shop up in there if somebody don't come along buy us out before then. We're wanting to sell out. We have been wanting to sell out for about four years, five years. And go back down the lower part of the country where it's a little warmer in the wintertime, not quite so long winters. It doesn't bother us. We don't mind the snow or cold weather but uh we just like to do a few other things we don't get to do now.

So, you have another little enterprise, your pictures of Stanley, 1910-1936.

Gerald: We bought the negatives and a lot of the prints from the fellow that we bought the property from. And he had them and he got, he came in here in '48, I believe it was. And uh he bought the camera and stuff from another fellow Jim Soule, or uh yeah Jim Soule.

Freda: Bill.

Gerald: Huh?

Freds: Bill.

Gerald: Bill Soule. And the camera was one of those type that you wound it up, you got your light meter all set up on your lights, and uh...

Freda: Your distance.

Gerald: Your distance. And it took a picture. It wound the thing, moved it over to where it took, got in line, took another picture and that's the reason you can see 36-inch pictures. You put two, three segments of that all-in-one unit and then printed them. And we've been getting them reprinted over at Boise.

This is a picture of the, up where the airport used to be up there, is, and uh forty(?) trees up there, this here lone tree set up there. And there's now quite a lot of trees up there. This building wasn't there then. This building was built in '52 so it has to be back in the, earlier than that. I judge it's back in the '30s somewhere. This is an old dredge that was built up on uh Stanley Creek and Martin Pollock says when they started to move that, it sunk. It was so heavy it was... it wasn't a walking one, it wasn't a floating one. It was just uh, they had to skid(?) it.

By the year, that looks 1920s.

Gerald: *It has to be back in the 19... well I would say somewhere in the '30s because Martin came in here about the same time that I ever came in here in the '20s. And uh he's been in and out ever since then so and he knew that... so, I'd say this is in the '30s here. They uh up the river here just uh about a mile and a half there's a spring up there and... there...*

Which way down there? Can you show?

Gerald: *I don't know. No, I can't but I can show you the road. This road right here is where the road came in. It's still there.*

There's a little glare on there.

Gerald: *Yeah, and uh it goes back up here about a mile or such a matter and uh that's all on Pivas' property. Piero and his brothers and uh it comes back off the highway up here about a mile and a half something like that, two not oh maybe two miles.*

This is a toll bridge right here and there was party, an older lady, that owned the motel or hotel up here and there was another fella on the other side. Well, when the sheep would go through there, they'd charge him so much a head to go through, but they were standing back in some kind of underground buildings there with sheep hooks and they'd grab a lamb every so often on, from both sides. And that's the way they was helping themselves beyond. And there's quite a few bodies buried around here, the different places. They'd have no evidence of it at all until they get to uh digging. Now, Bob uh Danner over here was moving some buildings around here a couple years ago and he dug up a body. Nobody knew anything about it. And this gal's that own this, Banner is what their name was. And uh she had her husband was buried here somewhere as nobody knows for sure.

Now, is this the um hotel that still stands?

Gerald: *No.*

The Sawtooth...

Gerald: *No, this here, this here, you know where uh Ron Gillette's property is over here, the blue uh buildings and the River, the Triangle C?*

Yeah.

Gerald: *Well, this building is setting right about where he's got his little cabin set on the, just above this draw. This is a draw that runs through here.*

This is 1910.

Gerald: *Yeah, this is 1910.*

How many buildings would you say?

Gerald: *Well, there's only about three or four at the most there. There's I think a*

building here and there's one here and there. This in here, this is a hotel here and it was still standing when we came in uh '65, but they tore it down because it was getting rack and run(?). There had been a hotel there. There had been a schoolhouse. The school had been kept in there and different things and probably gambling a lot of the time too.

What was the population?

Gerald: *Hmm, back then? Well, when we came here in '65, 49. Population. And it's increased from there to 100 now. So, I judge it there's probably maybe 25 at the most. Uh there was, oh golly I don't know when Nieces and them and Merritts, the whole works, they all been in here a long time. 1910, you see I don't know whether they was here all that time. Tuffy McGown, which is Edna McGown's husband, sometime in '50(?).*

When did Harrahs come into the Valley?

Gerald: *Uh, Bill Harrah bought in, back in the '40s. He bought one house, and he's remodeled it so many times that it's uh oh uh you wouldn't even recognize it today. It's right on down this street here. It's a big building on the south side of the street. Now this is, this is up here near our part of town now. And this is still the hotel it was down here at the crossing. Here's crossing going across here. And uh I don't know whether the Ace of Diamonds was then or not. It was a dance hall that they used and a café. And they tore it out just before we came up, I think. It was across the street where the uh post office was going to be.*

So, this is Ace of Diamonds Avenue?

Gerald: *I think this here street here is the road that goes back, the original road that came in here, then went back through here. And the Ace of Diamonds is here, and then this is what we call Shorty Conyers(?) now and that's where the clinic sits. There's one building left there that was there then and it's uh, it sits right this side of the clinic down there, and that road goes right on back through, we call this the uh Niece Street, I guess it is, yeah that's Niece Street going back through here, through town. And uh then we named this street here, this is the highway now. The highway goes through there, and the street that comes, the first street here that's right out in front of the building we call the Ace of Diamonds Street. And, uh Wall Street, Critchfield(?) Street back there.*

This is a picture of 1926, winter picture of 1926. And of course it's, even in a real heavy winter, this here uh hillside over on the other side won't have too much snow on it. You can see how bare this is here, you see in here. You can get down across there with the, some of them will ride down across there with snow machines, but it's just a little rough. Lot of rock.

Uh 1910 and this is 1926 and this is 1936. And, of course, there's quite a few more buildings here now than there was in any of these others. And uh this is uh the old Benner Hotel here and this is the highway the road that came in here. These are the buildings here. This is the hotel that's up here right now, at the end of the street. And this in here, I think, is Ace of Diamonds. And course that was 14, 15, 16 years before this building was built, so it don't show. Even the rock garage over here was not even built then.

Okay. I just sort of pan along it here for a minute.

Gerald: *If we had this here sitting over on the other table, we'd have it just exactly right there, showing this here is the east, going east and that going west. This is Lower Stanley in 1926 or 36, in 1936. This is Wooley's buildings back here. Bill Wooley, he's dead now, he drowned in the river here, but uh they still own it. Uh these cabins through here, here's a store down here. This is what is like Knotty Pine is now. This is uh, on up through here, you see over here would be uh about where Redwood is at. And uh this is where uh oh fish and game building and...*

This looks interesting...

Gerald: *That there picture is of a uh cattle roundup out here on the, in the Basin. You know, Stanley Basin. And uh there's some of the people that's recognizable there, I can't tell you which is which there but uh, there's some of the Chivers there and probably some of the Pivas. I can't tell you when that was taken but it hadn't been that long ago.*

Freda: *These are pictures that CA Gregory sold uh from this building when he had it as a grocery store and the post office was in the corner in there. And uh there was not living quarters in this building, it was just an empty warehouse back here. And this is reflections of Stanley Lake and uh these were made with the old camera that moved and set itself and made these long pictures in about three or four selections. And this is another one of some old things in Stanley Lake, on Stanley Lake.*

Gerald: *That's Little Redfish.*

Freda: *Little Redfish. This one is off of Galena Summit.*

Inaudible

Freda: *This picture example is a silhouette of Redfish Lake, and he had a quarter on that picture.*

Can we turn back to that just a second there. How much was that?

Freda: *25 cents. This is a view of the Sawtooths from the Idaho Rocky Mountain Ranch.*

Gerald: *Right up there at the lodge. This is the flagpole right here. These are the buildings now down at the ranch.*

Where is that?

Freda: *The lower ranch.*

Gerald: *This is the Rocky Mountain's building down at the ranch.*

Freda: *The lower ranch. Lower part.*

Gerald: *Here's the lake right here that's there now too. This is a road coming in here that comes into the, to the lodge.*

Okey Doke.

Gerald: *Now, this is the lake and the lodge here now. Here's your flagpole.*

Freda: *Hold still. This is an old picture of Redfish Lake and the docks that was made by Bill Soule, that was here before CA Gregory.*

Steady that a little bit.

Gerald: *It look like it's kind of foggy, don't it?*

OK, any more information about that at all or anything you can think of?

Gerald: *Uh no.*

Freda: Don't have. This is, this is the dock. This is the point...Gerald, hold this.

Gerald: Back...

Freda: This is the point out here where they call the Point Campground.

Gerald: Well, that was the original campground on this point here, when this here, ever since this was opened up why they've had campgrounds here. Then back in, see it was '67, they made campgrounds across the lake and took this and they made it into a uh campground for overnigher tenters and stuff like that. And brother and I worked for a Fairbanks(?) in Twin Falls and they'd put in a water system out here and then we built a sewer, a sewer system and bathrooms and toilets and stuff out there.

Where was that?

Gerald: On Redfish Lake.

Can you show us kind of where.

Gerald: It's out in this area right in here, back in the trees here. And uh it goes clear down to the point and it's a nice campground.

Is that just where the dock is now?

Gerald: No, the dock is, this dock is still there only it's made up a lot better but the uh...

Tilt it up towards me, would you?

Freda: I need to steady my hand on that.

Gerald: The new boat dock is clear across the lake from there. Right straight across the lake. They've got a wide, oh one that's five or 6 feet wide, 7 ft wide that's out on the shore there at the lodge now.

Freda: Was uh probably began, uh started um nearly between uh 16 or 17 years ago, at least. This was some of the original Mountain Mamas and we gathered in the old uh what was called the Armada Cafe and uh brought our handiwork in the wintertime and just set around and maybe we'd have lunch or just drink coffee and do whatever we had to do uh by hand at that time. And um then uh Brady Ebersol decided that uh it would be a good idea to try to have arts and craft fairs up here because she had been to one. And um so we tried that. The first little one was held under the awning or whatever that is over there at the Mountain Village Lodge. And then after that we moved to the big green area and our um arts and craft fairs have been very successful. And we've had people all over the United or western United States come to, and participate in these shows. And then we started making some quilts um to raffle off. Well, um well this was uh, this was in um 1976 when we were celebrating the second uh anniversary of the United States and uh so we dressed in old dresses and um that was what we wore and we wore at the arts and crafts show at that time.

Are you in there?

Freda: Yes, I'm right here. And uh this is Phyllis Williams here, she's a pioneer in this, or more or less a pioneer. She taught school here for years ago. And um this is Ruth Niece, and her husband was a pioneer here. This is Bonnie Hansen, and her husband was born and raised here. This is Brady Ebersol, who had the idea for the

arts and craft show. This is Flora(?) Sullivan, and of course the Sullivans were old-timers here. She was married to one of the Sullivans then.

Which is you?

Freda: And this is me.

Pull that up high, so we can get a comparison.

Freda: From dark hair to gray.

How has it changed since then?

Freda: Uh I think we have um a different type of people in here than what we had then, but I think that's good too. I don't think it's a detriment to us.

In what way?

Freda: Well, the old-timers used to have a lot of grudges and fought with each other, I think in the wintertime. We noticed that before uh snowmobiling became popular that there were a lot of uh I won't go to this party because someone is going to be there or that type of thing. And uh of course those people, a lot have moved away and passed away and so you have, it's a more open society and more accepting of whoever you... people value you for your very self and not what you might have or who...

Okay this was later when the Mountain Mamas became there were more of us. And a lot of these people have moved away. Stanley society is quite fluid, I think, because um there'll be people come and work for a while and then they'll think they'll stay the winter, and they don't realize that in the wintertime there's not much going on up here and then they leave. And so next year you have a new population and so on and so uh as I say most of these people are not here anymore. And so, we have a new group uh and it just continues on and we continue on with the Mountain Mamas.

Is there... what... is there any particular reason why they leave, is there reason for the change?

Freda: Well, their jobs change or their husband gets transferred or they go to school, or they move and live somewhere else.

Do many come back?

Freda: They come back to visit yes; they don't come back to live but they come back to visit with you.

That was one of the first pictures that the Mountain... or quilts that the Mountain Mama's made, and we donated our own fabrics out of our own thing. We picked out our color scheme and then each lady uh went home and maybe took some pieces that they had and joined with the other pieces and pieced these blocks and so that's just a variety of uh things and of course we raffle these off and we use that money for different community projects. And we have put um over \$20,000 into the community building in the way of kitchen, uh carpeting, paint, and things like that. And supplies for the kitchen in the community building. We also have donated uh money to the ambulance and uh blankets for the ambulance and people who've had uh disasters up here and things like that. We're just a community service organization and that's what we do with the money from the quilts that we have. This is another one and our color sch... oh that's another one and as you can see

our color schemes developed a little better. This is taken against an old log cabin here in Stanley and this was, we did this one in 1981. This is a quilt that was made out of all wool pieces that was given to us and we raffled that off too. And it had dark green in it, and it doesn't show up quite as well. Nearly all these quilts are about 84 to 88 by about a hundred and five. This one happens to be by 118, so they're all queen-sized quilts. Now the girls get together and cut these uh pieces all out for the quilt and then um we each take so many blocks home and piece them and uh then we get together and lay the quilt out in the design that we'd like to have and uh then we take so many blocks home again and piece our section and then we get together and put it all together. And then we put the top and the middle, which is the bat, and the back together, pin them together and then we put them on a quilt frame and then we spend the rest of the winter quilting the quilt. And uh this is a project that we have, I have in progress now and these are the parts to a double wedding ring quilt. But that will all be hand feast(?), it isn't sewn on the machine.

Gerald: Well, I'd like to have you see our church up here. Uh we built that; golly I don't remember now when I started that. But uh we've got windows in there depicting the mountains that a young couple in Boise College, when they were doing their uh oh leaded glass. They took the pictures of this and then went and uh put it into windows up there. And uh, then of course uh we've done a lot of work around here like working on that and working on building the clinic down here. And uh there wasn't too many of us that really actually worked on the Community Building, but there again it's a community project. Uh. we hired an outfit out of Boise to put the building up first and then the finishing of it has all been done by local people, either hired or free gratis.

Freda: Florence Neustadter and I made and uh we entered it in the quilt show in Paduka, Kentucky. It didn't win anything but it's our first attempt. This part is called a mariner's compass, and it's called a medallion quilt. This pattern is um clam shells, and I don't know what this one is but uh, that's about all I can say about it. It was an original...

Gerald: ... entered that and...

Freda: There uh they receive, in Paduka Kentucky they receive about 10,000 entries but they only show about 400 of them. And so, we felt lucky that we were even considered to be...

This is an original design.

Freda: This is an original design that uh I drafted up and we coordinated ourselves on whether we like this or didn't like that. And that's the way we worked the design out, we tried different things and that's the design we ended up with. It will be shown in the American Quilt Society 1990 calendar.