

PREFACE

This study could have never come to be if it were not for Fielding H. Harris and Melvin Blomquist, who made their contributions in the 1960s. Harris moved to St. George, Utah, from northern Utah in 1965, with the intention of making his living by tuning pianos, as he had done in the northern portion of the state. While there, he had also recorded some oral histories. Upon arriving in southern Utah, he discovered that the much smaller population was insufficient to support him and his family. He had a brother-in-law, Melvin Blomquist, who lived in southern California, where he had a successful accounting business. Melvin wanted to help Fielding and his family and suggested that he would finance an oral history project. Together they decided to interview a particular group: those born in the Mojave Desert region (below the Great Basin) around the year 1900. That would include people from about thirty villages and towns.

In 1968, Harris began his interviews. Over the next three years, he completed 425 tapings from Panguitch in the north to Bunkerville and Mesquite, Nevada, in the south; from Panaca in southeastern Nevada to Kanab in Kane County, Utah; from Orderville in Long Valley, Utah, to Mount Trumbull in northern Arizona; from Enterprise, Utah, to

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Washington, Utah; and all the towns in between, such as Springdale, Rockville, Gunlock, Virgin, Hurricane, La Verkin, Toquerville, Leeds, St. George, Santa Clara, Veyo, Hebron, Pine Valley, Central, and several others. Some people he interviewed were born outside this region but moved to it later, such as a substantial group from the Mormon colonies in Old Mexico.

In 1986, Melvin Blomquist contacted me just after I moved from Logan into the administration of Dixie College. He inquired whether Dixie College would be interested in archiving the interviews, which they had transferred to cassettes from the reel-to-reel originals. We were excited and received them with enthusiasm. Seven years passed, and in 1993 I returned to teaching and research. We went to work transcribing the interviews. Another key figure then entered the picture. Valarie Johnson had recently moved to St. George from Phoenix, Arizona, where she had been involved in transcribing oral history tapes in Gilbert, Arizona. She contacted us and we immediately responded. She became officially allied with the Val Browning Library as an oral history transcriber. She soon enlisted about a dozen others as a team to do the transcribing that was completed in 2013. Fielding H. Harris recorded the interviews, and then about twenty-five years later, a team of trained transcribers, who had each done many of the interviews, typed the interviews very carefully. The interviews were then taken to the interviewees to read if they were alive or, if not, to surviving family members. After this, transcribers included their corrections, indexed the document, and completed the final typing. They are cataloged and stored in the Dixie State University Library Special Collections and Archives. The tapes are also there and have been digitized along with the transcriptions.

In these interviews, Harris faithfully followed an outline, asking similar questions of each person: "Give your full name and birthplace and date. Give your father's and mother's name. How many siblings did you have? What do you recall about your early childhood?" This sometimes led to other childhood issues. "Tell about your school life. Tell about your parents." These questions came from the file of Laura Snow Woodbury, dated 19 April 1968. They prompted the respondents to tell the story of their life. Here are some questions he asked

Harmon Gubler on 18 February 1969: “Did you enjoy school? Did you take trips? Did you learn to be a farmer from your father? Did you like farming? Did you go to college? What did you do for fun when you were growing up? Name your brothers and sisters. Where did you go on your mission? Tell about your courtship. Tell about your children. How long were you branch president? Did you help bring water into this area?” Harris asked such questions of all respondents who in turn gave often lengthy answers, describing their childhood, education, adulthood, work, progeny, and service.

Funding to support this effort was another key element. The transcribers were paid a modest amount, but because many of the interviews were more than one tape, there were about 650 tapes to transcribe. The Val Browning Library budget was a major contributor to this cost but so were private donors and the transcribers themselves who did some of the work voluntarily. The Utah Historical Society, the Utah Humanities Council, and the Charles Redd Center at BYU funded grants. The latter also did some of the transcribing. About twenty to forty files were transcribed each year. The library support staff for these two decades of work has been critical for this project, particularly Bonnie Percival, Caleb Ames, Rob Snow, James Miller, Tracy O’Kelly, Amber D’Ambrosio, Glen Harris, Daphne Selbert, Richard Paustenbaugh, and Kathleen Broeder. Elaine Alder, Leah Welker, Kimball Gardner, Tyler Bali, Mandi Diaz, Leah Emal, and Devan Jensen helped edit this book.

Fortunately, Fielding Harris was consistent, asking each interviewee the same questions but allowing them to personalize their answers. This consistency helps in the tabulation of the data, such as how common childhood death was, how many people had second or third marriages, how often fathers and mothers died in midlife, how often people moved, how many served LDS missions, how many graduated from high school, how many went to college and where, how many were active in their religion, and how many served in their community. Between these questions, the person being interviewed often included choice personal views and many stories. The tapes are a treasure of real life experiences and feelings. A chart at the end of this study summarizes the data.

All this effort enabled this extended project of social history—examining the life of the laborers in the field. The resulting book is largely

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a compilation of their own words, describing their life in the middle period of the development of the West. It focuses on a rather large region, one that is arid and that required arduous labor to convert to agriculture and community life.