

The Gerlach Public History Project:
Community Participation in Preserving a Rural Nevada Town

By

CHRISTINA EDITH PRESTON
B.A. (California State University, Sacramento) 2011

Thesis

Submitted in partial satisfaction of the requirements for the degree of

MASTER OF SCIENCE

in

Community Development

in the

OFFICE OF GRADUATE STUDIES

of the

UNIVERSITY OF CALIFORNIA

DAVIS

Approved:

Elisabeth Rose Middleton Manning, Chair

Natalia Deeb Sossa

Kristina Casper-Denman

Committee in Charge

2016

Acknowledgments

I first want to acknowledge the residents of Gerlach for welcoming me not only into their community, but also into their homes. I thoroughly enjoyed the experience, and treasure not only the memories that they shared with me, but also the wonderful memories that were made during the project. I especially want to thank Judy Conley, Sunny and Gay Deforest, Andrea Jackson, Ray Mosley, and Margie Reynolds for all of the assistance they provided during the project.

This project would have not of been possible without the support, and encouragement of my partner, Dave Collins, and my mother, Donna Preston. Dave Collins provided invaluable technical assistance throughout the entire project. He utilized his expertise as a recording engineer to assist with the oral histories as well as assisted with the editing of historical photos and video footage. However, most of all, I am indebted to him for pressuring me to go through with surgery during the project. I had a very serious ear infection that required a mastoidectomy and tympanoplasty. He may have very well saved my life, and for that, I owe him everything. My mother, Donna Preston, was also a pivotal part of my support system. She provided an endless amount of encouragement every step of the way. She cooked numerous meals, kept me company during many long nights of writing, and provided the laughter needed to sustain me during the difficult times.

I owe an enormous gratitude to my committee consisting of Beth Rose Manning, Kristina Casper-Denman, and Natalia Deeb Sossa. I felt blessed to have three powerful activists, and scholars as my mentors. They provided endless guidance during the project, and empowered me to push through the difficulties of the writing process. I also want to thank Carrie Armstrong-Ruport for always being there for me, and keeping me on track to graduate. She is the backbone of the Community and Regional Development Graduate Group.

Lastly, I wanted to pay tribute to the late Huell Howser. I frequently reflected on his role on the television show, *California's Gold*, throughout the Gerlach Public History Project. I have always admired his endurance, enthusiasm, and innate curiosity for the past. Most of all, I admired and tried emulate his talented interviewing techniques which always put his subjects at ease.

Abstract

The Gerlach Public History Project is focused on documenting the history of Gerlach, a remote town located in the Black Rock Desert in Northern Nevada. The community is located near the current site of the annual Burning Man Arts Festival. This small community currently has less than 125 residents since the nearby USG Gypsum mine and production plant closed in 2011.

The project took a multi-media approach, working with residents to collect historical photographs, video footage, and community documents along with digitally recorded oral histories. The project documented the town's development, from the early 1900s through the 1970s. Highlights of the project included four Community Share & Tell events followed by the final event, The Gerlach Public History Night, a community created pop-up museum. These two different types of events provided a medium for residents to teach me about their community, as well to share their stories, photographs, scrapbooks, and artifacts with fellow community members. The materials produced by this project provide the Gerlach Community Economic Development team with the narrative necessary to apply for economic and community development grants, as well as create tourist brochures, website content, and didactic materials.

The primary focus of this document is to provide a brief historical overview of the community, describe the methods undertaken to document it, and to share a narrative of my experiences and interactions. Given that conflict and mistrust were reoccurring themes throughout the project, the narrative would not be complete without discussion of the scope and impacts of the conflict between Burning Man organizers, volunteers, attendees, and Gerlach's residents.

All research was planned in collaboration with residents utilizing Participatory Action Research (PAR). PAR was utilized to foster resident participation, collaboration, and inclusivity. Participants involved in the planning and implementation of the project included both current and former residents of Gerlach and Empire. There were over 46 residents that were continuously involved in the project. Aside from planning the project and events, some of the opportunities for participation included oral histories, research assistance, identification of historic photos, and editing. *This project demonstrated that **public history can be utilized as a form of community development** by providing a method for residents to envision the future while reflecting on the past.*

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Preface

Public History

Public historians consult collaboratively with living communities to develop historical narratives based off memories of past experiences. The methodologies used to gather information may include, but are not limited to, recording oral histories, reviewing and captioning historical photographs, and documenting different perspectives on news articles published in the past. This differs from academic history, which typically pieces together the past through the review and analysis of primary sources such as diaries, manuscripts, legal documents, speeches, and letters (Liddington 2002:85). Public histories can be used for a wide array projects from use by government agencies to inform civic projects, to providing content for documentaries, or the creation of didactic materials for museums (Liddington 2002:85). These histories often document places, people, and events that may be considered contextually insignificant by present-day historians. This can help develop a more robust understanding of the past since the voices uncovered during this process are typically the ones that are most often overlooked (Liddington 2002:85).

Gerlach and Empire

Prior to this project, the history of Gerlach and Empire had not been formerly documented by historians, academics, or writers. The remote location of these communities, as well as the absence of well-known, sensational historical events, may have contributed to the lack of acknowledgement by historians. However, the absence of a complete historical narrative is problematic for the community since it does not provide material that can easily be used by Gerlach's residents in grants, didactic materials, or for other community-led projects and purposes. In the challenging economic climate that followed the death of the regional railroad and gypsum mining industries, remaining residents are seeking to economically sustain the

community through tourism. Documenting the community's history has been complicated for residents due to a lack financial resources, interpersonal conflicts, and community politics predominately focused on impacts of the nearby Burning Man festival.

Gerlach is an unincorporated area of Washoe County, Nevada. There is no municipal body that governs the community aside from the County. Recommendations to the county are usually made by the Gerlach Community and Economic Development Team (GCED). This team consists of a small group residents interested in the future of the town. The number of residents active within this group fluctuates between five to eight members. This ad-hoc group of residents meets each month to grapple with a wide range of issues from landscaping to fundraising for community projects in the absence of a municipal body. However, the power of this group is limited. It operates on a small budget that is based on community fundraising efforts. Although, the GCED, had previously taken interest in documenting the history of the Gerlach and Empire for economic development in tourism, the project has never been undertaken since the team lacks the budget, and resources necessary to accomplish this task (GCED 2014).

Participatory Research

The Gerlach Public History Project was conducted as a professional thesis project. My role as a researcher was to work with the client, the Gerlach Community and Economic Development team, to produce a public history document that could be utilized for community economic development purposes. I selected Participatory Action Research (PAR) as the guiding methodological framework for the project. PAR can be defined as collaborative research that's designed to address community problems. The term collaboration is used in the paper to reference work that involves residents supporting each other by working together to achieve a

common goal for the betterment of the community. Within a PAR framework, the community is involved in choosing the research question, and in many or every stage of conducting the research, depending upon their interests and time and the characteristics of the project (Wulfhurst, Eisenhauer, Gripne, and Ward 2008:23). PAR is used by researchers for many reasons, including facilitating collaboration, empowering communities, and knowledge sharing (25). For the purpose of this project, PAR was utilized to transfer control to the community, increase participation, and reduce conflict.

This paper will frequently use the term “community” to refer to the residents of Gerlach and surrounding unincorporated areas. The definition of community in Gerlach can be problematic, as the term is often used to refer to individuals that share a geographic location, common interests, and religious affiliations (Agrawal and Gibson 2001). During the project, it was difficult to define the spatial boundaries of Gerlach since many residents consider themselves a member of the community even if they live as far as 30-50 miles outside of the town. Despite living great distances, ranchers, miners, and other homesteaders still participate in the community life of Gerlach by attending social events, and patronizing local businesses. Furthermore, many residents have moved from Gerlach and Empire due to the economic instability and lack of services, but still visit the community whenever possible. Rigid geographic boundaries would have been exclusionary. For the intent of this project, the term encompasses anyone who once lived or worked within Gerlach or Empire, and participated in the project; this includes both newcomers and longtime residents as well as current and former residents.

While the intent of the project to document Gerlach’s little-known 20th century history was very simple, the process was complicated by the unstable economy of the community,

resident's relationship with the annual Burning Man Arts Festival, and an overall mistrust of "outsiders" -- defined as anyone unfamiliar to longtime residents. Therefore, I have included a thorough description of the problems that I encountered during the project. The purpose of these narrations is to provide a glimpse into the unique variety of issues, both communal and personal, that researchers often encounter while conducting community-based PAR research projects. Instead of omitting these issues, I follow the examples set by other PAR scholars and offer very candid reflections about the invaluable lessons imparted by these challenges (Long et al. 2015; Minkler et al 2008). I hope that these descriptions and subsequent reflections can be of value to other PAR researchers embarking on field research.

Overview of Thesis

This document begins with a brief description of the project's conception before providing an overview of the community. This is followed by a description of the Burning Man Arts Festival, and how it relates to the Gerlach Community and Economic Development Group's desire to find ways to help residents and community businesses better capitalize on the visitors the festival brings to the community. After this, an overview of literature that exists on Gerlach is provided. The proceeding sections focus on describing the Community Share & Tell events, archival research, oral history, photography, pop-up museum, and the cemetery. I also address project planning, methods, project meetings, and the final product. The conclusion includes a discussion of community conflicts, project problems, and my reflections.

Project Concept

I first became aware of the small town of Gerlach after attending Burning Man at the age of 17 in 2000. Gerlach is the last town that attendees encounter before heading into the Black Rock Desert where the annual weeklong festival is held. In 2000, as I drove past Gerlach on Highway 447, I was intrigued by the town's isolation; it is located 108 miles north of Reno in a desolate portion of the Great Basin. This interest was rekindled in 2014 when I listened to a podcast on the National Public Radio website, entitled "Shuttered Plant Marks the End of a Nevada Town" produced by Robert Siegel in 2011 (Siegel 2011). The podcast featured an interview with the former United States Gypsum Corporation plant manager, Lonnie Dyck, regarding the closure of the mine located seven miles south of Gerlach. After listening to the interview, I decided to reach out to the community of Gerlach to see if it would be possible to work on a project focused on studying the town's economic sustainability after the closure of the mine.

However, finding an appropriate person to make contact with in town was very difficult. There are not any government or county buildings, community clubs, or civic organizations located within Gerlach. The only phone number publicly listed aside from contact information for the bars was for the Gerlach Community Senior Center. I phoned several times, but only received a busy signal. However, in July 2014, I found an online advertisement on the Nevada Bureau of Land Management (BLM) website for an Artist-in-Residence¹ program sponsored in

¹ The Artist-in-Residence program provides housing for two artists in Gerlach for two weeks. The artists are provided a small stipend to create works of art inspired by the Black Rock Desert. These artworks are displayed at the Black Rock Desert BLM offices during an open house, and utilized by the U.S. Department of the Interior for pamphlets.

partnership with Friends of Black Rock High Rock (FBRHR), a small environmental non-profit located within the community (Artist-In-Residence). A BLM ranger was able to put me in contact with the FBRHR director, Michael Myers, who ultimately connected me with the Gerlach Community Economic Development (GCED) team, a small citizen advisory board that provides recommendations to Washoe County on behalf of the town (Washoe County)². After some deliberation by GCED, I was invited to introduce myself to the community during a meeting in August 2014.

This initial meeting occurred on August 15, 2014, and was only attended by five residents, including three Burning Man festival attendees who had moved to the area between 2005-2010. I was excited about this mix of attendees, given that my original interest was in researching the town's increasing economic reliance on Burning Man after the closure of the USG production plant and mine in 2011. The meeting occurred informally on a picnic bench outside of the Gerlach Community Center. I introduced myself as a graduate student from UC Davis's Department of Community and Regional Development (CRD), and then described my background in anthropology along with a short narrative of the types of community projects that I had worked on in the past. Their interest was piqued when I offered to conduct a project of their choosing for free-of-charge in order to meet the program requirements for a Masters in CRD. After hearing this, residents urged me to present project suggestions. I offered several ideas, including studying the town's economy after the closure of USG production plant and mine, and the town's economy as it relates to the Burning Man festival. However, this topic was met with instant rejection due to the town's economically ambiguous, and often tense relationship with the Burning Man organization. A project focused on the economy would be a conflict of interest for

² The meetings are attended by any resident interested in the well-being of Gerlach. Residents also use this opportunity to discuss community projects and issues. Representatives of Washoe County are not present, and the meetings typically occur informally.

some residents and business owners, since Gerlach has become economically dependent upon the festival, despite the fact that many residents are highly critical of the event and its participants due to the strain so many visitors put on the community's limited resources (Glionna 2016).

After learning more about my background in archaeology, museum curation, and exhibit development, the residents immediately suggested documenting the town's history, since the size of the town was dwindling, and many of the longtime residents had recently passed away without formally sharing their experiences regarding life in early Gerlach. The GCED was especially interested in a historical document since it would provide the narrative necessary to apply for grants, and create brochures for tourists. I was very amenable to this suggestion since the project aligned with my previous experiences, while allowing me to further develop skills in facilitation and community organizing. It was clear to me immediately that working with residents would be rewarding, yet difficult, due to residents' weariness of outsiders which had been further compounded by interactions and conflicts surrounding Burning Man.

After the initial meeting, I decided to stay in town overnight to conceptualize the project, develop a sense of the community, and determine the resources that would be required. To cut down on costs, instead of staying in the only hotel in town, I opted to stay in a trailer offered by a member of the GCED team. Unfortunately, I discovered that the trailer was dilapidated and in disrepair. It had broken windows, the door would not close, and there was no electricity or running water. The conditions were grueling to deal with in the heat of July, and the mosquitoes were rampant.

Fortunately, my positive attitude despite the dismal conditions of my accommodations impressed Elizabeth Gambrell, Gerlach Senior Center Director. She had been present at the

GCED meeting the day before, and decided to call me the following morning to invite me to lunch at the Senior Center. During the phone conversation, she mentioned that I could come to the Center early to help prepare and serve the food; giving us time to become acquainted. Upon my arrival, she revealed that she had been impressed by my dedication to working with the community, as demonstrated by my willingness to endure the conditions of my lodging (Elizabeth Gambrell 10/15/2014). Gambrell stated that she believed visiting the Senior Center would provide a way to introduce me to some of the town's oldest residents that had not been present the night before at the GCED meeting (Elizabeth Gambrell 10/15/2014).

Upon chatting with the seniors during lunch, I quickly discovered that the project would be much more difficult than I had originally anticipated. After I was introduced, the seniors quickly probed my intentions. I was asked to further elaborate upon my interests in Gerlach, only to be interrupted by residents' misgivings toward the project. One resident suggested studying my own town, while another made unfavorable political remarks about my home state of California. Despite these quips, I was able to explain that I believed that Gerlach was a unique place due to its isolated location, as well as the long-term multi-generational residency of many who remained after the closure of the mine. Furthermore, I expressed my admiration of the residents who endure the conditions of the high desert, which include intense summer temperatures characterized by powerful dust storms, followed by icy, blustering winters. To live under these conditions requires dedication, adaptability, and independence. I also noted that Gerlach was unlike other desert towns that are frequently plagued by serious poverty, crime, and drug problems (particularly methamphetamines and opioids) (Murphy 2016). These explanations seemed to satisfy their curiosity and demonstrate that my interest in the area was more than a superficial fascination likely generated by its proximity to Burning Man.

After this initial lunch together, one of the town's oldest residents asked me to join some residents later that evening to celebrate an 80th birthday. I accepted this invitation, and attended the party. Elizabeth Gambrell, who was also in attendance, privately revealed to me during the celebration that some of the elderly residents were pessimistic about the project, according to comments she had overheard. However, she shared that it was a sign of trust and interest to have been invited to such a private affair (Elizabeth Gambrell 10/15/2014).

During the beginning of this project, invitations to community events would become increasingly frequent. I readily accepted invites to birthdays, family dinners, garage sales, swap meets, and parties when I was in town. Being aware that some residents may not be comfortable attending meetings without first becoming acquainted, I decided it was important to participate in these events so that I could mingle with the town's residents to build rapport, and personally inform them about the project in hopes that this would increase their willingness to participate. As such, I spent August-December of 2014 month visiting town, and interacting with residents to build their trust and confidence. I also hosted planning meetings regarding the project. Participation in community activities occurred throughout the entire duration of the two-year project, with many residents stating that my attendance at these events and their ability to informally familiarize themselves with my presence was a key component of their decision to participate.

Community Overview

Gerlach was established as a town in 1906 by the Western Pacific (WP) railroad (Murphy 1975). The town was named by WP after the Gerlach Land and Livestock Company, who managed a large ranching operation in the area starting in 1898. The abundance of groundwater,

evidenced by the hot springs in the vicinity, provided an ideal location for WP to establish a depot as steam engines needed stop every 100-150 miles to refill their boilers with water (Ray Mosley 4/20/2015). After purchasing the land in 1906, WP established a rail yard, roundhouse, train station, employee housing, and, most importantly, built water towers along the railroad tracks to replenish the steam engines along the WP Feather River Route (Ray Mosley 04/20/2015)

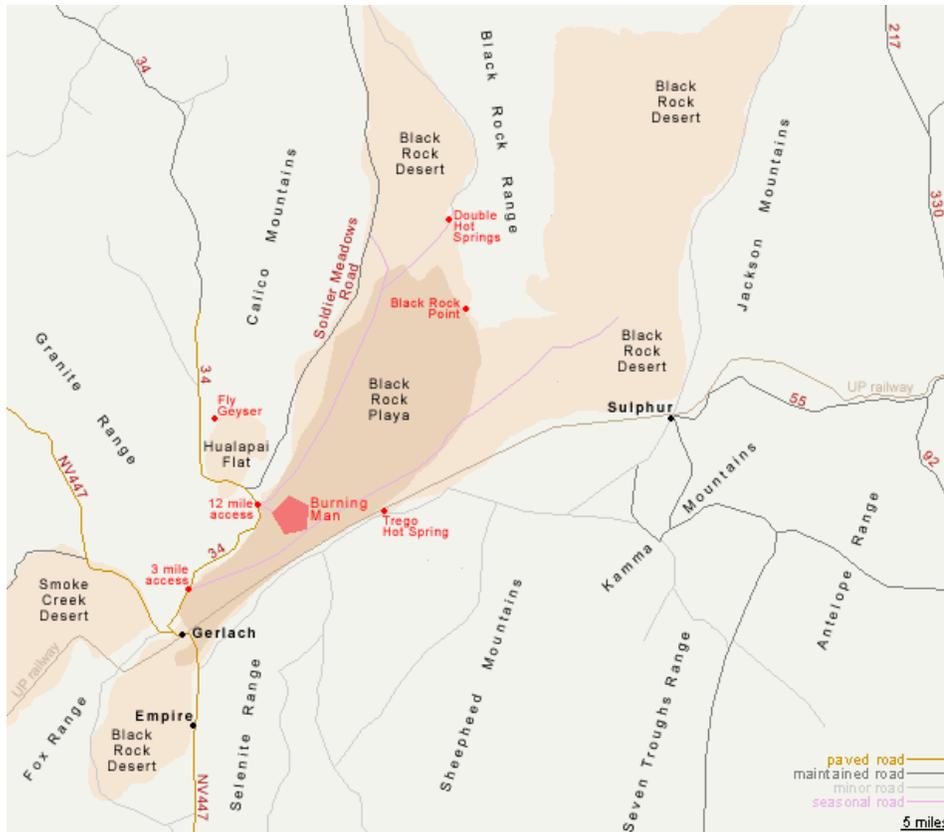
In 1910, the Pacific Portland Cement Company (PCC) established a makeshift mining camp seven miles south of Gerlach to mine gypsum from nearby Luxor Peak. The raw gypsum was sold for use as agricultural and granular gypsum, as well as manufactured into residential and commercial plaster products and wallboard. The tent-city established by PCC eventually transitioned into a company town in 1923 (Empire Plant History). Shortly thereafter, a plaster production mill was established in 1924 that included a 7.5 million square-foot warehouse and a four-kettle operation mill with a perlite expander (Empire Plant History).

The United States Gypsum Corporation eventually purchased the mine, production plant, and company town in 1948 from PCC. Shortly thereafter, production of sheetrock skyrocketed after World War II, due to the increased demand for quickly manufactured housing (Kersten 1985: 12). By 1950, a single line board machine capable of producing custom-sized wallboard and plasterboard was built on-site. Empire's population was at its highest in the 1960s when it surpassed 700 residents (Empire Plant History). At its peak in operations, the mine manufactured over 90% of the U.S.'s supply of sheetrock (Empire Plant History).

The town of Gerlach was still owned by the WP until operations downsized in 1950s due to the increased use of automobiles and the eventual discontinuation of steam engines (Murphys 1975). Advancements in diesel locomotive technology resulted in the ability of trains to travel

long distances without needing to stop every 100-150 miles to refill the boilers with water. WP officials eventually sold the town, which included 18 commercial lots, and 111 lots with dwellings for \$18,000 to residents in 1975 (Murphy 1975) A lease holders' association purchased the land on behalf of residents and then sold each plot individually (Murphy 1975). However, the reduction of railroad traffic resulted in a significant population loss, due to the shrinkage in available railroad career opportunities. Despite the loss, several bars, restaurants, and a movie theatre were able to maintain business by providing services to the remaining residents of Gerlach, and to those in the nearby company town of Empire.

In 1990, the Burning Man Arts Festival moved to the Black Rock Desert from San Francisco. During this time, the arts festival was a small informal campout of artists. The first event was free, and it was estimated to be attended by roughly 250 individuals (Mikel, Chase, Mosbaugh). Since this time, the event has become much more organized, and attendance has expanded to over 70,000 people per year. Ticket prices range from \$390 to as much as \$1200 (tickets.burningman.org). In 2015, over 70,000 people attended the festival (burningman.org). Over the years, Burning Man expanded its presence in Gerlach and surrounding areas by purchasing multiple properties for storage and operations.



Map demonstrates the proximity of Empire and Gerlach to the site of the Burning Man Festival created by American South West Guide to National Parks³.

In 2011, the small communities of Gerlach and Empire were hit with a severe economic blow when the USG production plant and mine halted operations indefinitely as the United States housing market crumbled. The drop in new housing construction coupled with competition from manufacturers in China resulted in USG company profits dropping from \$5.8 billion dollars to \$2.9 billion dollars in just under four years (Powers 2011). The USG Empire production plant and mine was one of the sites selected for closure due to the expense of housing employees and their families along with the cost of maintaining the town. In 2011, residents were paying USG as little as \$125 for a one room apartment and \$250 for two-bedroom home

³ "Black Rock Desert." *The American Southwest*. N.p., n.d. Web. <www.americansouthwest.net/nevada/black-rock-desert>.

(McMurdo 2011). During the closure, ninety-five employees were laid off, and evicted from their homes (Powers 2011).

Empire became a ghost town⁴ six months after the mine closed, as some residents with school age children were allowed to stay behind so the children could finish the school year. Some residents wished to stay, but USG refused to sell any of the property (McMurdo 2011). A chain-link fence now surrounds the dilapidated town, which includes 115 single and multi-family housing units along with a community pool, golf course, and snack bar, as well as a Baptist church, and a Catholic church⁵ (Empire Plant History). By the time the mine closed, it had been operating for over 88 years, making it one of the longest running mines in United States History.



Figure 1 This photo was taken during a tour of the former USG Production Plant. On the last day of the plant operations, the workers tossed their helmets in a tree. Pictured is a helmet that had fallen to the ground.

⁴ The term “ghost town” in this paper refers to a town that has physically been abandoned, and left in a state of decay.

⁵ The Empire grocery store, located off of HWY-447, originally closed in 2011 following the closure of the mine. This placed a significant hardship on Gerlach residents, who were then forced to drive 107 miles away to purchase basic supplies. Fortunately, the grocery store, now privately owned, reopened in 2012 despite struggles.

Since the closure, there are even fewer places of employment within the area. Bruno's hotel, restaurant, bar, and gas station, owned by Bruno Selmi, aged 94, employs the largest number of people in town, many of which are recruited from Reno to work as waiters, cooks, bartenders, and grounds keepers (Lena "Skeekie" Courtney 4/5/2016). Bruno usually provides small apartments for these employees to live in as a relocation incentive (Lena "Skeekie" Courtney 4/5/2016). The two other bars in town are Joe's Gerlach Club owned by Larry Guisasola, aged 76, and Bev's Miner's Club, owned by Beverly Osborn, aged 91. Both of these businesses hire locals to bartend during their very limited evening hours of operation. Both businesses are in jeopardy of closing due to the small population coupled with the advanced ages of the owners. Both Bruno's and Bev's Miner Bar have been on the real estate market for years without purchase, and it is unknown what will happen to these businesses if the owners become unable to operate them.

Washoe County also employs several residents. The school district maintains one teacher and two assistants for the eight children that are currently enrolled at Ernest Johnson Elementary School, which has been combined with Gerlach High School due to low enrollments. Washoe County also employs a cook and an assistant to prepare low-cost meals five days a week at the Senior Center along with a part-time bus driver to transport elderly residents 214 miles roundtrip to Reno for medical appointments (Cindy Carter 5/6/2016). Five residents hired as County workers also maintain 88 miles of paved road as well as 347 miles of gravel roads in the area (Cindy Carter 5/6/2016)

Empire Distribution is the only market within 80 miles. It operates just outside of Gerlach on Highway 447 beyond the boundaries of the former town of Empire. The store first opened in 1957 (VisitGerlach.Com). It carries basic supplies, boxed foods, and a small assortment of fresh

produce. The shelves are not well-stocked, and the store has struggled to stay open since the closure of the production plant and mine. Due to the poor selection and high prices, many residents prefer to make a few monthly trips to Fernley or Reno to purchase supplies. (Ray Mosley 10/20/2014). The grocery store is most utilized by travelers before, during, and after seasonal events such as the opening day of hunting season, or during the Burning Man festival. Business at the store is often slow during the remainder of the year, and hours often change without notice (Maltby 2011).

U.S. Postal Service mail is centrally delivered and picked up at the only United States Postal Office in a 70 mile-radius. There are over 200 postal boxes in use at the Gerlach Post Office, and Jola Guissola, postal worker, reports that some customers travel as far as 90 miles away from Vya, Nevada to retrieve mail since the United States Postal Service does not directly deliver to residents who live in desolate areas (Jola Guissola 9/18/2016). Postal delivery is important to residents, since many rely on online retailers to purchase household products, food, clothing and other specialty items. Online purchasing helps residents cope with the lack of retailers and resources available in town, and is particularly important to those who are unable to commute to Reno due to mobility or transportation problems. During fieldwork, I witnessed residents purchasing an array of items, such as clothing, dry goods, tools, and household products through online retailers that offered free expedited shipping.⁶

The Burning Man organization provides an open access Internet connection to the town via a point-to-point microwave link distributed near the organization's properties (Mathew Ebert

⁶ One elderly resident that did not have Internet connection asked me to purchase a health supplement on Amazon in exchange for cash since he was having car issues, and was unable to make his normal monthly drive to Reno. Another resident purchased shirts for her father who was in his 90s. She purchased several sizes with plans to return the items that did not fit, and remarked that she typically made all of his clothing purchases online since it was easier to return items via mail than to drive the items back to Reno to return to a retailer.

6/26/2016). Many residents rely on this connection to access the Internet since the only other option is satellite, which is reported to cost over a \$100 a month (Mathew Ebert 3/26/2016). Since the connection is only distributed near Burning Man properties, access is limited to residents nearby these locations (Mathew Ebert 3/26/2016). The connection provided by Burning Man is often unreliable, and completely inaccessible during the months before and after the event when Burning Man employees and volunteers begin to overwhelm the connection (Mathew Ebert 3/26/2016). Many residents are also suspicious of the free Internet, commenting that it may be used by the organization to monitor resident's Internet activities (Anonymous #1 2/10/2015). During the last year and a half, this concern was mentioned quite a few times in casual conversations. Although, there is no evidence to support that surveillance is occurring, such views demonstrate residents' mistrust toward of the Burning Man organization.

Current Population Demographics

The population of Gerlach at the time of this project was around 125 full-time residents (GCED). There are a total of 163 housing units in Gerlach (2010 Census). However, the population of Gerlach is not static. It rapidly increases by 200-300 people starting in June, when employees and volunteers populate all of the available housing in order to begin construction of the infrastructure for the week-long Burning Man arts festival in September (Mathew Ebert 10/14/2014). Some of these employees and volunteers stay for months after the festival, making Gerlach a temporary home, often due to the low-cost of living (Vaughn Solo 7/26/2016).

The demographic of Gerlach is not ethnically diverse. At the time of the 2010 census report, there were 206 individuals identified on the Gerlach census. The individuals identified as 97.57% White, 0.97% Asian, and 1.46% American Indian or Alaskan Native. (2010 Census).

Based on informal observations made during the project, and the population decrease that occurred after the closure of the USG production plant, company town and mine, it is reasonable to assume that diversity in Gerlach has further decreased since the 2010 census. However, it is worth noting that Gerlach was more diverse when the USG Production Plant and Mine was in operation, as the census reports that the community was comprised of 217 individuals. These individuals identified as 79.72% White, 5.07% American Indian or Alaskan Native, 0.92% African American, 12.44% other race, and 1.84% two or more races (2010 Census). Informal conversations with residents indicate that some of Empire and Gerlach residents would not have been formally counted since they were not U.S. citizens.⁷ The overall workforce of USG may have been more diverse than the citizenship of the town since employees commuted from Nixon, 54 miles south, which is located within the Pyramid Lake Paiute reservation (Sunny Deforest 6/6/2016).

Overall, residents report that the lack of stable job opportunities in the region makes long-term residency in town difficult for anyone who is not currently receiving government assistance or a pension (Vaughn Solo 7/26/2016). The evidence for this is suggested by the number of retired individuals currently living in Gerlach, the limited number of school aged children, the consistently dwindling population, and the decreasing hours of operation for businesses (Census 2010). Some younger residents find informal employment serving as part-time caretakers for elderly residents, or take on odd jobs by completing home repairs or errands. However, these are not lucrative or stable jobs. According to residents, the average going rate for temporary odd jobs in construction or caretaking in Gerlach is \$10 per hour, slightly above Nevada's minimum wage of \$8.25 (Vaughn Solo 7/26/2016).

⁷ Information obtained from former United States Gypsum Human Resource Manager

Aside from census data and informal interviews, the project did not focus on querying residents on race, ethnicity, religion, education level, or income. Residents were willing to reveal their age in most cases, but it was often difficult to obtain basic personal information such as the exact date of birth or full name. It is unclear why residents expressed trepidation about revealing basic personal information, but it was likely related to fear of it being published or misused. Residents frequently expressed fear that Burning Man was collecting data on the community that could later be used to accomplish a secret agenda to takeover the community by purchasing all of the property in town. It is also likely that residents feared that their information would be made available to other residents with whom they were experiencing interpersonal conflict. Due to such reticence, it was not appropriate to press for additional personal information that was not critical for the project.

Tourism as a Possible Solution to Gerlach's Economic Crisis

During the time of this project, the GCED team was seeking ways to improve the economic future of the town by capturing more revenue from Burning Man festival attendees and year-round visitors passing through the area. Aside from Burning Man, the Black Rock Desert attracts tens of thousands of people each year for a variety of activities including camping, star gazing, rock hounding, horseback riding, fishing, hunting, and hiking. Visitors particularly enjoy the region's abundant hot springs. Rocket cars also race on the flat hard alkaline lakebed, where conditions rival the Bonneville Salt Flats of Utah.⁸ However, most visitors to the region anticipate a lack of services in Gerlach, and bypass the town entirely after stocking up on

⁸ In 1997, the world land speed record was set on the Black Rock Desert by ThrustSCC, a British supersonic car, which reached the speed of 763 MPH. Rocket launches are also common. On May 2004, the Civilian Space eXploration Team, launched a rocket 72 miles into the atmosphere which is farther than any amateur rocket had ever been launched.

supplies in Reno (Michael Myers 2/25/2016). The goal of the GCED team over the last few years has been to find ways to encourage travelers to stop and visit Gerlach by offering more amenities and roadside attractions.

Currently, the Friends of Black Rock High Rock (FBRHR), a small non-profit located in the heart of Gerlach, is the only organization in town geared toward educating visitors. FBRHR was started in 1999 by Will Roger, one of the six co-founders of Burning Man. The small office located in Gerlach is staffed by two employees and serves as a visitor center for the Black Rock Desert, which was designated as a National Conservation Area (NCA)⁹ in 2000. The Black Rock Desert-High Rock NCA consists of 1.2 million acres that includes the Black Rock Desert as well as the High-Rock Canyon Emigrant Trails. Visitors can pick-up free BLM maps as well as purchase coffee and souvenirs from the non-profit's office. The FBRHR's primary mission is focused on monitoring the environment in the NCA, as well as providing restoration and rehabilitation of the desert ecosystem. Restoration efforts are completed by volunteers of the organization¹⁰. The secondary purpose of the FBRHR is to educate the public on the Black Rock Desert as a NCA by offering stargazing events, hikes, restoration campouts, and other educational opportunities to the public. Most visit FBRHR seeking assistance in locating the infamous Fly Geyser¹¹, which has been featured in magazines such as National Geographic. The privately owned land surrounding the geyser is obscured by shrubbery and cordoned off with signs fastened on barbed wire fences. It is a warning to trespassers that a guard is on duty, much

⁹ Lands designated by Congress to be protected, conserved, and enhanced for the good of the public. These lands are managed by the Bureau of Land Management

¹⁰ Friends of Black Rock advertise and recruit volunteers at Burning Man despite the festival's prohibition on any sort of commercialism and advertisement at the event.

¹¹ The geyser is a man-made feature that was created after a geothermal company drilled for hot water in 1964. The well was sealed after the water was deemed too cool for its intended use, but it eventually burst causing the multi-colored mineralized mound that exists today.

to the annoyance and disappointment of locals and tourists who find that they are unable to view the famous geyser closely (Michael Myers 2/25/2016).



This picture was taken when I was given permission by the land owner to photograph the Jackson Family, who live nearby the spring and once enjoyed swimming in it as children (Christina Preston, October 2014).

FBRHR provides a good orientation of the area to travelers as well as the types of seasonal conditions to expect when entering the NCA. FBRHR often warns visitors of unexpected weather that may make the area treacherous for the inexperienced who are not prepared for extreme conditions common to this unique high-desert environment. However, aside from FBRHR, the town has very little infrastructure geared toward attracting and serving tourists, despite the region's rich geography, which draws adventurers from throughout the West. Most of the people encountered by FBRHR are outdoor enthusiasts. The main difference between these two types of travelers is that the backcountry adventurer is well-prepared to explore the wilderness, while the tourist is seeking amenities such as museums, dining, guided

expeditions, and educational enrichment opportunities that Gerlach is currently unprepared to provide. FBRHR's current director, Michael Myers, reports that less than 10 people visit the office each week, while countless¹² vehicles pass through town without stopping on their way to the Black Rock Desert, the Smoke Creek Desert, or Squaw Valley Reservoir (Michael Myers 2/25/2016).



Picture taken of the Black Rock Desert during Sunset (Christina Preston May 2015).

Tourism is currently one of the few possible ways to stimulate Gerlach's economy. Amenities for tourists would also improve the quality of life of residents. At minimum, an increase in year-round tourism would lengthen business hours, and ensure that current bars,

¹² Currently, there is no official tracking system of how many people pass through Gerlach. However, at the time of our interview in 2/25/2016 Michael Myers, the director of FBHR, was researching ways to track the amount of recreational traffic that passes through the community.

restaurants, and the grocery store are able to sustain operations. This would, in-turn, substantially enrich the community by increasing autonomy and quality of life. An increase in employment and business opportunities would allow residents in need of work to remain within the community. There are currently several projects in the early planning phase to attain the goal of increasing the number of Gerlach's year-round visitors. One of the projects includes building a rocket garden similar to one constructed in White Sands, New Mexico,¹³ while another project is geared toward beautifying the town by painting murals representative of the area's history on buildings (GCED). There has also been discussion about installing large-scale art originally created for Burning Man in Gerlach. However, the only current piece on display is The Bike Bridge, an arch constructed from recycled bicycle parts, created by artist Michael Christian from The Crucible in Oakland. It was installed in Gerlach on the Black Rock Saloon property along the town's main thoroughfare in 2014 (The Bike Bridge).

It is difficult to estimate how much tourism would increase if the town installed other large-scale art associated with the event. Cities including Reno and San Francisco have purchased art pieces created for Burning Man to be placed in parks and other public places. As of 2014, eleven large-scale art pieces originally created for Burning Man could be found throughout the San Francisco Bay Area (San Francisco Travel 2014). In 2015, The City of Reno purchased an art piece, "Believe" created by notable Burning Man artists Jeff Schromberg and Laura Kimpton. The work, which is located on Virginia Street Bridge, consists of 12-foot three-dimensional letters that spell out the word "Believe." Although artworks such as this may

¹³ The rocket garden consists of an outdoor display of retired military missiles, drones, and rockets that are located outside of the U.S. Army's White Sands Missile Range in the desert located in White Sands, New Mexico (<http://www.wsmr-history.org>)

increase tourism for Gerlach, the costs may be too high for the small community unless donated. According to Reno Gazette Journal, “Believe” cost Reno \$70,000 (Kane 2016).¹⁴

To further understand the reasons that Gerlach believes tourism will increase the communities’ ability to sustain itself, it is important to consider Nevada’s current tourism industry, and its thematic focus. The purpose of the Nevada Division of Tourism, aside from gambling, is to promote the State’s desert landscapes, ghost towns, wild horses, ranching, and railroad history. Nevada’s tourism industry is closely tied to concepts of the “Old West,” often defined as “wild, open, and dangerous land” (Rex 1982: 72). Tourism generates the most industry revenue in Nevada, earning over \$56.5 billion dollars in 2013. This income places Nevada among in the top ten states in tourism (Nevada Division of Tourism; Poland 2014). Many small towns in Nevada rely on this revenue to sustain their communities. The Nevada Division of Tourism (NDT) even provides grants to help rural communities attract overnight stays by marketing their communities to road trippers traveling to the state’s more well-known attractions such as Reno, Lake Tahoe, Virginia City, and Las Vegas (Travel Nevada Strategic Plan 2016). In 2015, the NDT provided \$1.1 million in grants to rural Nevadan organizations through its Rural Grants Program to help communities develop events, pay for marketing, and update technology to support these efforts (Nevada Tourism Grants \$1.1 Million to Rural Areas for Tourism Promotion). Gerlach’s residents are hopeful that, like other rural Nevada

¹⁴ Considering the recent placement of this art piece in 2015, it is unclear if it has increased tourism to the area. However, it is clear that Reno is embracing the Burning Man festival in an attempt to generate more revenue for the city, which has been suffering economically since the recession in 2009 (City of Reno). In 2009 Burning Man and the Reno-Tahoe International Airport celebrated the beginnings of a partnership by hosting performances, art cars, and an exhibition focused on the festival in the airport gallery. In addition to this, the airport welcomed the Burning Man organization to set-up a welcome table for burners flying into the city (Hughes). This partnership recognizes the estimated 15-17,000 travelers that fly into Reno each year on their way to Burning Man, earning the airport an estimated 10 million dollars in concessions and airfare (Hughes). The City of Reno has even coined itself as the “Gateway to Burning Man” since Burners often stop to sleep, dine, and purchase last minute supplies from large big box retailers on their way to the festival. In addition to the revenue generated to pre-existing businesses, the festival has inspired numerous entrepreneurs to start businesses catering to festival attendees (Kane). The Morris Hotel, a Burning Man themed hotel opened in Reno in 2014 (Theeboom), and other businesses that have opened to cater to Burners include clothing boutiques, bicycle rental shops, and RV rentals (Kane).

communities, they may develop ways to market the unique attributes of their region, and begin to access tourism revenue.

GCED's interest in increasing tourism developed within the last five years, fueled by several variables including the disappearance of Empire, and the town's increasing economic instability. However, it was an idea without momentum, due to lack of organization, budget, and project leads. During this time, the GCED became aware that a historical narrative could be utilized for applications to apply for grants from such organizations and agencies such as the Rural Grants Program, Cowboy Country, and the Nevada State Historical Preservation Office. If awarded, these grants could be applied to generate tourism through marketing ventures such as website development, the creation of walking-brochures, magazine advertisements, and billboards. On a grander scale, funds could also be used to restore historic buildings, establish a small museum, or develop tourism-generating public events. Ultimately, a historical document could help the GCDE develop a narrative beyond Burning Man by illustrating its importance and relevance in relation to Nevada's rich mining, ranching and railroad legacy.

Burning Man Arts Festival

Burning Man (BM) is an annual *avant-garde* arts festival that attracts tens of thousands of individuals from around the world to the Black Rock Desert. The BM organization, a 501(c)(3) non-profit headquartered in San Francisco, describes the festival as "A temporary metropolis dedicated to community, art, self-expression, and self-reliance" (burningman.org). The permitted festival is held each year in the Black Rock NCA on a dry lakebed. The exact location of the festival shifts each year to a slightly different location in attempt to mitigate environmental damage. However, it is typically located 25 miles past Gerlach on Highway 447. The Bureau of Land Management awards a special event permit to the Burning Man

Organization that encompasses approximately fourteen thousand acres (Gomez 2013: 353). The ten-day event occurs the week before the Labor Day holiday, during the last week of August and the first week of September. The villages, camps, and art installations that constitute the event are known as Black Rock City (burningman.org).

Art is one of the main attractions of the festival. All of the art at Burning Man is created by festival attendees, aside from the 60-foot wood effigy of a man that is burned at the conclusion of the event. The organization itself provides 60 to 70 \$20,000 grants to fund artist projects (Black Rock City Honoraria). Funded projects are selected based on the amount of interactivity offered, as well as the ability to match the festival's annual theme, as determined each year by the festival organizers (previous themes include "Rites of Passage," "Fertility 2.0," "Cargo Cult," and "Carnival of Mirrors"). However, the grants are meant to only cover a portion of the art, leaving the rest of the money to be raised by the artists (Black Rock City Honoraria).

The festival is also comprised of camps and villages constructed by festival attendees. Burning Man does not endorse camps and villages aside from appointing the appropriate space for construction. According to the organization, "Burning Man is an annual experiment in temporary community dedicated to radical self-expression and radical self-reliance" (burningman.org). Themes are wide-ranging, from those revolving around hobbies (e.g., skydiving, math, running) or geographic interest (e.g., Toronto, South Africa, Reno), to those created for the sole purpose of offering an activity to entertain festival participants (e.g., roller-skating, kite flying, therapy, live music). Festival attendees can also camp on their own without an affiliation to a theme camp or village (The Event: Theme Camps and Villages).

The temporary city includes streets, public transportation, an airport, and even a post office. Despite the gamut of services provided to replicate a small city, sanitation services are not

provided outside of the provision of portable toilets. It is a “leave no trace” event, meaning that festival attendees are expected to pack out all trash, gear, and supplies. This encourages festival attendees to reduce packaging and be mindful of preventing damage to the environment (e.g., pick up trash on ground, prevent vehicle oil leaks, liquid spills, etc.) while also lessening the burden on the organization of cleaning up after festival attendees (The Event Preparation).

One of the components of Burning Man that distinguishes it from other events is that commerce of any kind is prohibited within the confines of the festival except for coffee and ice, which are sold by the Burning Man organization. The prohibition on commerce creates an environment based on sharing, trading, and gifting instead of capitalism. Participants are even discouraged from wearing company logos of any sort. Some attendees even go as far as covering logos on cars, clothing, and food products (The Ten Principles of Burning Man).

Volunteers provide the largest body of support for Burning Man’s infrastructure and operations. The organization is comprised of 26 volunteer departments.¹⁵ The myriad of positions that volunteers occupy includes staff to manage the airport to volunteer medics. Many positions operate year-round off-site and focus on event logistics planning. According to Burning Man, “it takes over 2,000 volunteers to build, run, and clean up the city,” along with over 80 year-round staff (The Event: Volunteering in BRC).

Impacts of Burning Man on Gerlach

It is presently unknown the exact amount of revenue that Gerlach earns from the festival. Currently, Burning Man estimates that the town earns 20% of its revenue from visitors on their

¹⁵ Air Playa Info, Airport, Artica (Ice Sales), ARTery (Artist Services, Black Rock City Rangers, Box Office, Burn Perimeter Support Group, Burning Man Information Radio, Census, Center Camp Café, Cleanup and Restoration, Department of Mutant Vehicles, Department of Public Works, Earth Guardians, Emergency Services, Empire-Gerlach Bus Services, Gate, Perimeter, and Exodus, Greeters, Lamplighters, Media Mecca, Playa Info, Recycle Camp, San Francisco Office Squad, Technology Teams, Temple Guardians, and Theme Camps.

way to the festival (Department of Public Works Handbook 2015:56). The source of this information is unknown. However, this percentage seems modest in the aftermath of the USG production and mine closure. Furthermore, data on the amount of income generated by local businesses and entrepreneurs is not readily available due to competition, and the potential for jealousy among residents within the community. The bars, restaurant, gas station, and hotel likely profit the most during the festival, when over 70,000 participants pass through town on their way to the festival site. Other organizations such as the GCED sell water while several entrepreneurial residents set up kiosks to sell food and supplies to festival attendees as they pass through town. One resident reported generating over \$25,000 profit from selling food during the week of the event (Anonymous #1 5/25/2016).

Although it is currently unknown how much festival attendees spend in Gerlach, “Burners¹⁶” spend an average of over \$44 million dollars in Nevada on food, entertainment, accommodations, and supplies (Raenell 2014). However, as the Burning Man festival has grown in popularity, the organization is spending less each year in Gerlach by outsourcing contracts since the town is unable to meet the festival’s expanding demands for services. In 2015, Burning Man withdrew a catering contract from Bruno's Restaurant, and outsourced it to Florida Food Management Services, owned by Comcast Communications (Brooke Covey 7/11/2016). The original contract, which fed the organization’s pre-event volunteers and employees, resulted in a loss of over \$500,000 to the restaurant; a major impact on the restaurant's annual revenue (Lena "Skeekie" Courtney 4/5/2016).

¹⁶ “Burner” is a term used by the Burning Man organization and festival attendees to describe an individual that attends the festival and encompasses the 10 founding principles which include radical inclusion, gifting, decommodification, radical self-reliance, radical self-expression, communal effort, civic responsibility, and leaving no trace. Definitions for these principles can be found on the organizations website (burningman.org).

Overall, the proximity of Burning Man to Gerlach has brought an increasing amount of stress to the town since 1990, when the festival moved from San Francisco's Baker's Beach in California to Nevada's Black Rock Desert (Mikel, Chase, Mosbaugh). The growing mainstream popularity of the event attracts an ever-increasing crowd, placing undue hardship and stress on the small community, which lacks even the most basic of amenities such as public restrooms.¹⁷ Residents commonly complain that festival attendees defecate and urinate on resident's properties due to a lack of public bathroom facilities¹⁸. Residents also cite hitchhikers and those seeking last-minute tickets scavenging food from fruit trees, and knocking on resident's doors to seek assistance with locating water, food, bathroom facilities, sleeping accommodations, telephone access, car repairs, or first aid. These interactions wear on residents, who express that servicing these needs and burdens should fall on the shoulders of festival organizers, not local residents.

Traffic is another focal point of resident's complaints. The tens of thousands of people who flow through Gerlach increase lines—sometimes requiring over an hour of wait time—at the small grocery store and gas station. Traffic jams throughout the duration of the ten-day festival are commonplace along two-lane Highway 447, since it is the quickest and most direct route to I-80. It is 108 miles from Gerlach to Reno, and residents report that a drive that normally takes two hours to may take up to eight hours to during the festival (Sunny Deforest 6/6/2016). The heavy traffic is further exacerbated by the long lines at the event's gate, which congest the highway. Festival attendees can wait up to 12 hours to enter and exit the festival (Vaughn Solo

¹⁷ Please see Appendix B for an extended narration of the conflicts.

¹⁸ In order to prevent public urination and defecation, Dana Sparkes, owner of Empire Distribution, pays over \$3,000 to provide over 20 portable toilets outside of the store since the single-stall bathroom runs on a septic system, and unable service the thousands of people who stop at the store daily during the event. Even with the portable toilets, Sparkes complains about the burden with cleaning trash, and human waste around the exterior of the store (Sparkes Interview 9/23/2016).

7/26/2016). Prolonged traffic jams are the most common complaint voiced by residents, since they directly impede their ability to move freely in the community, especially if they have pressing needs to visit Fernley or Reno for food, supplies, or medical appointments. I was made aware of all of the above issues throughout my fieldwork. Complaints typically occurred during informal discussions with residents, rather than during formal interviews since they were aware they were being recorded, and were worried about repercussions of their complaints.

Before Burning Man, Gerlach was relatively unknown to outsiders. The growth of the festival has resulted in substantial conflict between organizers, attendees, and residents. Residents often express their assumption that festival attendees, including residents that are affiliated with the event, unanimously support any decision that the organization makes that impacts the town. This is a generalization that is likely unsupported upon deeper analysis. However, these impressions and assumptions incite ongoing disagreements between locals and burners¹⁹ regarding the impacts of Burning Man on the community and environment. Gerlach has changed over the last ten years to include many festival attendees who have decided to make the community their home²⁰. These issues were relevant to the project since these conflicts impacted the dynamics between community members and often hindered collaboration. The

²⁰ The presence of Burning Man has begun to impact the community throughout the year. An unknown number of Burning Man employees and volunteer have purchased property in the town. Longtime Residents frequently complain about the upkeep of properties purchased by festival attendees and employees (GCED October 2014). Some of these properties are not occupied year-round; rather, they may serve as storage facilities for art cars, RVS, art, and camp infrastructure used during the festival. Landscaping is not maintained due to the absence of occupants, and the multi-purpose use of the lawn for storage means that properties sometimes take on a “junk-yard” appearance that upsets many of the local residents that I worked with during the project. Photographs of the town in the 1970s and 1980s compared to the current state of the community over the last decade reveal that there has been deterioration in the town’s overall appearance, which was once known for its well-manicured lawns despite the desert landscape. The change in community standards of property care are popular complaints by residents to the GCED team (GCED October 2014).

section entitled, "Community Conflict and Project Problems," provides an example of the issues that were salient during the project.

Personal Experience with Burning Man

I attended Burning Man for 15 years from 2000 to 2014. I started attending the event as a teenager when I was still in high school. As a young person, I found the event liberating as an outlet for creativity and exploration. After my first year, I became involved in social groups and art galleries associated with the event in Sacramento and San Francisco. This involvement led me to eventually volunteer for an array of departments for the organization including Department of Public Works (DPW), and Fire Conclave. For the last eight years of my attendance (2006-2014), I volunteered for Gate, Perimeter, and Exodus (GPE), which is involved with providing security before, during, and after the event. However, I stopped attending the festival in 2014 since I no longer found the experience rewarding due to my concern involving the festival's increased reliance on volunteer labor to do dangerous construction and security jobs. However, more than anything, I believed that attending the event was a conflict of interest with the project. Working with residents and listening to their perspectives on the festival transformed my views on the event, as I learned more about the festival's impacts on those living in Gerlach.

Few residents inquired about whether or not I had ever attended the festival, but when asked, I was honest about attending in the past, and made it clear that I was no longer interested. However, I did not discuss this unless I was questioned. This felt natural to me since I have always been reserved about volunteering this information in my personal life in order to avoid the negative stereotypes regarding drug use that are often associated with people who attend the

festival. Admittedly, early on in the project, I did fear that, if I had been asked at the onset, it would have affected the residents' perceptions of me. However, by the time that many residents were aware, their opinions did not appear to change due to the rapport that I had built with them, which demonstrated that I did not match their idea of a stereotypical attendee.

Project Planning

I learned early on that residents were most interested in determining the goal of the project, and participating in its achievement, rather than determining the project's design. This fits with the literature on PAR, which underscores the importance of project selection, or entrusting participants with determining which problems are important and need to be addressed within their community (Minkler, Hancock 136). Transferring control to Gerlach residents was an important impetus to inspiring participation among residents. As I discovered, the desire to document the town's history was not a new concept inspired by my presence. Instead, it was an idea that had been discussed among residents previously at GCED meetings, but there was no one willing to formulate and carry out a project that required so much time and sensitivity with regard to navigating interpersonal conflicts and community politics.

Aside from Burning Man, the conflicts within the community were diverse. They included interpersonal disputes between residents regarding property usage, soured business deals, multi-generational family feuds, and infringements on privacy. The small size of the community seemed to increase the intensity of disputes since it was difficult for residents to avoid each other on a day-to-day basis. Some of these conflicts were very old, spanning decades, while others developed during the project. My knowledge of these issues increased as time passed, allowing me to better navigate topics that might cause conflict between residents. For

instance, the proposed construction of a coal plant six miles away from Gerlach in 2004 politically divided the community (Deidre 2004). Over 12 years later, there are still many residents who blame the town's current economic instability on individuals within the community that opposed the plant. Although damaging to the environment, the coal plant may have provided an alternate future that could have sustained the community by creating over 100 jobs. (Deidre 2004). Despite the failure of the proposal over 12 years ago,²¹ the issue became more relevant than ever with the loss of the USG production plant and mine in 2011.

During the project, I was particularly concerned regarding the possibility of creating more conflict within the community due to its isolation, and the limited resources available. There is a heightened sense of vulnerability among residents who share and control a small pool of resources. A community like Gerlach can quickly become internally alienating and exclusionary due to the intimacy between residents based on the small population, and multi-generational residency. Residents who monopolize access to resources such as fuel, food, community transportation, and even the Internet, have the ability to control and influence the actions of other community members. A simple seemingly interpersonal conflict can have devastating ramifications, resulting in a loss of resources that ultimately impact a resident's ability to cope with living in such a desolate and difficult environment. Any researcher committed to working in environments similar to this must be cognizant of and committed to reducing the potential for increasing conflict because of the repercussions it can have for community members (Long et al 2014).

I observed several examples of the ways in which interpersonal conflict can increase vulnerability of residents in this remote environment. For instance, one resident refused to enter

²¹ Some residents believe that the coal plant was unsuccessful due to protestors while others implicate the environmental impact analysis. The reasoning to not build has never been formally released.

the only restaurant or use the gas station owned by the same proprietor due to a longtime family dispute. This resident preferred hauling in their own gasoline from Reno to store on their property instead of using the only gas station in town. In another example, two residents participating in the project were also experiencing ongoing conflict over disagreements regarding the exterior appearance of one of the residents' homes, which had resulted in many complaints to Washoe County Code Enforcement. The neighbor's complaints threatened to close the business that the other resident was operating from their home.

Conflict was common among residents throughout the community. However, due to the focus of the project on documenting the history, it would not have been productive to involve myself, or publicly acknowledge, any of these issues. I followed Minkler in this regard, who notes that even greater divisions within the community may result from pursuing contentious topics, even in an attempt to address them (Minkler 2004). I was aware of the ability for interpersonal conflicts to infringe upon the success of the project, since some residents were unwilling speak to each other, or even attend meetings together. In order to lessen the possibility of these conflicts of lowering participation, I offered to meet residents privately outside of planning meetings, or even conceal participation by permitting anonymous contributions. Both of these options were used quite frequently by at least 16 different residents who wanted to participate, but were weary of attending meetings or public offering their narratives.

There were also many topics within the community that were sensitive. Due to the desolate nature of Gerlach, and lack of accessible emergency medical care, deaths from accidents were common. During the beginning of the project, I was not always aware of the topics that might be sensitive for some residents. During research, I would often come across newspaper articles detailing a tragedy that had occurred within the community. For instance, in 1973 a

nineteen-year old woman from Lake Tahoe was scalded to death in one of the hot springs outside of town. The accident occurred when the young woman accidentally dove into the hottest spring instead of one of the more tepid springs appropriate for swimming (Healy 1973). Several local teenagers were present during this incident while others were part of the team to recover the body. This death subsequently impacted local accessibility to some of the nearby hot springs due to the fences that were constructed afterward by the county and private owners (Healy 1973).

Fortunately, residents would typically give me insider information on what topics might be contentious or painful to some residents since they were related to the victim or had witnessed the accident. Admittedly, some of these events were worth documenting, but the intent of this project was never to stir controversy among residents, and my role was never conceptualized as that of an undercover reporter. Preventing damage to the community as well as to individual residents was always a top priority, even if it meant glossing over or censoring some of the more sensational anecdotes and stories involving the town's history. *The work of a community developer is focused on developing relationships based on trust, sensitivity, and respect, rather than uncovering salacious topics (Long et al 2014). The purpose of the Gerlach Public History Project was to work in collaboration with residents to develop a historical narrative that could be used by the community for economic development projects.*

The Gerlach Public History Project required documenting railroad, ranching and mining in Gerlach and Empire from the early 1900s to the 1970s. The stories recorded were meant to be understood as individual interpretations of these experiences, ultimately ensuring that there was space for a wide range of narratives. As much as possible, I respectfully sought and solicited participation from individuals that were the least likely to contribute. I provided information regarding the project, and let them know that they could decide to participate at any time during

the project by participating in an oral history, sharing photos, volunteering during the meetings, or in any other creative manner. Providing examples allowed residents to see the variety of ways they could participate, and demonstrated the project's flexibility. Some residents that were hesitant to participate, decided to do so when they realized the commitment was based on their abilities, and interests versus rigid criteria. This approach resulted in the goals developing throughout the process in collaboration with residents instead of being determined upon the onset of the project. While this did take a great deal of flexibility on everyone's part, I believe that it resulted in more participation and a sustained interest in the project throughout its duration.

I hosted three planning meetings with residents during the first four months of the project (August- December 2014), in order to outline the focus of the historical documentation. During this time, residents expressed the desire to create a comprehensive historical document that encompassed life in Gerlach and Empire, including discussion of important community events, and the history of the railroad, ranching, and mining activities in the region since the early 1900s. The town was also interested in distinguishing itself from Burning Man, as well as dispelling some of the rumors and historically inaccurate depictions of the town. One example of a problematic portrayal was a 1990 Reno Gazette-Journal article by Joe Gosen, entitled "What's your pleasure? In rural towns like Gerlach, drinking in bars is a way of life," which depicted the town as being full of drunkards due to the number of bars and its remote location:

"That's right: Five saloons in a town of 350 people. And just as the Old West, the town's saloons are the town's social hubs, its communication centers, its places of respite. But there is also a darker side to this time-honored tradition: the Wild West lifestyle creates an atmosphere conducive to heavy drinking. And few towns embrace saloons with the enthusiasm of Gerlach's long-time residents. "That's the way it is in many parts of rural Nevada," says Dorothy North, chairman of Nevada's Substance Abuse Commission. "What passes for social drinking in some towns is really mid-to-late-stage alcoholism."

As residents frequently disparaged such depictions of their town in the media, dispelling rumors and misconceptions became one of the goals of the project.

Residents also assisted in determining the period of time that the project should focus on. Literature previously written on Gerlach focused on early pioneer history and Burning Man, leaving a gap of documentation from the early 1900s to the 1970s. Through consultation with residents, and in consideration of the available primary and secondary sources, it was determined that the main products of the project would be as follows:

- Historical document chronicling life in Gerlach and Empire.
- (10) Oral histories focused on the experiences of USG employees, ranchers, cowboys, railroad workers, and business owners.
- (4) Community Share & Tell Events
- Gerlach History Pop-Up Museum
- Portraits of longtime residents and participants in the project.
- A compilation of resident's poetry, family photos, community newsletters, and memories that reflect life in Gerlach and Empire.
- A compilation of news and magazines articles that focus on Gerlach and Empire than can be used by residents for future projects.
- If possible, a list of the names of the individuals buried in the Gerlach Boot Hill cemetery

Methodology

Before approaching the community, I knew that I wished to pursue a project that would utilize Participatory Action Research (PAR). This methodology is characterized by collaboration with communities to solve problems ranging from ecological management to healthcare issues. The main point of PAR is to increase participation, sustainability, and optimal outcomes by including stakeholders in the design and implementation of research. The intent is to create mutually beneficial relationships between researchers and communities (Wilmsen 2008:9). PAR projects allow for a wide range of individuals to participate, including people that may not be able to normally contribute due to financial, physical, or personal reasons (Wilmsen 2008:9). The job of the PAR practitioner is to remove these barriers, increase inclusion, and transfer agency to participants. The seven principles of PAR, as defined by UC Davis Education Prof. Heidi Ballard, demonstrate the capacity of this methodology to bring communities together by facilitating collaboration and trust between participants and researchers. According to Ballard, PAR:

- 1) Recognizes community as a unit of identity
- 2) Builds on strengths and resources
- 3) Facilitates collaborative partnerships
- 4) Integrates knowledge and action for mutual benefit
- 5) Promotes a co-learning and process that attends to social equalities
- 6) Involves a cyclical and iterative process of trust building
- 7) Disseminates findings and knowledge gained among all partners (Ballard 2004: 190)

PAR is ideal for working with small communities that are weary of outside intrusion, since it allows participants to manage the goals, design, and implementation of research. PAR would be

particularly effective for conducting a project in Gerlach since I knew that the community struggled with internal conflict, mistrust of outsiders, and economic instability. PAR's approach allows for the development of research that is mutually beneficial to researchers and the community by addressing community needs (Long et al 2014:6). As exemplified by the cases provided in *Partnerships for Empowerment: Participatory Research for Community-based Natural Resource Management*, PAR promotes collaboration, consensus, and allows the community to steer the project to best meet their interests and needs (Wilmsen et al. 2008:9).

Even with a PAR approach, there is no guarantee that the community will participate. However, PAR allows the community to define the parameters of the project (Wilmsen et al. 2008:2). This has the potential to increase long-term participation by increasing personal and communal interest. This methodology was suitable for the project, since it allowed newcomers and longtime residents to contribute in their own ways, regardless of their historical knowledge of Gerlach. In addition, PAR was ideal since it provided the flexibility for elderly residents to participate. Gerlach's oldest resident at the time of the project was 91, and the average median age of participants was 72. Many of the elderly individuals were burdened with health issues such as severe rheumatoid arthritis or chronic obstructive pulmonary disease. Incorporating residents with health and mobility issues required flexibility and patience. Using PAR also provided the potential to promote inclusivity among newcomers, who are typically excluded from events due to their associations with Burning Man. Longtime residents contributed their knowledge of the history of the town, while newcomers assisted with gathering the information, scanning documents, and encouraging residents to share their stories. One of my primary goals

was to utilize PAR by promoting community solidarity²² through facilitating collaboration and participation in the community history project.

While PAR doesn't come with a prescribed set of methodologies that promise a favorable research outcome, it provided a framework for all decisions regarding the project. My desire was to use PAR to help ensure that the project would not serve as an unintended catalyst for more conflict in Gerlach. Rather, the project's goal was to create a project that was inclusive, promoted collaboration among groups of residents experiencing tension, and reduced the possibility for further conflict. This included embracing and crediting residents for their ideas and contributions. It provided avenues for residents to take leadership within the project through an array of roles from volunteering at meetings to participating in oral histories, and assisting in organizing events. My hope was that the project would provide avenues for residents to work together toward a goal of mutual benefit: the potential to generate a historical narrative that could be used to help the community apply for grants that in turn could increase the community's ability to sustain itself. By using PAR to include all residents who desired to participate, I hoped to avoid the potential of the project being used by residents to define the citizenship of the community based on interpersonal conflict, affiliation with the festival, or years of residency. I also hoped it would facilitate communication between residents that would not normally interact due to age differences, feuds, or varying affiliations (or lack thereof) with the festival.

Regional Literature Review

Before embarking on the project, I completed a thorough review of the limited literature currently existing on Gerlach, Empire, and the Black Rock Desert so that I could develop a deeper sense of what has been written about the community. Understanding the community also

²² The use of the term "community solidarity" here refers to the ability of the community to work together, despite differences, in order to address issues that are important to residents.

required that I develop a working knowledge of Gerlach's industries. Educational visits to western-themed museums were undertaken to develop a deeper understanding of ranching, mining, and the railroad. The following is a broad overview of the relevant literature, including a discussion of the films and other media created in the area that informed my understanding of the community.

Black Rock, written by Paul Starrs with Peter Goin's photography, provides a thorough and robust description and visualization of the unique geology of the region. Goin's photography is predominately focused on documenting the stark mountain ranges, abundant hot springs, and alkali flats that characterize this area, along with a small compilation of images from the Burning Man arts festival. Starr's narrative provided an overview of natural forces that created the Black Rock Desert, while covering over a century of the region's cartography alongside poetic reflections of the landscape. The most notable contribution of *Black Rock* to Gerlach's historical documentation are the photographs taken of the historic buildings located on Main Street, since the condition of the buildings has deteriorated greatly since 2005 when the images were taken.

Another book written about the area is Sessions Wheeler's *The Black Rock Desert*. It provides a comprehensive narrative of the early explorer and pioneer history. The book includes journal entries from pioneers crossing through the area on the Lassen-Applegate Emigrant Trail. Many of the entries provide stories of thirst, compounded by the high temperatures, which were characteristic of the journeys undertaken by pioneers seeking mining opportunities in California beginning in the late 1840s. It is clear from early pioneer narratives that the landscape appeared intolerable for European settlement until the early 1900s when cattle ranchers begin to homestead the area to take advantage of the rich grazing lands. A small chapter toward the end of

the book was dedicated to describing modern life in Gerlach along with a few historic photos obtained from the Nevada Historical Society.

Christopher Brook's *The Black Rock Desert* (2013) of the Images of America Series, mainly contains images collected and captioned by Brooks. He encountered the Black Rock Desert as a land sailor, drawn to the region by the high winds and the smoothness of the alkaline flats. A good portion of the images and captions focused on pioneer history, regional geology, and art events that occurred on the flats during the 1980s prior to Burning Man. Brooks reached out to me at the beginning of the project after a resident informed him of the project, and we were in touch throughout its duration. He was very helpful in identifying the names of ranches, businesses, and sites as they changed over time.

The gypsum mine, production plant and associated company town of Empire are undocumented in literature, despite being one of the longest continually-operating company towns in the United States. However, in 2011, a litany of news articles covering the closure of the USG production plant and mine were published.²³ These articles were helpful since they showcased former employees' and resident's reflections about their lives in Empire and the

²³ The following articles published online discuss the closure of the USG Plant and Mine:

Adams, Paul. "End of Empire: Tough Economy Closes Mining Town." *BBC*. BBC, 19 Oct. 2011. Web. <http://www.bbc.com/news/magazine-15360661>

Empire Lost. *Vimeo*. Vimeo, 12 Aug. 2012. Web. <<https://vimeo.com/48540225>>.

McMurdo, Doug. "Empire: The Death of a Nevada Company Town." *Las Vegas Review-Journal*. Las Vegas Review-Journal, 12 June 2011. Web. <<http://www.reviewjournal.com/news/nevada-and-west/empire-death-nevada-company-town>>.

Powers, Ashley. "An Idle Plant, an Empty Town." *Los Angeles Times*. Los Angeles Times, 29 Mar. 2011. Web. www.articles.latimes.com/2011/mar/29/news/mutest

Praetorius, Dean. "Empire, Nevada Completely Wiped Out By Recession." *Huffington Post*. Huffington Post, 21 June 2011. Web. <http://www.huffingtonpost.com/2011/06/21/empire-nevada-recession_n_881816.html>.

closure of the mine. Many of these residents were devastated by the loss of employment and forced eviction from the town. These articles focused on the positive experiences of the production plant and mine, which strongly correlated with many of Gerlach resident's memories of the mining community. It was important to understand the influence of Empire on Gerlach since the communities were intertwined due their close proximity and the surrounding desolation. Empire was effectively the heart of Gerlach's economy from the early 1900s until 2011.

Retired mine employees currently living in Gerlach shared company pamphlets and mining literature such as the "Welcome Empire" pamphlet which familiarized residents with the communities' amenities. The Gypsum Construction Handbook published by USG gave an overview of the production process. Several attempts were also made to contact the headquarters of USG in Plaster City, California to obtain additional files and photographs related to community life in Empire. However, USG never replied to these inquiries, possibly fearful that the materials would be used to depict the company in a negative fashion due to the impact of its production plant and mine closures on Gerlach.

Films shot in the area were reviewed since they were frequently referenced by residents. These films included *The Winning of Barbara Worth* (1926), *The Misfits* (1961), and *Far from Home* (1989). Notable performers such as Drew Barrymore, Marilyn Monroe, and Clark Gable were cast alongside locals in these films. National Geographic also produced a short film on Gerlach in 1972, as part of the series called "Haunted West."²⁴ The segment included a reenactment of resident's negotiations with the Western Pacific Railroad to purchase the town. The series was presented as a documentary. However, residents report that the majority of the scenes in the film were staged, including the scenes of the women's-only fire brigade putting out

²⁴ The Haunted West: National Geographic Specials (1972-73) CBS

a house fire (Brooks 2013:91). The production of some of these films resulted in construction and/or modification of some of the buildings in town, i.e., by adding permanent facades (Brooks 2013:113). Watching these films provided a visual timeline of the town's structures.

I also completed a thorough review of all community newsletters, poetry, and newspaper

COWBOY IS HELD FOR SALOON HOLD-UP

George Kelly, a cowboy, allegedly held up a poker game at the Silver Plume saloon in Gerlach last night, obtaining \$100. He was captured early this morning by Sheriff Ray Root and Chief Deputy Ben Parks, who drove to Gerlach after receiving a midnight summons, and Kelly is now in the county jail facing a possible charge of robbery.

Witnesses told the sheriff that Kelly lost a few dollars at the game, then left the saloon. A few moments later he returned, his face masked with a bandana handkerchief, and flourishing a rifle. He fired a shot into the floor, then ordered six men to stand with their hands up while he took the money from the poker table, it is charged.

Angelo Picchi, owner of the Washoe club at Gerlach, was a witness to the robbery. He drew a gun and fired several shots at the fleeing bandit, but missed him. Picchi then telegraphed to Sheriff Root, telling him to "come at once" but did not give any explanation. The officers left Reno, arriving at Gerlach early this morning.

They found Kelly hiding in a vacant garage and he surrendered without resistance, the officers said. The money was found hidden in a pile of railroad ties nearby. With their prisoner, Root and Parks left at once for Reno, arriving here shortly after noon today.

Kelly was formerly a cowboy for the Gerlach & Waltz ranch in northern Washoe county but has not been employed for several months, Root said.

Reno Gazette October 1936

articles. This was important in helping develop a deeper understanding of the community since formal literature was minimal. These materials were also collected at the request of GCED to create a compilation of documents focused on Gerlach and Empire. The collection of these articles could be used at a later date for an array of goals such as grants, didactic materials, and newsletters.

As seen below, some of the newspaper articles collected were quirky, and focused on strange events and/or crimes. The Gerlach articles in the Nevada State Journal were often more entertaining than informational. I took interest in these types of articles since they provided amusing anecdotes that could be used to liven up the historic documentation. When possible, I recalled articles during oral histories, and asked residents to offer their reflections on these events.

During the project, I also collected poems, art, and writing from residents. The poem below, entitled, "Will I Find Them in Heaven," was provided by the descendants of Jewell

Claire Finley. She was the daughter of European settlers that emigrated from Missouri to Modoc, California in the late 1800s. The Finley family eventually moved to Gerlach in the 1900s when Jewell was a teenager. Jewell lived in Gerlach most of her life until she eventually passed away at the age of eighty-seven in 1992 in Washoe County, Nevada. This poem is frequently read at memorials and funerals for Gerlach residents, and demonstrates the unique affinity that many older residents have for a landscape that outsiders find inhospitable.

Will I Find Them in Heaven?

Will there be a Black Rock Desert in Heaven when my days on earth are o'er?
Will there be a good cow horse to meet me when I reach that Golden Shore?
Will there be heaps of sunshine and free and will the good old whirl winds blow?
Are there ever sandstorms in Heaven? Please tell me for I want to know?
Are there coyote's way up yonder, and at night do they howl so drear?
Are there ever mirages in Heaven that make ones so vision so clear?
Do horn toads crawl through the burning sands? Does the grease-wood glisten so bright after a warm
desert rain has bathed in it? And do the night owls call in the night?
I wonder if the stars twinkle bright in Heaven; if the moon shines down on you, too.
Making the desert a fairy-land when the sage-brush sparkles with dew.
I would mind leaving this cold, lonely world where wealth is all people can see;
If I'll find the Black Rock Desert in Heaven, then Heaven is the right place for me.

Jewell Claire Finley
Gerlach, Nevada
1923

One of the most exciting parts of this task was that I often found documents or family photos that could be attributed to ancestors of current residents. During one instance, I located a poem entitled "Progress" in the Gerlach Senior Center. This was tucked away in a file drawer among the center's old food purchase receipts. I was not sure if the author of the poem was a former resident so I posted the article on the Empire/Gerlach Nevada Classmates.²⁵ Through this,

²⁵ The Empire/Gerlach Nevada Classmates Facebook group was pivotal in engaging residents that would not normally be able to participate in the project. This 200-member group was created by a former resident, Bob Stafford, in 2009. Stafford created the page to reconnect residents with each other, and reminiscence. I joined the

I discovered that the poem was written by a current resident's mother. The daughter of the woman wrote to me, confirming that the name attached to the poem was indeed a former resident. She revealed that she was touched by the find and unaware that that her mother wrote poetry. In other instances, I recovered childhood photos of individuals that had passed away, and I was able to pass these on to family members who had never seen the photos before. I was also able to recover snippets of history written by three separate residents: Gary Horton, Theresa Eckhardt, and Nevada Lambert. The individuals had made incomplete attempts to document the town's history in the 1950s, 60s, and 70s. I was able to contact the son of Nevada Lambert, who was very excited to have his mother's efforts integrated into the project, and provided a biography of her activities. I found all of this work, to be very rewarding—both personally, and for residents who were able to obtain new information, photographs, and writing from their family members, many of whom had passed away years before.

Project Meetings and Events

After I completed a review of the limited literature on the area, I began hosting initial project planning meetings. These meetings occurred September 2014 - January 2015. The times and dates of these meetings were always determined by residents in collaboration with the GCED team. The meetings were typically held on Thursday or Friday in the early evenings when most residents could attend. It was suggested by several residents to hold the meetings in private homes or at one of the local bars. However, to avoid excluding anyone, the Community Center was selected since it provided the most neutral and welcoming location for all residents.

group at the onset of the project upon an invitation by one of the members. I informed the group of the project, and sought participation. During the entire duration of the project, I posted photographs, news articles, and other materials for residents to discuss, and comment upon. Members also selected photographs from their personal collections, and shared information, and anecdotes. The group allowed for residents to collaborate distantly without attending meetings.

To set the tone of the project, I made special preparations for the community meetings. I planned the seating so that everyone would be sitting facing toward each other in order to create the most potential for dialogue and collaboration. During the first two project planning meetings in Fall 2014, I made a point to speak for only 10-15 minutes of the hour that was reserved. I introduced myself, and the intent of the project, as based on feedback from previous meetings. Then, I would sit back down and turn over the conversations to residents.

Residents usually took this time to talk amongst each other after my introduction, and once the commentary and chit-chat subsided, I took on the role of a facilitator, asking the group questions that I had prepared in advance. I generally performed these tasks while sitting with residents to create a casual atmosphere, since I had observed that GCED meetings also were performed in this way. The questions I asked began with possible ideas for documenting the community, and led to specific inquiries about historical or community events. This structure helped me to develop a better understanding of the community, and it was also an important way to explore resident's knowledge in a comfortable group setting. Prompts also provided a way to cope with prolonged silence, and to steer residents away from topics that were disagreeable or known to cause conflict. For instance, it was not uncommon for residents to offer divergent views on past events. These alternate perspectives were welcome, but in order to maintain a positive environment, I intervened by steering conversations toward different topics in moments when the discussion had the potential to lead to personal attacks or derogatory remarks.

I anticipated that some residents would not be comfortable speaking in front of others, so I had pens and poster board available at each meeting for residents to write down suggestions. The large boards were left on each table during meetings with pens of varying sizes since some of the residents suffered from rheumatoid arthritis or tremors from age. The blank poster board

was used by residents to write down the names of ranches, historic buildings, or community events during the meetings. Encouraging residents to write down their ideas regarding research was a helpful tool in gathering suggestions from individuals as well as from the group as a whole. I also encouraged residents to speak to privately speak to me after the meeting, and to call or email if they had further suggestions. Many residents utilized this option when they did not wish to contribute in the group setting.

The materials required to host each meeting were minimal. I set up a scanner to scan photos or news articles that were brought in by residents for inclusion in the project. Volunteers often assisted with scanning. Assistance with technology or other tasks during the meetings provided a great way to incorporate residents into the project that were not able to contribute historical narratives. The coffee and desserts that I provided at the meetings added to the atmosphere by making it more comfortable and welcoming, and residents reported appreciating the gesture since food selection was limited in the community. After the first meeting, one of the residents suggested that I donate the remaining food to the Senior Center, and this became the procedure after each meeting.

Aside from the initial planning meetings, there were two main types of events that became a focal point of the project. These two events were the Community Share & Tell and Gerlach History Night. These two events were attended by more residents than the original planning meetings since they included much more entertainment and socializing than the planning meetings. Both types of events were open to all residents, advertised weeks beforehand, and allowed people to mingle and share. The Community Share & Tell events occurred throughout the project, while the Pop-up Museum occurred toward the end of the project. In

keeping with providing a linear trajectory of project activities, the Pop-up Museum will be discussed in the paper after the Community Share & Tell Events.

Community Share & Tell Events

Four Community Share & Tell events were hosted at the Community Center in Gerlach with the assistance of local residents. During these informal events, residents would typically bring in newspaper clippings, scrapbooks, family photos, and other documents to share. These meetings would attract long-time residents as well as recent transplants that were curious to learn about the area and mingle with long-term residents. Residents often engaged in reminiscing and storytelling with each other during these meetings. Not only did these events allow me to become familiar with residents and their experiences, they also provided a new way for longtime residents to share their experiences, and to communicate their passion for the community to newcomers in a casual environment.

Many of the residents have amassed impressive collections of newspaper articles, photographs, and historic objects that they were willing to share at these events. One of the items residents brought included a men's cream-colored western button-up polyester dress shirt sewn from a parachute left over from target practice when Fallon Air Force Base utilized the Black Rock Desert as a temporary gunnery range during WWII. After the test targets had fallen to the ground, the residents would scavenge the parachutes. According to Barbara Conley, the women would make dresses and shirts from the polyester fabrics while the buckaroos would take the parachute cords to dip into lead to make them heavier to use as lassos (Judy Conley 4/12/2015). The dress shirt that she brought to the meeting was in perfect condition since Conley's mother had decided that the material was too flammable to permit wearing. Other items kept by residents

included the original skeleton key from the old single jail cell, as well as cattle brands from some of Gerlach's first cattle companies.

These community events were often cited as residents' favorite aspect of the project, since they encouraged socializing and conversation over shared interests in Gerlach history. Individuals that were not normally on speaking terms would attend these events and participate regardless of feuds and community politics. Sometimes they spoke to each other after being prompted by a memory that they both recalled positively. It was not uncommon for residents to remark that the "project brought the town together." While it is difficult to ascertain if the project brought sustained connectivity between residents, it is clear that the numbers of people that attended the planning meetings and Share & Tell events surpassed the average number of attendees at the monthly GCED meetings. The regular GCED meetings focus on community issues and projects, and typically attract only 4-5 residents. However, the meetings (including Share & Tell events) for the Gerlach Public History Project typically attracted a minimum of 15-20 participants.²⁶

During Gerlach Public History Project meetings, I called upon volunteers, many which would be defined as non-local²⁷, to help with scanning documents, setting up the room, taking notes and providing general assistance during these meetings, thus providing a way for people to participate even if they could not contribute to the historical narratives due to their rather new residency in the community. The meetings also provided a method for residents to brainstorm about the types of objects and narratives that they wanted to include in the final document. Meetings and events such as the pop-up museum provided a method to help bridge the gap

²⁶ These numbers are based on sign-in sheets provided at each meeting.

²⁷ "Non-local" refers to residents who moved to the area after attending Burning Man at some point after 1990 when the festival was first held in the Black Rock Desert.

between young and the old, newcomers and old-timers, by providing an activity that all residents could become involved in to achieve a common goal (Cantrell).

Support and enthusiasm for the Project was evident during early Spring 2015. The community voluntarily hosted a Bingo Fundraiser to help cover my travel expenses for the Project. I applied the small grant that I was awarded in the amount of \$1,500 from the Community Development Graduate Group in March 2015 to assist in paying for lodging, transportation, and a digital recorder required for the oral history portion of the project. Residents also raised an additional \$900 to support the project, which helped cover the costs of archival research, printing, photo development, and other miscellaneous supplies. The fundraisers demonstrated the community's commitment to the project, and provided me with personal validation that my presence and work were welcomed and valued by the residents involved.

Gerlach History Night Pop-Up Museum

The most popular event was "Gerlach History Night Pop-Up Museum" which was held on October 16, 2015 in the Gerlach Community Center. This event was designed to celebrate the town's heritage by inviting residents to share historic items, family photos, poems, art, and other objects of interest. Several films were selected, including a slideshow of photos compiled by residents, historic footage, and a seven-minute National Geographic film featuring the reenactment of the Western Pacific's sale of the town to Gerlach residents in 1973. This event was collaboratively planned for several months by residents in consultation with GCED. The purpose of the event was to showcase some of the historical items and information gathered during the project. It was my hope that it would showcase the contributions that had already been made by residents, and also inspire others to become involved.

The term “pop-up museum” refers to a short-term exhibit that is created with the intention of stimulating conversations between creators and participants through the display of meaningful objects (Simon 2010). The concept requires minimal preparation and a small budget in comparison to traditional museum exhibits, which typically encompass customized space to showcase valuable objects of cultural, historical, or scientific significance. Pop-ups simply require wall or table space, and can be hosted in a wide array of venues such as coffee shops, parks, senior centers, and school auditoriums. The location is inconsequential in comparison to the participants, the objects, and the conversations facilitated by their display. This type of museum closely aligns with PAR by facilitating collaboration and interactivity, instead of the more common top-down pedagogical approach, in which museum visitors view objects whose importance has been defined by scholars.

Once the decision was made to create a pop-up museum for Gerlach, I made posters and flyers to promote the event in collaboration with several residents from the GCED team²⁸. These materials encouraged residents to participate by bringing historical items, photographs, poetry, or personal objects. However, all residents were encouraged to attend even if they could not participate. The flyers were posted around town including in the post office, the Senior Center, bars, and Bruno’s restaurant. The event was also placed in the local newsletter, “Gerlach Happenings” as well as on the Empire/Gerlach Nevada Classmates Facebook page. In addition to this, it was featured on the Gerlach Outreach Facebook page, which is utilized by some residents to share events and community information. Residents also personally shared the event with many of their friends and family.

Most participants contacted me in advance regarding the type of objects they wished to contribute to the event. I assisted residents by conducting interviews regarding the objects, and

²⁸ See Appendix C

preparing captions. Each caption was printed on cardstock or handwritten. Residents were welcomed to write their own captions, but many preferred that I assist with this task. In addition, I assisted with curating the displays and decorating the auditorium. On a limited budget, I was able to purchase tablecloths, seasonal flowers, balloons, items to accent the displays, and picture frames for photographs. Residents were also encouraged to donate décor and bring items for a dessert pot-luck, which was organized by a volunteer. The goal was to transform the community hall into a vibrant and festive space that encouraged community socializing and historical reflection.

Judy Conley, a member of GCED, recruited volunteers to help with set-up on the day of the event. Even if residents did not have anything to formally contribute to the exhibit, this provided another way that both newcomers and longtime residents alike could work together on the project. Assistance was needed to help set-up tables, chairs, décor, and technology. Over 20 volunteers assisted throughout the day with this process. Many elements of the set-up of the event were impromptu, meaning that residents participated in a variety of ways that were not accounted for during the planning process. One resident made banners with the town names while another laminated the newspaper articles handed out during a previous meeting to be placed on each of the tables. Residents brought historic items such as pack saddles, train messenger hooks, cattle brands, train timetables, and rockets. Individuals that brought items to share typically remained with those items to answer questions and reminisce. A door removed from an old cowboy cabin which was etched with carvings left by cowboys became the focal point of the night. Many of the creators of the etchings had long passed on, resulting in the door becoming an informal memorial.

In addition, the elementary school teacher brought interpretative collages the children had made as a school activity. Other residents brought personal items that were passed down from their parents who settled in the area during the town's infancy. The flexibility of the pop-up museum allowed residents to take ownership of the event, since there were no limitations placed on the way each individual could contribute.



Picture of residents gathered around door from a local cowboy cabin during Gerlach History Night (Christina Preston, October 2015).

One of the highlights of the night for many residents was a black and white 20-minute film from 1940s and 1950s that contained historic footage of the Gerlach rodeo, Fly Geyser, Main Street, and the arrival of the Shrine Circus train. The video was made from footage shared by longtime resident, Ray Mosley. Mosley had homemade videos on DVDs that had originally been captured on 8mm film in 1940s and 1950s by his late stepfather, Charley Carter. Ray inherited the videos and had fortunately transferred 8mm film to DVDs before the original film was destroyed in a flood. However, Ray was very unhappy with the image quality of the films and the sequence of the images. He presented the film to me in hopes that it could be edited into

a continuous video for the project. This was beyond the scope of my capabilities and budget so, after reviewing the films, I contacted a close friend with expertise in film editing, Dave Collins, who agreed to volunteer to edit the video.

After I selected the highest quality footage, Collins extracted the selected scenes to create a continuous film using professional video editing software. Copyright-free music was then added to the videos since the original film was not accompanied by sound. After Mosley reviewed the video, he urged me to present it during the pop-up museum. I was also given permission to temporarily share the film on the Empire/Gerlach Nevada Classmates Facebook with residents who were unable to attend the meeting. Collins also copied the video onto DVDs for Mosley to distribute at his own discretion. The video footage was enjoyed by many residents since it is the oldest known film of Gerlach.

In an attempt to include former residents that could not attend, many of which were elderly, I also queried the Empire/Gerlach Nevada Classmates Facebook page regarding their first impressions of the area. These quotes, some humorous, were framed, and placed around the room, resulting in discussion among residents about their own memories. Below is a sample of some of these reflections gathered from Facebook:

I was 9, I believe, when we moved there. We were moving from Elko and we took the back road from Winnemucca. It was summer, so we had to drive with the windows down and it was, of course, very dusty. We had a parrot. There was a pillowcase over his cage to try to keep too much dust getting to him. We stopped at the old gas [In Gerlach] station. Mom pulled the pillowcase off the cage, and the bird fluffed his feathers and said "God damn." Needless to say, it really made a good impression! - Jackie Schofield, Empire/Gerlach Nevada Classmates Facebook, 10/13/2015

Dad drove from Elko. Got to Gerlach, late at night. Slept at Bruno's. There wasn't all the extra hotel rooms built then. I woke up early in the morning. Opened the curtain. Total shock. Looking east, the Black Rock desert. I just said, "Oh, no you don't. I want to go home." My first impression took me at least two weeks of adjustment. After that, it all came together for me. I could ride the California Zephyr for free. Dad was a railroad man. The rest is history. I liked it. Marie Kane and I were the only teen girls in town at

the time. Occasionally, Mariom Parker, was in town. By the end of summer 63, I was the only teen girl, in Gerlach, in high school, at the time. 90% of the kids lived in Empire, but time did change that.” - Dolores Rios, Empire/Gerlach Nevada Classmates Facebook, 10/02/2015

My dad was working there ahead of us. We traveled from Columbus, Georgia. No freeways, no air conditioning in car, Grandpa, Mom, and 4 little kids. I was 6 years--the oldest. We thought we were there when we got to Reno, then Grandpa asked the gas station man. It was another 106 miles to go. I thought we were going to the end of the world!” - Lynette Sarllana, Empire/Gerlach Nevada Classmates Facebook, 10/10/2015

First time that I came to Gerlach it was via the back road to Winnemucca through Sulphur then along the [rail road] tracks to Gerlach. 1972! Longest drive ever from SLC, Utah! When we got to Sulphur, and saw the old tailings pond, I thought it was the Gerlach hot springs. Pretty scary! I was never so happy in my life to get back in the car when the Grandparents assured me it wasn't Gerlach! Gerlach was a beautiful site at the end of that trip!”- Cindy Carter, Empire/Gerlach Nevada Classmates Facebook, 10/13/2015

The pop-up museum also featured the descendants of Louis Gerlach as guests of honor. During the project, I had spent a considerable amount of time researching the rancher that the town is named after. Upon reading a blog written by Reno Metro columnist Michael Fitzgerald that discussed the families' history, I discovered that the descendants of Louis Gerlach presently resided in Stockton, California. The following is a quote from Louis Gerlach's great-grandson, Fred Sanderson, from the article written by Fitzgerald that inspired me to track down the family, and invite them to Gerlach with the communities blessing.

I need to get up to Gerlach one of these days. My dad visited some time ago (pre-Burning Man) and from what I can recall the locals had no idea why the town was named Gerlach.

Another family member called to say the name of the family, if not the town is pronounced “garlic.” A humorous sign that used to stand outside the city begged to differ. Perhaps created by a frustrated bachelor, the sign said it was pronounced “Gir-lack.”

After reading the article, I contacted the columnist who put me in touch with the family. The family was excited to discover I was working on the project, and agreed to allow me to interview

them regarding their great grandfather who was a prominent rancher, owning over 3,000 acres in the Black Rock Desert. They were even more surprised, if not embarrassed, to find out that residents did actually know a great deal about Louis Gerlach. After I visited their home in Stockton to learn more about their family, they happily accepted the invitation to visit the town to learn more about their families' legacy in ranching. Their visit to the pop-up museum was a focal point of the evening. Fred Sanderson, Gerlach's great-great grandson, gave a speech detailing the founder's life, and displayed a copy of an oil painting that the family had made to share with the community. Long term residents and new residents alike took an interest in welcoming the family, and in sharing their own history and knowledge of the area with them.

The pop-up museum was pivotal in providing ways for residents, regardless of length of residency, age, or affiliation, to join the project. The flexibility and casual environment allowed residents to participate based upon their own interests and capabilities. The youngest participant was seven years of age, while the oldest was in his/her early nineties. Admittedly, a pop-up museum requires a certain level of risk regarding participation. For example, as a curator of such a short-term event, it can be extremely stressful to rely on informal and temporary contributions. I constantly worried that people would attend the event only to find an empty exhibition space, since it was difficult during the planning stages to ascertain if residents would follow through with contributions they had promised. Ultimately, I feared this could jeopardize the way people viewed the project and my capabilities. However, this did not occur, and residents participated in many diverse creative ways, including the following:

- Ernest Johnson Elementary school children created drawings and artwork from construction paper that reflected their favorite place within the community. A short paragraph accompanied each work.
- Numerous residents donated historic family photographs for display.
- Friends of Black Rock High Rock displayed historic maps of the region.

- Michael Mikel, Burning Man Co-Founder, donated train timetables and merchant receipts found in a historic building that was purchased by the organization.
- One resident donated technology, including a projector, screen, speakers, and a microphone for use during the event
- Ernest Johnson Elementary School displayed yearbooks, school sports uniforms, and old newsletters. The school also brought Black Rock Desert rocket launch memorabilia.
- Bruno's Bar and Restaurant displayed historic photographs kept in the bar's private banquet hall.
- One resident presented advertisements and menus from old Gerlach businesses and restaurants.
- One resident volunteered to photograph and videotape the event for residents unable to attend.
- The Sanderson family prepared a slide-show about Louis Gerlach and donated a large copy of an oil painting created of Louis Gerlach in the 1800s
- One resident selected and provided music to play during the event.
- An array of residents donated supplies, including tablecloths, vases, pictures, flowers, decorative fabrics, and dishware.
- One person created a diorama of the train wreck that occurred in Gerlach
- One resident read a poem to the audience written by a resident regarding the Black Rock Desert
- Bruno's Bar and Restaurant donated accommodations and meals to the Sanderson family. A group of residents also arranged a tour of the community for the family
- Residents donated desserts and beverages to the dessert pot-luck

In total, over 122 people attended the "Gerlach History Night Pop-Up Museum," including many former residents that had moved when the USG closed. All of the events (the History Night as well as the Community Share & Tells) were invaluable in increasing participation in the project. The meetings also provided a way for residents to get to know each other, and particularly a way for older residents to connect with younger residents and newcomers. Ultimately, the project events demonstrated that history could be utilized as a form of community development by strengthening community solidarity through reflecting on the past.

Participation in Community Activities

Participating in daily activities during my visits allowed me to connect with residents more deeply, and enabled me to understand the past as it related to the present. Residents would often invite me to community events such as family dinners, birthdays, chili cook-offs, yard sales, and even cattle brandings as the project progressed. It was not uncommon to receive an invitation to an event without fully understanding the agenda. I was compelled to join in with community activities despite my preference to observe, since refusal could be interpreted as a form of rejection. Fortunately, I never witnessed, or was invited to join into activities were unsafe, unethical, or illegal. I was safe throughout my fieldwork, and was eager to learn more about the community by participating.

During February 2015, I was invited to a cattle branding at the Jackson Ranch located 30 miles outside of Gerlach in Hualapai Valley. I attended with the expectation that I would be observing and photographing the lassoing, ear marking, castration, branding, and vaccination of the calves. I was particularly interested in observing this event since the family organizing the branding were descendants of homesteaders who had lived and worked in cattle ranching in Gerlach since the early 1900s. I initially started photographing the branding activities upon arrival, but wanted to offer assistance since they seemed shorthanded. Upon asking if I could help, I was quickly handed a large syringe, and asked to vaccinate each calf in the neck as the castration, branding, and earmarking simultaneously occurred. The work was dangerous, and needed to be completed with accuracy and efficiency, so as not to cause pain to the animal or damage the tissue around the injection site, which could cause infection as well as reduce the

quality of the meat. This activity required each participant to remain attentive to avoid being trampled by the rest of the herd in the pen as two cowboys chased the calves on horseback before lassoing them from the front and back legs. The cowboys then held the calves taut between the two horses before a third assistant wrestled the calves to the ground. While I was given very little instruction, I do have ample experience with livestock and am a longtime equestrian, so I was relatively comfortable with the task at hand.



Photograph taken at Jackson Ranch during branding activities (Christina Preston, October 2014)

I was asked to attend cattle brandings, chili cook-offs, and other events throughout the project. For instance, in November 2015, I was asked to attend an invite-only feast of Rocky

Mountain oysters²⁹ at Bruno's Restaurant. This event was hosted by a local sheepherder family to thank ranchers who had helped with the sheep shearing, branding, and castration earlier in the year. I was nervous to try the cuisine offered. However, I felt honored to be able to attend events such as this. I readily accepted invitations whenever possible even if it was something that I wasn't particularly interested in being a part of since declining invitations might be understood as a form of rejection as well as imply favoritism toward certain individuals. Throughout the project, it became clear that perceptions of my integrity were often acutely tied to my acceptance and participation within the community, which also helped me to understand community dynamics.

Digital Oral Histories

Community oral histories provide a way to document the lived experiences of everyday people. This counters traditional methods used by historians, which typically focus on researching materials that reinforce narratives from dominant society. Instead, oral histories invite the voices of those who are most often ignored by historians to speak: minorities, women, elderly, deviants, and the poor. These histories can be a very important tool for community development, as they invite participants to reflect on their place in the community, which may enhance networks and communication between residents (Foth and Klaebe 2006:). Oral histories provide communities with the ability to generate alternative narratives while correcting stereotypes by providing interpretations and perspectives on community values, cultures and ways of life (Scobie 1979:35). For the residents of Gerlach, sharing oral histories gave them the opportunity to challenge stereotypes circulated in the media regarding the town's trouble with alcohol, for example, or its number of bars.

²⁹ Rocky Mountain oysters is a dish prepared of bull, pig, or sheep testicles.

Beginning in October 2014, I worked with residents to complete one-on-one interviews regarding early life in Gerlach. Interviewees were first selected by their willingness to participate. Fliers were also posted in the Senior Center and online, via the community Facebook page. The participants were usually longtime residents in their 70s, 80s, and 90s, and interviews with them were followed by interviews with their adult children.

Open-ended interview questions were designed based on the participant's experience or professional expertise. The first part of the interview started with an overview of the project, a brief description of my background, and an explanation of how the materials would be used. If possible, the interviewee would be asked to review the questions in advance.

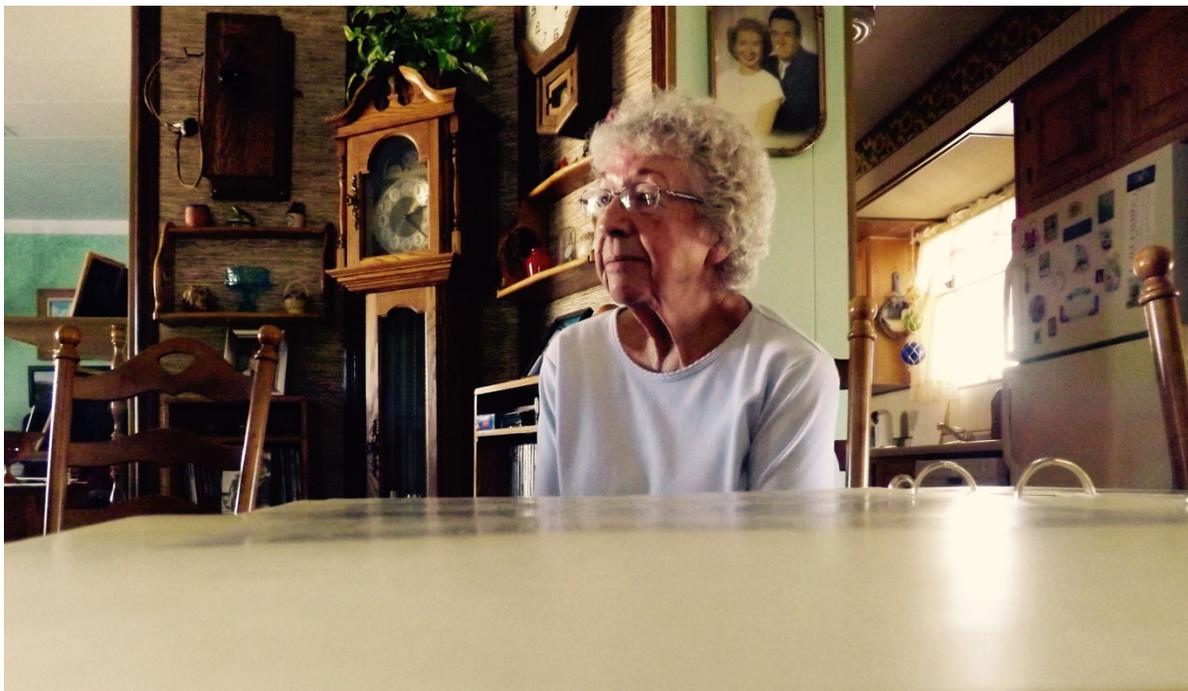
Many of the interviewees were initially hesitant to speak with me, fearing that they wouldn't have much information that would be of interest. Some residents were also worried that I would examine their personal lives instead of their experiences of and reflections on early life in Gerlach. Once residents realized that I was actually interested in the latter, they became increasingly willing to participate in the oral history portion of the project. Some residents were interested in participating immediately, while others joined after several months or even up to two years later.

The following questions were developed to help the interviewee ease into the interview, and to allow me to focus on a particular topic of interest during the interview:

- Where you born in Gerlach? What year?
 - When did you move to Gerlach?
 - How long has your family lived in Gerlach?
- What is your profession?
- Can you tell me about your life in Gerlach?

- What are your hobbies or interests?
- What are important key events, or individuals that you believe that I should include in the Gerlach History Project?

These questions and prompts were effective in exploring the interviewee's knowledge of the area, as well as easing the participant into the interview. I would also ask interviewees to present photos or objects that might be relevant to the project. Not only did this help me develop a deeper context of the town, community events and people, it also greatly assisted in helping interviewees recall memories. Furthermore, it distracted many interviewees from being nervous during the beginning of the interviews. With permission, I would photograph and scan objects and pictures for future reference and incorporation into the project. Ideally, the interviews should have only encompassed two hours, but each interview usually lasted between three and four hours, based on the individual's willingness to speak.



This picture was taken in the home of Bud and Barbara Conley during an oral history interview (Christina Preston, October 2014).

During the oral histories, I was most interested in developing a more robust understanding of community life. I wanted to deviate from the normal scripts told to reporters and outsiders. I also wanted to be inclusive without downplaying the voices of the most outspoken residents, so, instead of excluding them, I challenged them to speak on topics that they were unaccustomed to reflecting upon. This was initially difficult for some residents for two main reasons: first, they often stated they knew very little about topics that deviated from their favorite stories, and, second, it was unclear to them why anyone would want to discuss events or aspects of the community that seemed relatively uninteresting from their perspective. However, anecdotes shared under these circumstances were often more candid and illuminating than the narratives they had perfected through retelling over the years.

In one example, Lena “Skeekie” Courtney, the daughter of Bruno Selmi, who owns Bruno's Bar and Restaurant, has been frequently interviewed in various newspapers throughout Nevada over the last 30 years regarding her father's success as an Italian immigrant (Fullbright 2005). Bruno settled in Gerlach in 1946, and worked at the gypsum plant before starting a bar in 1952, eventually expanding his business enterprises and becoming one of the largest and most influential business and land owners in Gerlach (Fullbright 2005). At first, it was difficult for Skeekie to expand on topics regarding her experiences in Gerlach that were not exclusively focused on her father’s achievements as a businessman who started his life in the United States as a poor Italian immigrant from Tuscany. However, the contributions that she was able to make through her reflections regarding the relationship between Empire and Gerlach enriched the understanding of the dichotomy that existed between the two towns:

Gerlach was just different than Empire. In some ways, I think the mineworkers looked down on us. We were ranchers. Our community had the bars. They had the churches. We

just weren't as cosmopolitan and educated as the mineworkers who came from all over [the United States] (Courtney 4/16/2016).

To be clear, it is not that I didn't find Bruno's experience to be relevant, but various reporters in many different news articles had covered this story over the last 30 years. The purpose of the project was to explore and elaborate on topics that had not been previously covered. Bruno's story is well known throughout the state of Nevada. Burning Man has only added to his legacy, along with his ravioli feeds that bring senators from as far away Las Vegas (Skeekie "Lena" Courtney 4/16/2016). However, my alternative tactic of conducting interviews focused on lesser-known topics allowed for the discovery of novel anecdotes. Residents often shared that they valued hearing these diverse stories that deviated from the norm, since they provided a new perspective of the town as well as new insights into each resident's experiences while living there. This created a space for the more reserved residents to add their alternate narratives to topics that had previously been covered extensively by the most outspoken residents.

One of the most surprising findings during the interview process focused on how former USG employees experienced life in a company town. They spoke highly of their life in Empire during oral histories. They missed the community life that USG facilitated through sponsoring newsletters, hosting community events, or creating a college scholarship fund for residents (Sunny Deforest 6/6/2016). Several residents expressed they had been taken care of rather than oppressed by the company (Deforest; Lambert; Carter). This countered the belief that every company town is exclusively based on controlling the personal and private lives of workers. One resident even described how USG paid for a hot air balloon to give rides to residents, and presented photos to prove it (Sunny Deforest 6/6/2016). Stories such as this challenged literature as well as my own assumptions regarding the oppressive characteristics of company towns,

which are often depicted as monitoring and restricting the behaviors and activities of employees off-shift (Green 2010:31).

Midway through the project, the History Department at the University of Nevada, Reno (UNR) offered me complementary use of their oral history studio on campus to record interviews. However, it was very difficult to convince residents to travel the 214-miles roundtrip from Gerlach to Reno. This would have been especially difficult for the older residents with limited mobility and that are unable to drive. After asking several residents who were unsure about the possibility of visiting UNR, I decided that the length of trip, the cost of parking, and the trouble of navigating the campus would make it unreasonably difficult for residents to utilize UNR's recording studio even in instances where they were willing.

All oral history interviews were typically followed by a review several weeks later depending on the participant's willingness speak further. Follow-up interviews were carried out to confirm information previously shared, as well as to attempt to integrate information discovered in subsequent research. In addition, follow-up interactions also served as a way to further develop a reciprocal relationship by keeping residents up-to-date on the project, incorporating their input, and soliciting their advice. Due to constant interaction, residents maintained their interest and support. Some residents would attempt to assist me in the research without being solicited. For instance, Sunny DeForest, a former employee of USG, located a steam engine that was once in operation at the mine. The steam engine, known as Locomotive #13, is now featured in a permanent exhibit at the California State Railroad Museum.³⁰ One resident also recorded her mother's history on a digital recorder I provided since she was sick during many of the visits that I had scheduled with her in order to perform the interview. Such

³⁰ Virginia and Truckee Railroad, Steam Locomotive No. 13, California Train Museum. Sacramento, CA

initiative on the part of residents stimulated project participation, and facilitated collaboration between community members to accomplish tasks.

The completion of the oral histories was time consuming and sometimes problematic. During the interviews, participants would often bring up a wide range of tangential topics that sometimes included illegal activities. Many of the interviewees forgot about the recorder and it was clear that many of the conversations were not intended to be recorded or made public. Some of these topics included town gossip while some of the other topics were much more legally reprehensible. One particular topic that reoccurred among the residents that I interviewed regarded a controversial multi-family feud which resulted in a murder. Due to these issues, I decided in collaboration with residents that it would be better to use the recordings to gather anecdotes and interesting quotes rather than full transcriptions. Residents agreed with this method since they also wanted to avoid creating further conflict in the community or being depicted in a fashion that reflected poorly on their status in the community.

Gerlach's Boot Hill Cemetery

Residents involved in the project had a strong desire to find out the name and number of individuals buried in the town's only cemetery, located in the eastern corner of Gerlach. Dilapidated wood crosses mark some of the graves while others are unmarked, aside from stems of weathered silk flowers protruding from the ground. Names on the wooden crosses were non-existent or nearly illegible, with the exception of two fairly modern stone graves. Furthermore, residents explained that, during the 1970s, the grave markers were removed by high school pranksters and placed on the lawn of the school with the names of the teachers written in lipstick. The pranksters eventually returned the crosses and wood markers to the cemetery, but it was unclear if the placement was accurate.

Assisting residents with this task was not possible since there are not any records maintained by the town or Washoe County. Records were not kept by the community, likely due to its status as a “Boot Hill” cemetery. “Boot Hill Cemetery” is a generic name for a burial ground in the early 19th century in the American West. Boot Hill cemeteries are typically characterized by makeshift headboards and wooden crosses. During the 19th century “Boot Hill” cemetery was a common name for burial grounds full of people who died unexpectedly with “their boots on” (Britz 2003:213). The Gerlach burial ground is known as a Boot Hill cemetery by residents, since in the early days of the town’s history many died in Gerlach unexpectedly via automobile, train, ranching, and mining accidents. The town’s cemetery is characterized by nameless headboards. Often, Boot Hill cemeteries served as a burial place for transients whose names and families were unknown.

During the heyday of Gerlach’s railroad operations, transients were common in town, and Gerlach was favored by vagrants due to the nearby hot springs, which earned the town the nickname of the “Hobo Bathtub” of the West (Ray Mosley 04/20/2015). However, transients riding the train would sometimes slip off the locomotive while entering or exiting the boxcar. According to notes left by former Gerlach resident Gary Horton in the 1950s, the first individual believed to be buried in the cemetery was a hobo that was split in half by a train. The date of the first burial is unknown, but it is likely to have occurred sometime in the 1910s after the rail yard and mine were in operation:

First body buried in the cemetery was a hobo. Two trains hit, and the hobo fell from the train, and the train ran over him, and cut him in two. Fred Phillips helped burying him. The Washoe County has tried to move the bodies buried in the cemetery, but local people have objected to it. (Horton, n.d.)

It is likely that many of the unmarked headstones may of have been for unidentified individuals that died tragically while passing through Gerlach (Skeekie “Lena” Courtney 4/5/2016)

I contacted the Nevada Cemetery District to find out when the cemetery was established, but they could not locate any information. However, residents had previously stated that most burials at the Gerlach Boot Hill Cemetery commenced in the 1950s. The reason for this was unknown. However, it is possible that Washoe County would not allow the bodies to be interred in Gerlach without an official death certificate being issued by a qualified individual. Due to the isolated nature of Gerlach, this would mean that the body would have to be transported over a hundred miles to reach a physician or coroner. Before Highway 447 was paved in 1947, the journey by automobile on gravel roads could take four or more hours (Demand for Gerlach Roads). It is assumed that the transportation back to Gerlach for burial may have been too costly or labor intensive; leading many residents to choose to bury their deceased in Reno. However, it is clear that not all residents wished for their dead to be taken to Reno, based on a document that describes a mortician being forced to embalm a body on the spot using items found around town since descendants refused to release the body for transport back to Reno for the procedure (Horton, n.d.).³¹

A second explanation for the cessation of burials was that the water table was discovered to be too high in the cemetery to allow for graves to be dug to an adequate depth (Skeekie “Lena” Courtney Interview 4/5/2016). There is reason to believe this is true since the infamous Great Boiling Hot Springs is located less than a half a mile from the cemetery. Hot water can be found seeping up throughout the ground in town as well as in culverts on the side of Highway

³¹ See Appendix D

447. Due to earthquakes, it is not uncommon for springs to appear in new locations throughout the Black Rock Desert.

During the project, it was impossible to identify the names, dates, or the number of burials in the cemetery since the private owner, or Washoe County, did not maintain records. Most of the wooden tombstones lacked any writing, and it was possible the headboards were left intentionally blank since the identity of the individual was unknown. At the time of this project, the cemetery was owned by Willie Courtney. Conversations with the family revealed very little information regarding internments. I tried to collect the names of individuals from obituaries and news articles in the Reno Gazette-Journal to assist in identifying the names of individuals that were buried in Gerlach. However, it is doubtful that the list was comprehensive since it is likely that many of the deaths and burials were not publicized.

Finally, one senior resident reported that the wood fence currently surrounding the plots was not reflective of the actual size of the cemetery. I visited the cemetery in April 2016, and determined there were at least 49 marked graves, as well as at least 25 unmarked graves, judging from the remnants of silk flower stems stuck in the ground. Although a short list of names and obituaries were collected throughout the project, it would be impossible to locate the number of individuals buried in the cemetery without utilizing expensive equipment such as ground penetrating radar, which is beyond the scope of this project.

Community Conflict and Project Problems

I began my work in Gerlach in the midst of personal turmoil. I decided to leave my husband in September 2014, three months after I had officially started the project. The community had come to know me as a married woman, which appeared to be a respected status.

Throughout the project, I was conscious about how my sudden shift in status from a married woman to a divorcee might impact my relationship with residents who had on occasion taken a keen interest in my personal life as they began divulging so much of their own lives with me. I considered concealing my relationship status, but believed it would be best to be honest, as many of the residents began to refer to me as a friend by welcoming me into their homes, sharing meals, and assisting with the project. It seemed only natural and genuine to answer their questions in turn, and to ultimately be open about my life.

I made the decision to reveal my divorce in a casual email in January 2015, explaining my prolonged delay in visiting the town. Unfortunately, a week after the initial communication, I discovered the personal email had been published in the town's newsletter. My humiliation was two-fold, since I was embarrassed not only about my divorce, but also by the thought that some residents believed that I desired to share the news so publicly. This was especially troubling to my reputation since many of the conservative older residents were the most devoted readers of the paper. I was confused by this action, which seemed to be an attack on the project as well a deliberate jab at my reputation. However, I quickly came to realize that instances of judgment or interrogation into my personal life would be commonplace; occasionally just serving as an antidote to small-town boredom. As a researcher, I decided to deal with these issues professionally by not allowing these remarks or incidents to change my behavior toward residents. Over time, these incidences appeared to dwindle, possibly due to my lack of reaction or even acknowledgement.

Negative encounters mostly manifested as fleeting spiteful remarks, most frequently made by residents that were hesitant to become involved due to the belief that information they shared would be used for profit, or might become part of a project for the Burning Man

organization. On the opposite end of the spectrum, residents that were relatively new to the area, having only recently moved to the community in the last decade through their affiliation with the festival, sometimes tried to contribute to the historical portion of the project by claiming to have lived in the town longer than they actually had. I never interfered with participation, but these behaviors brought awareness to the project's potential to create a greater divide between longtime residents and relative newcomers.

For instance, the project's focus on residents that had lived in the community during the early 1900s to 1970s excluded residents that had recently moved to the community in the last 30 years, which ultimately emphasized the lack of citizenship of those who did not have a familial connection to the area. Most of the newcomers that I encountered during the project moved to Gerlach after serving as either volunteers or employees for the Burning Man organization. These newcomers often could not fully integrate into the community despite volunteer service, attending social events, or even working to build positive relationships with neighbors. Some even attempted to dress in similar ways as the ranchers by wearing cowboy hats, flashy western clothing, and boots. I noted this early on in the project, but later found out this behavior had been previously noted in the book, "This is Burning Man," published by Brian Doherty, a U.S. Journalist. Doherty describes a Burning Man ambassador who moved to the community to "soften" resident's attitudes toward the event. This ambassador attributed his quick entry to his attire: "When I asked Flash how he managed to insinuate himself so thoroughly into Gerlach society so quickly, he proudly showed me a snap shot of himself, in full wild man-mode, lanky arms muscled like old rope dangling from a shirt with the sleeves torn off, long knife brandished, sitting like a pampered child in the midst of six middle-aged (and older) women: the women who wielded social power in Gerlach" (Doherty 2007:15). Many longtime residents expressed that

these actions were inauthentic and manipulative. Undoubtedly, incidences such as this increased mistrust. During the beginning of the project, it was interesting and perplexing to encounter newcomers that attempted to mislead me regarding their length of residency in the community as well as affiliation with Burning Man. On some occasions, I even interviewed individuals that claimed to have grown up in the community, only to find out they had recently moved to the area.

Many residents expressed that the newcomers could never be anything more than extensions of the Burning Man organization, and believed that their long-term presence foreshadowed a change in the community. Longtime residents commented that, if the town became home to an increasing number of Burning Man supporters, then the organization would become even less inclined to respond to community concerns with traffic, pollution, increases in theft, drug use, and other negative impacts associated with the festival. My ability to gain acceptance from longtime residents seemed to offend some of the newcomers who told me that I had been welcomed into the community too quickly while they had not, despite their ardent efforts to integrate over sometimes many years.

An example of such animosity occurred early on in the project. A resident that had only lived in the community for three years and was well known for her enthusiasm for the festival called to ask if I would be willing to spend the day helping her move furniture while she worked on her home. I was only in town for a couple of days, so I declined her request due the interviews that I needed to complete that day. I was able to remain on good terms with her afterward, but she would frequently mention that I had not invested the proper amount of time paying dues to the community in the same way that she had. These types of comments and interactions were perceived to be based on resentment that I had gained acceptance into the community in a much

shorter time than many of the newcomers had (if at all). The acceptance often came in the form of invitations to exclusive community events such as Bruno's ravioli feeds, brandings at local ranches, or even simply by being treated politely by members of the community that are considered to be highly respected.³² For newcomers or outcasts, rejection frequently came in the form of never receiving invites from locals to these events.

However, longtime residents were also worried that I might misrepresent them or contribute to misconceptions of the community. For instance, communal space in Gerlach is extremely limited. The town's social activities once were more robust, but currently the town is home to three bars and one restaurant. Many residents spend the early evenings socializing by playing pool, swing dancing to the juke box, chatting with other residents, or watching TV at one of the bars. As a solo female researcher, I found myself avoiding these bars due to my own assumptions about how it would potentially impact my image. I was worried that I would be first judged as a woman, regardless of my status as a researcher. I was also worried about how my interactions with male residents would be perceived. Residents eventually remarked about my avoidance of the bars since they were an integral part of community life. However, when visiting any of the bars in town, I quickly came to understand that there was a fine balance in these perceptions. During the times that I was invited to the bar by residents, the older women would goad me to return home once they had finished their drinks and socializing for the evening. It was also commonplace to receive stern directives to avoid certain men in town that the older women had determined would put me at risk. However, if I avoided the bars too much then I was chastised for not socializing, so I eventually began to visit the bar more frequently to make contact with residents, including the bar owners who occasionally tended at night. During these

³² Some of the residents that were considered to be newcomers by the longtime residents would frequently remark that they were jealous that I was invited to private dinners, brandings, and ravioli feeds when they had never had the opportunity to attend these events.

times, I noticed that it was not uncommon to find some of the towns' elderly residents in the bars visiting, celebrating a birthday, or reading the newspaper. On one occasion, I decided to visit the bar after a particularly laborious weekend visiting outlying ranches. I shared a few drinks with residents, but decided to leave before becoming noticeably intoxicated. The following evening, I received an online message from a male employee of Burning Man reporting that there was a rumor in town that I had been drunk at the bar. This was followed by his perceptions that I was moving on from my husband too quickly. Although the community welcomed me, these instances of scrutiny made the environment occasionally oppressive as a woman, and as an outsider.

Other challenges came from a few long-time residents that mistrusted my motives as a researcher and were worried that I would attempt to profit from the project. From the onset of the project, there was suspicion that I was going to write a book, and some residents did not want to participate if their images and narratives would be utilized in this way. This required constant reassurance. During the first several months many people had a difficult time understanding my passion if it was not motivated by recognition or greed. To dispel these rumors, I created flyers for residents to reiterate the intent of the project. The flyers included a Q&A section that described project funding and addressed potential concerns.³³ The flyer ended up being a fantastic tool to increase clarity, and inspired residents to raise nearly \$1,000 through the bingo fundraiser discussed earlier in the document.

Competition was also an unanticipated problem. During the beginning of the project, I discovered that a resident was interested in writing his/her own historical narrative of the community. I did not want to dissuade this from happening, but some residents reported being irritated at being approached to share their stories, photographs and pictures with an additional

³³ See Appendix E

person,³⁴ and had turned down inquiries since they were already working with me. In an attempt to temper resentment between residents and to facilitate collaboration, I welcomed materials and photographs that had been written by other residents working on their own projects. This stimulated participation through crediting them for their work. I ensured that residents would be cited throughout the project for their contributions, and constantly stressed the power of collaboration to create a stronger and more robust project.

Despite my desire to facilitate collaboration between residents and myself, I avoided collaboration with outsiders.³⁵ One of the cofounders of Burning Man, Will Roger, attended one of the initial meetings, and initially showed interest in supporting the project as a form of public relations. This was frowned upon by many of the longtime residents, and it was immediately made clear that many residents wanted to avoid collaborating with the organization due to town's tumultuous relationship with Burning Man. However, closer to the conclusion of the project, I was contacted by Michael Mikel³⁶, one of the six Burning Man cofounders, and I hesitantly agreed to meet him in Reno to go over some of the photographs and historical information that he collected on Gerlach as an amateur historian. Unfortunately, Mikel did not present any historical documents or information of substantial interest other than a diary once owned by one of Gerlach's early constables, Bill Hart. Mikel only let me take a quick glimpse of the diary, which mostly detailed the weather.³⁷ The meeting only demonstrated Burning Man's interest in

³⁴ Residents indicated that they had only shared information with me since I had developed a rapport with them. They also frequently expressed there was too much polarization between residents for the project to be carried out by another person living within the community.

³⁵ Early on during the project, I was approached by a German film crew to help them with a documentary on Gerlach. I refused to assist the crew in documenting the community based on residents' request. This advice particularly came from members of the GCED, who were offended by the film crew's decision to film residents without permission, based on one problematic instance of unannounced filming by the crew immediately outside of the elementary school property.

³⁶ Michael Mikel is most commonly known as "Danger Ranger." He is one of Burning Man's original founders.

³⁷ The diary was likely kept by Bill Hart when he was a rancher so the details were mostly focused on the weather conditions and livestock.

the possibility of opening a museum that would highlight the regional history along with Burning Man's development over the last several years. Although Burning Man seemed interested in collaborating, it was not possible due to Gerlach residents' resentment toward the event and its organizers. I was also weary of making any sort of association with Burning Man, due to the festival's reputation of ignoring its impacts on the town's residents.

Key Participants

The project began with five participants and grew to over forty-three routine participants by the end of the project. The following three residents were selected to showcase in this document due to their particularly high degree of public involvement. Ray Mosley, Judy Conley, and Andrea Jackson are highly respected longtime members of the community whose involvement and enthusiasm increased participation in the project. They provided me with constant feedback, encouragement, and guidance. They also assisted with coordinating community events such as the Community Share & Tell nights and pop-up museum. All three residents were born and raised in the community, and demonstrate an impressive breadth of knowledge regarding the community's history that extended well beyond the time period of the project's focus.³⁸ All three individuals also maintained a rather extensive collection of photographs, news articles, and historical items. Their personal contributions were equally important, as they convinced other residents that the project was a worthwhile endeavor.

³⁸ During the beginning of the project some residents only agreed to participate if one of the respected members of the community became involved. These three individuals were frequently cited as being important members of the community that could influence other residents' decisions to participate.

Ray Mosley

Ray Mosley was a key participant from the very start of the project. We met after he attended the second GCED meeting that was held in Gerlach in October 2014. It was during this meeting that he presented a large scrapbook full of family photos and news clippings that he thought would be of interest. After sensing that he was hesitant to talk in front of other residents, I invited him to meet with me privately during the following evening to go over the materials. During our first meeting, Ray visited the place that I was staying since he refused to meet at the town's only restaurant due to a decades old feud with the owner. During this time, I discovered more about Ray and his profound knowledge of the town. He talked much more candidly about his life in Gerlach than any of other residents were willing to in the early stages of the project.

During my meetings with Ray, I learned that he is a quiet man in his 70s who was raised in Gerlach and worked for many years as a railroad engineer in the Black Rock Desert. His stepfather, Charlie Carter and mother, Veda Carter, owned the Stanley Café and Theatre. Both parents also served as judges. Ray was raised alongside his brother, Lloyd Carter, who also still resides in Gerlach.

Mosley currently lives on a tungsten mining homestead located at the bottom of Limbo Peak outside of Empire; living a fairly isolated life with his two pit bull dogs. His home is modest with a tin roof, a well, and a woodstove for warmth. He relies on propane for electricity. Aside from the constant maintenance of his home, Mosley spends most of his time manufacturing Damascus steel knives with handles of hand-carved deer antler along with intricate leather gun holsters and knife sheaths. These knives, which are typically sold by word-

of-mouth, supplement Mosley's pension from the railroad. Unfortunately, the manufacturing of these knives require a high level of skill and tedium which is complicated by his severe rheumatoid arthritis, hindering his mobility and ability to complete even basic chores. His stamina to survive, create, and thrive in such a desolate environment despite his age and health complications demonstrates his love of the Black Rock Desert.



Ray Mosley on his ranch near Limbo Mountain (Christina Preston, February 2014).

After our second meeting, Mosley invited me to his home. His hesitation was palpable, however, and he only offered to meet me at the end of the two-mile road near his house. After my arrival, he extended the invitation to see the exterior of his home, which is surrounded by rusted tools, old brands, and farm equipment that he proudly curated after acquiring them from old abandoned ranches and trash dumps throughout the area. Eventually, Ray invited me to see

the interior of his small home, which was a museum full of family photos, glass telephone wire insulators, old perfume bottles, carved antlers, saddles, and horse bridles. It was surprisingly much more extensive than the collection that decorated the sprawling exterior of his house.

Although Ray was not presently active in Gerlach community life, he was intensely interested in preserving the town's history, and took a great deal of enjoyment reliving the past since he was very active in the town during his younger years. He attended rodeos as a youth, frequented the bars, hunted mule deer, and mined semi-precious stones. As a youth, he worked in his parent's café in Gerlach by preparing food for the cook until he was eventually hired by the railroad as a teenager to work on line crews while his brother, Lloyd Carter, worked as a buckaroo. Both brothers left Gerlach for unknown periods of time, but eventually returned to the town during their retirement.

Ray's interest in helping develop the Gerlach Public History Project was incredibly motivating throughout the project since he typically checked in with me on a weekly basis to hear about the project's progress. He was generous with his knowledge of the town, and assisted in navigating the complicated social dynamics of the town by unabashedly suggesting which topics to avoid, as well as warning me of personalities that I may have difficulty with. In many ways, Ray became my confidante and advisor. His enthusiasm for the project, coupled with his introversion and physical distance from the town made him an ideal person for these roles, which developed naturally from the onset of the project. We talked frequently by telephone and I visited him at his ranch. To return Ray's kindness, I would check in on him and send care packages while he recovered from surgeries for his debilitating arthritis.

Although I was close to Ray since he welcomed frequent communication, he had tense relationships with a couple of influential residents. The origins of the unrest were unknown, but I

believed it may have stemmed from public opinion of his late mother, who served as one of the last town judges. I made accommodations so that Ray could participate in the project without interacting with other residents whenever possible. Despite Ray's uneasy relationship with some residents, he is also known in town as a bit of a legend for his prolific stories, and his sought-after hand-carved knives.

Andrea Jackson

Andrea Jackson lives on a family homestead in Hualapai Valley, 50 miles north of Gerlach, with her brother, Grover, and her sister, Tilly. The family is very self-contained, producing their own meat and vegetables and only leaving their ranch infrequently for supplies or to pick-up mail in town. The Jackson family has been involved in cattle ranching in the Black Rock Desert for well over two generations. During the project, I became particularly close to Andrea, the matriarch of the family. She is an extremely warm and gregarious woman in her late 60s. She was ebullient, eager to share, and an excellent horsewoman who still participates in cattle drives that span several days over the rugged terrain of the Granite Mountains.

On my second visit to Gerlach in November 2014, I shared a spaghetti lunch with the



Andrea Jackson (Brian Kelly October 2015)

family on the ranch. Afterward, Andrea drove me to visit different sites in Hualapai Valley such as the Lund Petrified Forest. Andrea stressed the increasing difficulties of ranching during the last couple of decades due to the persistent drought, as well as increasing scrutiny by the Bureau of Land Management (BLM). According to Andrea, BLM is focused on

reducing the environmental impacts of ranching by restricting the number of cattle that can graze on public lands, based on such criteria as water availability and endangered species habitat (DOI: BLM: Livestock Grazing). Just as all of the cowboys that I spoke to in the area, the Jacksons longed for the days before barbed wire divided the land, limited the range, and politicized ranching.

The Jacksons ultimately become expert informants on ranching. Residents always recommended speaking to the Jacksons, as they were highly respected, frequently labeled as “salt of the earth” since they lived in the same manner as their grandparents once had, resulting in the family achieving iconic status among locals and other ranchers in the northern part of the state.

The Jacksons would frequently describe with great nostalgia how the wild grasses and water were once abundant, allowing ranchers little concern about feeding the cattle on the range. For the early buckaroos, wild horses provided an endless array of headstrong mounts to break before the BLM started actively culling the herds to prevent environmental damage. The stories that could be collected from the Jacksons were limitless and thought-provoking. The Jacksons were one-of-a kind, a remnant from era long gone, without the possibility of any future progeny to carry on their way of life.

Judy Conley

Judy Conley has lived in Gerlach for most of her adult life with her husband, Steve Conley. Judy was one of the few staff members retained by Washoe County to work in the elementary school as the registrar after nearly all of the school's over 23 teachers and staff were laid off following the closure of the USG production plant and mine due to low enrollments. Judy's position expanded to include many tasks, including that of a teaching assistant, janitor, and school secretary for the eight children currently still enrolled. Judy is very passionate about maintaining community life in Gerlach, although she frequently admits that she is pessimistic about the community's ability to retain its history if Burning Man continues to encroach upon the town (Judy Conley 5/15/2016).

The project would not have been possible without Judy Conley's participation and advocacy. She played a pivotal role in arranging interviews, events, and increasing residents' participation. Judy's social capital also enabled me to initiate interactions with notable residents who would have been otherwise unlikely to participate. She was able to convince some of the most skeptical elderly residents to attend meetings. Furthermore, reaching out to residents in a desolate town, where some residents lack regular access to the Internet or who are too hard of

hearing to speak via telephone would have been very difficult without her assistance. Judy was very passionate about the project from the beginning, and guided me throughout the process on how to approach certain individuals, as well as provided constant contextualization of some of the narratives collected. Judy's enthusiasm and community involvement inspires many residents, since she is able to remain optimistic regarding Gerlach's future despite its current economic situation. Conley became an ambassador of the project by impressing upon residents the value of their narratives.

It was important to collaborate with well-respected members of the community who were able to encourage participation, and demonstrated a genuine interest in the project. It was important to avoid aligning the project with the most powerful and influential members of the community since these individuals may have created more division within the community by promoting special agendas or interests (Long et al. 2014: 15) The three individuals described above— Ray Mosley, Judy Carter, and Andrea Jackson—were particularly well-known within the community, and occupied positions that were considered to be neutral in comparison to other residents who maintained strong and public opinions regarding community politics. Mosley was the exception to this rule. He was known to be strongly opinionated, and frequently experienced conflict with residents. However, I believe that the distance of his homestead from Gerlach, and his interest in assisting with the project from behind the scenes due to his desire for privacy allowed him to occupy a role in the project that permitted his participation without upsetting other residents.

Final Product

The final product of the project is a 94-page public history document that provides an in-depth historical overview of Gerlach and Empire. This portion of the history was focused on describing the development of Gerlach as a railroad and ranching community while providing a timeline for the establishment of the USG mine, production plant, and company town. The document is divided into sections focused on topics such as the railroad, the gypsum mine, and community events. Portions of the document include transcribed quotes from the oral histories. A copy of this document was provided to all project participants, and the Gerlach Community and Economic Development Team. Some residents obtained the document for inclusion in family histories. The GCED is permitted to modify the document for their needs to apply for grants, create didactic materials, travel brochures, or for use on the VisitGerlach.com website. I asked to be credited for my work along with residents that were listed as contributors. Since the final product belongs to the community, it has not been included in the appendix of this document. Any researcher seeking a copy, should contact the GCED.

The oral histories were digitally recorded. These histories were not fully transcribed; instead quotes from the histories were extracted for inclusion in the public history document. Due to privacy issues, these histories were not shared publicly. Participants were given a Compact Disc or an MP3 file based on their preference. The right to distribute the oral histories was given exclusively to each resident that participated. I will retain a master copy of the oral histories on a Compact Disc in my home office, and will destroy the master copy after two years.

At the end of the Project, in September 2016, a file was provided to participants, Ernest Johnson Elementary, and the GCED, that included a compilation of all of the documents that were recovered on the community. This included poetry, newsletters, news articles, and narratives written by other residents, as well as historical photographs and family photos. If possible, the materials were captioned with the name, date, title, and contributor.

Project Conclusion

Finishing the project was more much difficult than anticipated, since participation continuously increased over time. During the first four months of the project, only ten residents continuously participated, but, as time passed, over 43 former and current residents were consistently involved in the project by providing oral histories, editing assistance, contributing photographs, and assisting with research.³⁹ As time passed, people became more comfortable and aware of my presence and increasingly willing to share information. Toward the end, community members were urging me to borrow their personal scrapbooks and family albums to scan. Oral history recordings occurred until May 2016, and I suspect that the project could have carried on indefinitely since residents frequently commented about enjoying the social aspects of the Community Share & Tell events, and other related activities. This event seemed especially therapeutic and entertaining for residents since these events involved storytelling, sharing of experiences, and recollection of events as a group. This provided a method for residents to learn more about each other through the presentation of resident's photos and scrapbooks. These

³⁹ Residents that routinely participated in the project included: Judy Conley, Steve Conley, Barbara Conley, Bud Conley, Ray Mosley, Lloyd Carter, Bruno Selmi, Lena "Skeekie" Courtney, Cecil Courtney, Margie Reynolds, Mathew Ebert, Sunny Deforest, Gay Deforest, Keith Deforest, Andrea Jackson, Tilly Jackson, Grover Jackson, Cindi Carter, Steve Carter, Bev Osborn, Larry Guissola, Rachel Bogard, John Bogard, Michael Myers, Vaughn Solo, Brooke Covey, Brian Covey, Elizabeth Gambrell, Stuart Little, Marjorie Schoenfeldt, Fred Sanderson, Bob Stafford, Steve Lambert, Connie Ugalde, Dolores Rios, Marjorie Schoenfeldt, Florence Larraneta Frye, Tina Walters, Anna Popjoy, Michael Ugalde, John LawAver, Sherry Carter, Ray Vermillion, Jackie Schofield, William Cummings, and Viola DeVita

meetings, which focused predominately on residents reviewing photographs and sharing their recollections, mirrors Reminiscence Work used by both oral historians well as therapeutically by recreational leaders in elderly care homes to help interviewees/participants recall memories through the presentation of objects or images (Bornat 21). Considering that Gerlach lacks social activities that are elder-friendly, (e.g., requiring little mobility, financial investment, and endurance), and many of the residents participating in the project were over the age of 70, it is easy to understand residents' attraction to and the resultant success of the Community Share & Tell meetings.

Ending the project also brought more social complexity than I was prepared to deal with. It was clear that some residents desired that the relationships and communication established would extend beyond the project. For the most part, I interpreted these desires as a compliment to my work, and welcomed these subsequent interactions with residents. However, transitioning from a researcher to a friend was sometimes professionally and personally difficult. I had enjoyed my time with many residents by participating in social activities, mingling at the bars, and enjoying family dinners. However, it is through these less formal interactions that I developed a deeper knowledge of resident's personal and interpersonal lives. Earlier in the project, I was shielded from the troubled aspects of life in Gerlach: drug addiction, financial crisis, terminal illnesses, and alcoholism. My increasing knowledge of these issues made neutrality difficult.

Furthermore, it was not uncommon for residents to share their political beliefs in hopes that I would commiserate with their stance. Often, a resident's political viewpoint strongly countered my own. Expecting this, I would typically give a nod to indicate that I was listening or give an appeasing smile. However, my lack of commentary more than likely gave away my true

position on these matters. I was inauthentic during these interactions and, at times, I experienced resentment since many of the beliefs that I had to hide are very central to my identity. In order to lessen my feelings of resentment, I tried to understand their perspectives, which could be assumed to have been shaped by living rather self-sufficiently in a small isolated desert town. As a researcher in control of facilitating the project, I felt that it was not appropriate to share my beliefs or disagree during conversations since it might alienate residents. Toward the end of the project, many residents had grown attached to my presence as evidenced by the increasing desire to engage through email, phone conversations, and contact via social media. It was important to maintain these relationships, and to understand them as a positive outcome of a successful Participatory Action Research project. Neutrality regarding politics, interpersonal relationships, religion, or any other potentially controversial topic is paramount to facilitating inclusivity. Because many residents redefined our relationship as a form of friendship by the end of the project, it was paramount to maintain a professional relationship since my goal was to nurture collaboration between residents, and to leave the community with positive associations toward the work completed.

One of the principle goals of the Project was to ensure that it didn't create further conflict within the community by reinvigorating past feuds between residents through the reexamination of the past. I was also concerned about the possibility for favoritism, and creating unnecessary competition between residents. To reduce the possibility of conflict, I constantly examined my intentions, and the way that different individuals might perceive my actions. For instance, I would typically publicly and personally inform residents several weeks in advance regarding dates that I would be visiting the community in order to complete additional interviews. This reduced the possibility that residents would be left out by not being informed of my visits.

During fieldwork visits, I would also typically set aside two to three days worth of unscheduled time so that I could visit with residents, attend community events, and schedule last minute interviews or oral histories. In order to reduce favoritism, I attempted to divide my time equally among participating residents when in Gerlach, and whenever possible, I accepted invites to dinner, lunches, or other social events. I was aware that some residents were not interested in participating, but it was important to maintain friendly relations with them, and to maintain an open-door policy regarding participation.

Attending social functions allowed me to remain accessible to all residents, and build rapport. I treated these events as outreach functions, and refrained from participating in town gossip, political conversations, or anything else could be deemed as offensive. For all intents and purposes, I tried to maintain a professional and welcoming demeanor. I even tried to keep my facial expressions and language neutral when residents shared information about interpersonal or community feuds. Residents frequently cited my consistent approachability as the reason for deciding to participate in the project. Admittedly, this required tedious maintenance of relationships, which sometimes reduced the limited time available during fieldwork to conduct oral histories, archival research, and follow-up interviews. This work could be extremely tiring since it required me to constantly monitor my behavior, and be mindful of my interactions on visits that could sometimes last up to seven days.

I originally started the project assuming that I would document the history of the community. However, my role quickly expanded into much more than just a community historian or researcher, as I became a coordinator of community events, a confidante, a friend and a facilitator of communication between residents in conflict. As I worked with residents closely, I realized that some of the activities that I was doing inadvertently assisted newcomers in

proving their commitment to longtime residents by volunteering during the project. For elderly residents, the project was enriching: I listened patiently and gave undivided attention to their stories, essentially validating the depth and importance of their lives and experiences. The project also demonstrated that newcomers to the community, many of whom were much younger, were also interested in narratives of longtime residents. The project provided a way for residents that would not otherwise communicate to co-mingle with each other, potentially bridging generational gaps created through a lack of understanding of divergent lifestyles and experiences. This provided an important aspect for elderly individuals in particular, since age can come with sense of alienation and devaluation (Bornat 16:1989). Occasionally, I even provided access to the outside by obtaining goods or information to residents. It was not uncommon for me to read online news articles or help explain current news events for those lacking access to media due to their location. These requests often came from some of the most socially isolated residents who had given way to hermitage. These were unintended and time-consuming tasks, which yielded beneficial consequences of trust-building with residents.

One of the main stressors of the project was time. Time was of the essence during this project, and was constantly on my mind as I was cognizant of the ages of the individuals that I was working with, the fragility of their health, and the possibility that a participant could pass away before the completion of the project. This never occurred, but I did worry about it constantly since emergency room visits and extended hospital stays were not uncommon. I also knew that for many residents that I was working with, the recordings, photographs, and quotes that were gathered may be their last or only formal testament regarding their life. Family and friends of residents often pointed this out, and I experienced a sense of urgency among longtime residents and their family and friends. This likely played a large role in the amount of

participation in the project. Understanding this, I always provided unedited copies of photographs and recordings immediately to residents, or to their children—with the interviewee’s permission.

Throughout the project, I was consistently awed by the number of residents that were able to live on their own well into their 80s and 90s, with the help of family and community. Despite their advanced age and health and mobility challenges, residents never demonstrated notable issues with cognizance. However, performing collaborative research with elderly populations requires special considerations regarding time. Despite my urgency to complete the project, work often progressed at a slow pace. As Isabel Higgins points out in her article, “Reflections on Conducting Qualitative Research with Elderly People, “time for elderly people heralds a slow and predictable rhythm; life is lived in slow motion with shuffling, pulling, and sleeping” (Higgins 1998:860). Fieldwork with elderly residents often reflected this, by constantly requiring me to be respectful and aware of health concerns, fatigue, and caretaker schedules. It was not uncommon for an interview to be disrupted for medications, nap times, or scheduled meals. Furthermore, over the nearly two-year span of the project, it was not uncommon for elderly residents to experience health complications which sometimes led to prolonged hospitalization, or bouts of illness or fatigue, all of which precluded them from participating for extended periods of time. Researchers should be mindful and sensitive to these issues, and consider whether projected timelines will be compatible with the needs of elderly participants. The timeline of the project was extended under these considerations from one year to over two years.

It is important to consider the size of the town in relation to participation. Gerlach’s relatively small size made it easier for people to travel, interact, and be part of a movement

focused on documenting the history of the community. Residents only needed to travel, at most, a few blocks to participate in meetings. Although I visited some community members that lived up to 50 miles away from Gerlach in desolate areas, the size of the town also made it easier to visit and interact with most of the residents than it would have been in a city or a project that covered a much larger expanse. Furthermore, the lack of social opportunities, the relative isolation, and the ample time afforded to many of Gerlach's retirees, suggest that participation in the project was an attraction rather than inconvenience.

Although the project was not focused on studying the conflict between Burning Man and Gerlach, these issues undoubtedly factored into the project. Residents' mistrust of the organization was based on their perceptions of Burning Man's lack of community outreach and mitigation of problems generated by the festival. In the early years of the festival, founder Larry Harvey admits to lacking a true understanding of life in Gerlach and superficially attributing the depth of the community by judging the bars (Doherty 2007:14). Of course, this does not mean that Burning Man has ignored the community. Although the total number of financial contributions are unknown, according to residents, Burning Man has donated a considerable amount to Ernest Johnson Elementary and the Senior Center. According to Mikel, Burning Man has also donated money and labor to fix some of the historic buildings in town for community members that lacked the financial means to repair the buildings themselves (Mikel 4/2/2016). However, financial resources cannot fully address cultural clashes, stressors brought on by traffic, and the lack of meaningful consideration of resident's concerns. Some of the tension during the project was a byproduct of this relationship, leaving behind many questions regarding the long-term effects of large festivals on small communities. Based on my experience in Gerlach, it is clear to me that festival organizations, no matter how ad-hoc or informal, must

consult with the communities to discuss the ways in which their presence impacts these communities, and to find ways to lessen these impacts.

Throughout the project, residents' continuous and spontaneous participation became an indicator of project success. The purpose of participatory action research is to foster inclusion so that it increases each individual's agency to make a decision to participate in research free of barriers or coercion, and this was demonstrated through the residents on-going participation in the project without coercion (Wilmsen 2008:3). Residents expressed that it was worth their time and effort since the benefits were mutual. The project appealed to the needs of the community by providing the narrative necessary for grant applications and projects focused on generating tourism, while appealing to residents for a plethora of reasons including offering a venue for reminiscing, socializing, and working collaboratively. Many reported excitement regarding participating in an oral history, as well as sharing their family photos. Elderly residents in particular were pleased to participate in creating a document that they could share with their relatives. One resident made Christmas gifts from the photos that were taken during the project, and remarked that these were likely the last professional portraits that would be taken of her father, since he was in his mid 90s and in failing health.

The Gerlach History Project not only helped the community in developing a historical narrative that could be utilized for economic development, but it was a project that incorporated social activities. Community gatherings and celebrations are important components of community development since these functions can strengthen communication between residents, and build social networks within communities (Van Delsam, n.d.). Project events helped residents to bridge divisions by engaging new and longtime residents in common activities (see Cantrell). Participation in the Gerlach Public History Project illustrated the importance of

Gerlach and Empire's history to residents, while strongly demonstrating the potential for history to serve as a catalyst for community development.

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Appendix A

To Christina Preston and Whom It May Concern:

We, the undersigned, constitute a majority of the Gerlach Economic Development Committee.

We would very much like to ask you to create a complete oral history of the towns of Gerlach, Empire, and the surrounding communities. This document could be used to preserve the history of Gerlach and Empire, Nevada. The Gerlach Economic Development Committee would be an eager collaborator with you in this project, helping however possible.

This project should include locating archival materials, transcribing oral histories, documenting landmarks of interest, and any other areas that you consider relevant. We are very proud of our community's influence throughout the last 150 years and fervently wish to see it preserved for posterity in its entirety.

Signed:

 (Tina Walters)

Judy Conley

TICNOT TAKA PROVOST

 Stacey Black

Mike & Lisa Nash

Appendix B

Burning Man Conflict

The impacts of the festival are no longer restricted to the ten-day period during the event since Burning Man employees and volunteers move to Gerlach as early as June when preparations for the festival start. This work crew stays until October until every trace of the event has been removed from the Black Rock Desert. An excerpt from the Burning Man's DPW website describes the purpose of this workforce⁴⁰:

The Department of Public Works (DPW) undertakes the massive task of building, maintaining, and cleaning up Black Rock City. The city occupies over 4 square miles. Its facilities are assembled from 200 lampposts, 2,000 street signs, over 6,000 t-stakes, several thousand concrete form stakes, and 12 miles of fence. It encompasses an airport, banks of port-a-potties, several temporary buildings, acres of shade structure, 24 burn platforms, and 200 burn barrels. The construction of this metropolis requires thousands of hours of labor by hundreds of dedicated workers, all accomplished in a month's time, in very harsh high-desert conditions a hundred miles from the nearest source of building supplies.

DPW is known by festival organizers, attendees, and volunteers for being a loud, obnoxious, and pugnacious workforce (DPW Abuses; What's up with DPW and Gate). Unfortunately, the types of individuals available, willing, and capable of such difficult manual labor for extended periods of time without pay in exchange for food and housing, often have trouble gaining or maintaining employment in mainstream society due to drug addiction, mental illnesses or other extenuating circumstances (Vaughn Solo Interview 7/26/2016). Burning Man has acknowledged this trend among their workforce. However, this behavior is often overlooked

⁴⁰ The crew starts by mapping out the site of the festival on the Black Rock Desert and building basic facilities before moving on to build more complex art installations in collaboration with funded artists. Pay is typically limited to managers, and is made in the form of a small stipend that equals far less than hourly minimum wage employment (Roberts 2004:208). These positions require manual laborers as well as skilled workers such as welders, electricians, carpenters, heavy machinery operators, and surveyors. As added incentive, Burning Man provides free housing, food, and an open bar for employees and volunteers.

by the Burning Man organization due to the conditions and manual labor required to build a temporary city in the desert in four weeks⁴¹.

Volunteers and employees bunk together in Burning Man-provided housing spread throughout Gerlach. Most of DPW live in a trailer park known as the Gerlach Estates (Department of Public Works Handbook 2015:58). Housing also includes modular homes, single family units, RVs, and apartments attached to Bruno's Hotel. DPW workers are typically easy to identify due to their appearances, which include colored hair, heavy tattoos, piercings, and clothes that local residents consider to be unusual or lacking in modesty.

The central gathering place for DPW in Gerlach during event construction is the Black Rock Saloon in Gerlach. Established in 2004, the Black Rock Saloon is a temporary bar that exclusively serves Burning Man volunteers and employees. The historic building, previously a locally operated bar known as Norm's Cabaret, is located in the main thoroughfare on Main Street next to three locally operated bars (Black Rock Saloon 2015). The bar opens each year in mid-August, and remains in operation until October when festival clean-up has concluded (Department of Public Works Handbook 2015:60). The bar, which provides free limitless alcoholic drinks, and live music exclusively for the enjoyment of volunteers and employees during the evenings, is known for being raucous⁴² among locals and burners alike (Black Rock Saloon 2015). In 1998, Flash Hopkins, a Burning Man festival participant and Gerlach resident, was shot twice by a bartender with a .38. This incident, and the wild nature of the bar, is detailed on one of the Burning Man Co-Founders, Michael Mikel's, blog (Danger Ranger).

⁴¹ In 2002, Will Rogers, Burning Man Co-Founder, candidly discussed the composition of the DPW workforce in an interview by Adrian Roberts for in an article entitled, "We Built This City: A Kinder, Gentler DPW builds Black Rock City." Roger discusses cleaning-up the DPW work crew by screening volunteers through an application process, "This year, for the first time, we're choosing the people we want. And with this, we can eliminate the people who have caused problems in the past. The whiners, the cry babies, the junkies..." (Robertson 2002:136).

Noisy disturbances from the Saloon—notably not characteristic of the other bars in town—have increased since the building has been renovated by the Burning Man organization to encompass outdoor seating. The bar’s proximity to housing results in residents often complaining about the loud music, fighting, and frequent shouting from the venue. Increased incidents of property theft, assault, vandalism, and public intoxication in Gerlach are often attributed to the DPW. For many residents, the provision of limitless alcohol presents an ethical dilemma regarding excessive consumption by the organization’s staff and subsequent nuisance behaviors that disturb the community (Mosley Interview 11/14/2015). It is possible that residents’ views regarding the festival have been heavily shaped by prolonged contact with Burning Man’s DPW, which the organization acknowledges is bothersome to residents (Department of Public Works Handbook 2005:58) Furthermore, the organization’s sponsorship of this venue, which specifically excludes anyone that is not affiliated with Burning Man as a volunteer or employee, coupled with the loss of potential revenue to local bars, has led many residents to express additional and mounting resentment toward Burning Man.

GERLACH HISTORY NIGHT

October 16, 2015



Gerlach Community Center

5:00-9:00 PM

Slide Show, Historic Films, Pop-Up Museum,
Dessert Potluck

Have History to Share?

**Please bring your photos, poetry, art, and historical
artifacts!**

Appendix D

DEATH AT GERLACH—A MORTICIAN'S VIEW POINT by Gary B. Horton

The following was extracted from the Silas Ross oral history manuscript at the University of Nevada. Mr. Ross was a long time Reno mortician who handled the funeral needs of many Gerlach area residents. It is a necessary profession that doesn't get talked about much, and for that reason the following recollection will probably present a new slant to most readers. You should also be warned that it contains very graphic information about the preparation of a corpse and should be avoided by those who easily become queasy.

"Well, we had a call to Gerlach and we understood that we were to bring the body into Reno. So I went out prepared to do that very thing. Then when we got there, they said, 'no, we want it prepared here, and we want you to bring in a casket because we're going to bury her here.

Now, as a rule, if I went on a country call, I used to carry my embalming kit with me. But the call seemed to be plain and I left the grip home. And there I was. I was in a bad spot. I got the railroad people to telegraph away at Portola and back to Reno (after talking about the kind of casket they wanted and so on) to send the casket and an outside chest and my embalming outfit out to me as fast as they'd get there. I remained there, but I had to do something about this.

So, I had no cooling board or anything like that, and I reverted to the old way of getting a sawbuck and a chair, putting a door on it, and we raised the body and covered it there. This lady had a purpral fever. I knew what it meant, and I knew that I'd have to do something. So I decided if I could get certain things in Gerlach that I would improvise and wash the circulatory system of the extra blood, and that done, put more of this improvised fluid in the circulatory system and tie it off in order to stop decomposition.

So I went over to the store, and I got some ordinary epsom salt crystals, and I got some of these straws that you drink through, and I got some thread, and I bought the largest needles that I could get. Then I rustled to get a douche bag and then extra rubber tubing. Then I got some glass jars from the people there—they were like the old fruit jars—so that I'd have something to catch the blood.

I used my pocketknife to make the incisions. I smoked a long-stem pipe and took the stem out and inserted that in the vein and tied it off. Then I took up the—that's the femoral area. I took up the femoral vein, and I injected in it and put that in with the straw, tied it off and put a tube in it. Now, for injection, I got a string that you put on one of these picture things on the wall that held the picture—and tied it with that, and put it on the wall and had the clamp, of course, and let gravity work down through the artery. And then as the blood came out, I caught it in these blood bottles. And after that was cleansed, when I thought the blood was cleansed, I continued to inject this epsom salt solution in the arteries until I thought they were saturated. Then I had to wait.

Of course, I posed the body and closed the eyes and mouth and orifices with cotton and the like of that, and put on face cream to stop desiccation. And finally, they came through with the casket and so forth, and we then did the proper injecting. We got permission to get the certificate signed by the coroner, and had the funeral, and came home. That shows what you can do when you have ingenuity. If I hadn't had the chemical background and thing like that, I don't know where I'd have been." End.

Appendix E

Gerlach History Project Questions and Answers

Who are you?

I am a UC Davis Graduate student in Community and Regional Development. I have a background in archaeology, oral history, and cultural preservation. I selected this project to meet the requirements to obtain my masters degree. I wanted to do a project that was interesting as well as important! This project fit the bill.

I am from Sacramento, California. I enjoy horseback riding, kayaking, gardening, raising chickens, spending time with my dogs, and my mother. I absolutely love the desert and the ocean. I also enjoy volunteering my time on a plane restoration team at Travis Air Force Base and volunteer with the fire department as a community emergency responder. I also founded a small non-profit that serves the homeless in Sacramento.

Why Gerlach?

I love history. It is my passion. I selected Gerlach because it is an isolated community with a rich history of homesteading, cattle ranching, mining, and the railroad. Gerlach is a unique place! There is not a lot written on the history of Gerlach and I noticed the file in the Nevada State Historical Society is nearly empty. I also love the fact that I get to visit a beautiful place that is far away from Davis!

Will this project be published?

No, this project will not be published or turned into a book. The purpose of the project is to preserve the history of Gerlach. The final product will be a document that will include an oral history, archival research, photographs, and other materials obtained throughout the project. The product will be provided to the town for their archives and families as well as to the Nevada State Historical Society to keep on file for perpetuity. The materials can also be used in the school, to share with family, or can be turned into educational brochures for a museum or a walking brochure for visitors.

Who can participate?

My desire is for all interested residents to have an opportunity to participate as much or as little as they want. I am interested in interviewing locals who were born and raised in Gerlach. I am interested in the history of the rail road, sheep herding, ranching as well as rodeos, family stories, weddings, and high school events. There is no limit! I cannot guarantee that everything will be included due to time restraints, but I will do my very best to produce a document that residents find to be a satisfactory representation of their history. I am especially interested in the early years of Gerlach's history until about the 1960s. I am willing to talk in-person, email, by phone, or any other way that you find comfortable. I also need assistance with drawing, archival research, mapping, photography, and scanning if people are interested in assisting in these ways.

Who is paying for this?

UC Davis was generous enough to offer me \$1,200 dollars to cover the expenses for the project such as for gas, food, printing costs, related equipment, and archival research fees. I have exceeded this budget since I started in August, and the project is now an out of pocket expense for me. I work as a teaching assistant at Davis to help cover costs. I am also relying on the generosity of friends and family to assist with the transcription of oral interviews, editing of pictures, archival research and audio enhancement.

When will this be finished?

This project will be finished by August of 2015. I am taking the entire summer off to write, but I will have to be finished by August since this the deadline of the University as well as the fact that I need to find a job after this point. I plan to visit Gerlach throughout the summer, but I will need to have my interviews primarily finished by June or July. I am hoping that residents will assist in editing the document for accuracy and assist me with finding additional people to interview.

Additional Comments

I have really enjoyed getting to know the community and feel so appreciative for the people that have helped me as well as given me guidance. It has not only been a fun experience, but has been very transformational. I want to express my appreciation for home cooked meals, lodging, and for welcoming me into your homes to hear about your life in Gerlach. I feel blessed to have been given this opportunity and it will be an experience that I cherish for the rest of my life!

Appendix F

Suggestions for Further Research

Gerlach is a rich place for study on many topics that I was unable to explore because they were beyond the scope of the project. Below is a list of topics that I found may be of interest to researchers for exploration. Please note that these interests are based on informal observations that occurred during the Gerlach Public History Project. These topics should not be used to infer anything about the community or residents. Some of these observations were based on my eyewitness accounts or from informal conversations with residents. The following should be accepted as my reflections, and perhaps, catalysts for further exploration:

- Women reported in oral histories that they enjoyed job mobility in Gerlach that they believed would otherwise not be possible in other communities. For instance, two women in the early sixties operated the short-train for the mine between Empire and Gerlach. Many women were also cowhands, worked in the mine, owned bars, and participated in rodeos.
- Gerlach is racially homogeneous. This is based on my observations as well as census data. Residents are predominately White, many identify as politically conservative, and Christian. However, as someone who has travelled extensively in Nevada, I found it interesting that I never encountered overt racist, homophobic, or sexist symbolism (e.g., t-shirts, bumper stickers, merchandise, etc.) which I frequently observed in other parts of the state, including Virginia City and Reno. I am not arguing that intolerance does not exist in Gerlach, but I sometimes wondered if the absence of oppressive imagery is due the town's economic relationship with Burning Man. Furthermore, Gerlach residents voiced a number of complaints about Burning Man, critique of participant's sexual identity was never one of them. Burning Man's 2015 census participants revealed that over 30% of the population does not identify as heterosexual.
- Another interesting phenomenon is that Gerlach has had a difficult relationship with Burning Man due to unmitigated impacts on the community (bathroom issues, theft, traffic, pollution, vandalism), but the Senior Center takes seniors on bus trips for a few hours throughout the week. The seniors dress-up typically in matching clothes (tutus, tie-dye), and tour in the bus for a couple hours. It is a much anticipated field trip with many in their 80s and 90s that suffer with mobility issues. I was curious about why the seniors want to attend Burning Man since it appears that they have a desire to observe and/or participate in an alternative community. I also notice a deeper resentment toward Burning Man from older residents, and yet less among younger residents. Does this mean that they resent the values, or resent their fatigue and inability to fully explore? Does it upset their daily routines? They often remark they are "Just too old!" Yet, many of the senior residents of Gerlach make attempts to visit the festival, and enjoy what it has to offer despite their criticism of the event during the rest of the year.

- During the project, I often heard complaints regarding the impacts of Burning Man upon the community. I frequently found myself wondering about if the community's attitude toward the event would change if Burning Man consulted and collaborated with the community in order to ameliorate some of the issues regarding pollution, traffic, public urination and defecation.

Appendix G

November 4, 2016

Hello Beth,

We have been pleased and fortunate to have Christina Preston document the history of Gerlach and Empire, Nevada. She has been working on the project since August of 2014.

The historical narrative and associated materials has been received by the Gerlach Economic and Community Development team.

This has been a wonderful project for our community and we are extremely grateful for the documentation since we can use it for grants, brochures, and our VisitGerlach.com website.

Please let me know if you have any questions regarding Preston's work, or regarding Gerlach.

Sincerely,

Margie Reynolds
Gerlach Economic Development Committee