

Historg

Interview with Carroll "Doc" Powell, and Ione Keeler, March 5, 1984.

Doc: We had some people that liked us, and some that didn't. And we had one hassle from the very beginning to the very end. Now, I'll tell you. There was about one-third of the people that didn't like the way we done it, and the other third jast loved it. Well--what are you going to do?

Ione: Why, what are you doing here?

Annette: Well, I'm a writer and I'm a teacher. And George Bartlett asked me if I would research and write a Senior history. And that's why I'm here.

Ione: I'd do anything for George Bartlett. If he asked us to do this, I'd do it.

Doc: You were asking me awhile ago if I could think of something about the Seniors? About the history of the dance?

Annette: Yes.

Doc: I just started writing something, and I give up on it. It was too much of a mental effort for my peanut brain to remember, anymore.

Annette: Sometimes it's easier to talk it than to write it. Maybe you could tell me about it?

Doc: Well, anyway, we were silly, I'd say offhand. Here is a picture of Lou Hanson--he's dead now--and there's me. We're the two that started it. There were just 2 of us when we started.

Annette: That started the dances?

Doc: We started the dances. A lady named Lennie Pappin--and I don't know whether she's still alive or not; she lives over at Walnut Village or did, the last I heard. Kitty Schwank was the dance chairman, and she was gone for the summer, and Lennie was running it while she was gone, and they had a hard time getting somebody to play one night. Lennie called me up--they knew that I could play, I'd been playing around the Autumn Leaves and different places--this was in June 1977. And Lou and I went down there, and we started playing, and everybody got up and started dancing. Well, it was supposed to be a fun and music night. Well, some of them wanted to play games, and some of them wanted to sing, but whenever we started playing, everybody danced, see? Half of them didn't like it, especially the leaders. It almost started out with a hassle the first night we was there--almost, see? Paul Chamberlain was running a dance class, at that time, and planning it to records. And he couldn't teach his dancing to our playing.

Anyway, we went down there ever night then, or every Saturday night, and most of the time they danced while we was there. Most of the time. They tried to have a little teaching, but they didn't amount to much. And even the ones that didn't like us, they got up and danced like everything the minute we started playing, see? So we So we enjoyed it. And Lou really enjoyed it. And we kept that up until December--no, before December. They bought that teen-age building over there. We was on Perkins Street then, see?

Annette: Now is this December of 1977?

Doc: No, this was in June of 1977. In September of 1977, they bought that other building over there for the Seniors, and they moved our building over there. In the process of doing that, for the first couple of weeks we didn't have any piano over there. I went down and played arecord--I had a recording machine then, at that time, I don't have it here anymore. It was a PA system, and I played some of my tapes for them to dance by for a couple of weeks. And then there was an old piano there, that had belonged to the teenagers, and we looked it over and got an estimate and decided we could get it fixed up for about \$75. We took up a collection from the people who were there, to pay for it, and in two weeks time we ~~had~~^{raised} enough money to get it fixed, and after that we had a piano. Lou and I paid

Lou and I played there, then, till December 3, 1977. He got sick and went to the hospital and I played one week alone. The next week I got Pete McCarty from..he owned--they call it McCarty Manor down here, where they got all them places. Pete came and played with me 2 or 3 weeks, till Lou got out of the hospital. Lou came back, and after that I had 2 banjos. We played there then till--oh, all spring, and some-time in the spring of '78--I don't remember what exact time it was--Paul Lumsden with the drums come in. I asked him to sit in with his drum and we'd try it out. We liked him pretty good and Betty--she was activities chairman then...

So Paul Lumsden set in with the drums and we got along real fine for quite a little while. But, anyway,--let me get my book out here now--one of the highlights--course we played for a dance every week, we had something going every week all that time. And then--June 8, I think it was, 1978--we had a wedding there. That was the highlight of my whole experience there.

Annette: Now where was it?

Doc: Right in the Senior Center, the Recreation Hall where it is now. We had moved over there, and we got the piano fixed. Orin and Susie Gann--they'd met at the dance. They got engaged, they wanted to get married down at the dance. Her son was a preacher in some church up in Laytonville, and he come down and performed the ceremony. They had family too over in Boonville, and they just filled the place full. Dance was supposed to start at 7:30, and we had the wedding right sharp at 7 o'clock, and had the _____ march in and played the weddingg march and he got up and performed the wedding ceremony, and then they went out to the cars and threw rice at them, and then we started the dance and they come in. And she had all her relatives

there, maybe 50 or 60 of them, from Boonville. Children, grand-children--and they were all there for that wedding. And that has been very successful. They're together now, they're living together and real happy. And they still come down to the Center, every once in awhile, and have lunch down there.

Well, that was the biggest highlight, as I remember. And we had a lot of good things happen. We went to so many different places, and we had so many nice parties and things like that. We had a 60th anniversary there for Schindlers, and we went over to the Veteran's Hall to have a 60th anniversary for _____. Ione Keeler was elected chairman of the dance committee in the spring of '78. Before that, Katy Schwank had been the director before that, but we didn't get along very good, her and I didn't get along very good; 'cause she tried to boss me around, and I'm not very bossable. So she got so she wouldn't come near me, and if she wanted to send any word, she'd have Ione bring it to me.

Then they appointed Ione chairman, and she was chairman all through 1978, and in 1979--the chairman's only supposed to be for a year at a time--then they made Helen Boring chairman. She's on the Board. And her and I had it. We didn't get along very good at all. I don't know whether we should put all these hassles in there or not. I think it would be good to leave them out.

Annette: Well, you know what I'll do, Doc Powell. I'll transcribe it, then bring it back for your approval.

Doc: I don't want a lot of things about the troubles we had, because after all, it's not important anymore, see? I like Helen real well anymore, but at that time it was cat and dog. She wrote me a letter and said that I was only supposed to play twice. Well, that was just a little while before Lou died. Lou was dying all the time of emphysema, and I KNEW IT. He lived right next door. And he'd wheeze and puff, and you couldn't get him out of his chair. Until Saturday night for the dance, and he'd get up and struggle down there, and somebody had to carry his banjo in for him. He played down there, until he finally ended up in the hospital and died 10 days later. He played just a couple of weeks before he passed away.

Annette: What is his last name?

Doc: H-a-n-s-o-n. ^{Hanson} Luther Hanson. Now he's the one that started the dance with me. And he's the one that got me to come to Ukiah in the first place. I come from Idaho in 1975, the first time, I didn't even know there was such a town as Ukiah, 'til I met Lou back there he'd come back there on a fishing trip. I had a little band back there. Now you don't want to hear the history about me. We're about the history of the dance, so I won't go into that detail. But, anyway, I come out here to visit him and ended up playing for the Seniors down there one time. I played for a Hobo Party, and ever place we played, people always liked me and wanted me to come back.

Annette: What's a Hobo Party?

Doc: Everybody dressed up like hobos. We really had a big party there, at that time. That was in May of 1975; that was before regular dances ever started at all, see? But I come in--Lou and I, and then there were some other musicians come in, and we had a pretty good little band there that night. We played for that Hobo Party, and the people come in dressed, and they had a big old time.

That was just about the same time as George Bartlett took over as director of the Senior Center. I think that is just about the time when I first met him--or maybe in the fall or October, I don't remember. I come back again in October, and then I got acquainted with Ione and her husband, and her sister lives next door, and Lou lived next door. I had a little band back there, but they was high school kids, and they grewed up and got married and went to college, and the first thing I knew I didn't have any band. Do you see what I mean? So I didn't have nothing to do, I come out here. And I got a son lives over at Anderson, California. I come to visit him, and he brought me over here to see Lou; that's the first time I ever heard of Ukiah.

Well, anyway. When did we go to the Veteran's Hall? We went over to the Veteran's Hall because they closed down our place to remodel it. They put a new ceiling in, and they done all that stuff...

Annette: What you're saying is your dance went over to the Veteran's Hall?

Doc: Yes. The Veteran's Hall was kind enough to let us have it, see? So we went over there. And then they tried to run the teenage kids in on us, see? And most of our Seniors wanted it to be a Senior Dance. The teenage comes in and takes over; they run around the dance hall and done all kinds of things, knocked some of the old people down. And they didn't have any business in there, and I refused to play for them, as long as they had teens. So I had a big hassle with the Board members. Some of the Board members just raised the dickens with me. So I quit. And I started a dance of my own over there; we called it--I got an okay from the Veterans--and we called it the Veterans' Senior Dance. Half of the seniors came over there, and the other half stayed over there and tried to have a dance there, and it didn't work very good.

So Bartlett wanted me to come back, and he called me up and talked to me about it. I said, "George, you're gonna have to come out here and see me, I'm not"--he wanted me to come see him--I says, "I'm not a'gonna come to see you, if you wantto see me, you're gonna have to come out here and see me. Well, he's finally come out here and sit right here in this room and asked me to put it back together because they was getting such a big hassle around town, of the Seniors ~~was~~ breaking up, see? They was afraid they wasn't going to get their finances--and I knew it was a bad deal, I didn't want to do it.

I said, "Well, if you can get the Board to okay my conditions, I'll comeback." So we had a Board meeting and they just really raised--the Board really got after me. But I says, "No teenagers witout their parents there to supervise them, and they have to be invited by a Senior in order to get in, see? In other words, we're not just going

to throw it open, let the teenagers take over--we're going to have a Senior Dance, for seniors and their guests.

The Board finally agreed with it, in order to get me to come back. I went back and put it back together. I say it's one hassle, right after the other, all the time, ever since I were there. Them things are going out of my mind. I don't hold anything against anybody, even the Board members that were against me at that time, well, we're friends again. I mean, time kind of tempers some of these things, you know--you forget and forgive. You forgive, you never forget. But you forgive.

Annette: And I've been involved with enough organizations to know they all have these problems.

Doc: Every kind of an organization there is has there problems, and anyhow that's how it is, but--there's one thing that's kept me going. Whenever we started playing, everybody would get up and dance, whether they were mad or not. And had a big old time, see. They loved the music, and that's the thing that made me happy. I had good times all the time when I was playing. Unless I was fighting with the band. I had as much trouble with the band as I did with anything else. That sounds silly, but it was the truth.

If you have an organization of any kind, a group of people working together, you've got to do something that everybody can do. One guy, he can play one thing, but this guy over here can't play it. This guy can play something else this guy can't play. You've gotta work out a program to smooth that out so...and if you play the one that this guy can't play, it makes the other one unhappy. Well, it's a hard hassle to try to lead anything, a group of temperamental, half-musicians who can't really play anything very good anyway--some of them, see?

There was a saxophone player come in, while we was over at the Veteran's Hall. What's his name? Vic. Vic Foucault. He lives in Lucerne.

Annette: Well, you must play wonderful music, because you say everyone liked to dance when you played, and you ~~was~~^{have been} playing it, and I've heard good things ever since I've been working with the Senior Center. What kind of music do you play?

Doc: Piano.

Annette: Yeh, but what--what style?

Doc: You want me to play?

Annette: Oh, I'd love to hear something.

(Music, "Ragtime Blues," Darktime Strutters Ball," Six Foot Two")

Real toe-tapping music!

Doc: I play rag-time, I don't play jazz.

Annette: I love rag-time. It really gets you going. It makes me think--did you see that Scott Joplin movie on the t.v. awhile back?

Doc: Oh, yeah--I play about 12 Scott Joplin tunes, from memory.

Annette: How long have you been playing?

Doc: Well, since about 1913. I was about 13 years old--I was born in 1900--I was about 13 years old, my dad bought a piano. They started giving my sister piano lessons, and I was very interested, but at that time there wasn't very many boys got piano lessons. They give them to girls, see, girls was supposed to play the piano. Well, I WOULD SIT in there while she was getting the piano lessons, and I caught onto them books right away. And I started learning the notes, by myself, see, and I learned an awful lot of things out of them. And I played some by ear, but not too much, most everything I played by memory. These things I played, I learned them off the music, see. Scott Joplin's "Maple Leaf Rag" and all them, I learned them off the music, see, but then I'd play 'em without any music, from memory. See I had a kind of natural photographic mind. I can see a piece of music, and by the time I get it learned I have it memorized, and I can see it in my mind while I play just the same as if I was reading it off of the music. I can't read fast enough--I'm not trained to read, I'm trained on sight--I have to play them over quite a few times before I get 'em. But once I get them, then I've got it up here too, see, and then I don't have to have any music anymore.

Well, 1913, that makes it over 70 years ago, and you're bound to learn something in that length of time. And I can't stay away from the piano, I've always had a piano. I might not have anything else, but that's all I have in this world now is a piano, everything else belongs to her. Well, anyway, we had a lot of good times.

Annette: Well, tell me a little about the history of yourself, Where were you born?

Doc: I was born in Minnesota. I went to school in the first grade in Minnesota, then we moved to South Dakota--my mother's folks lived there.

Annette: What did your mother do? Did she work outside the home?

Doc: Oh, no, she was just a housewife.

Annette: Did you have a lot of brothers and sisters?

Doc: I was the oldest one of nine children. They raised seven of them. Two of her children died. One little girl died when she was about 3 years old. She had dysentary or something, she got sick and she died. They didn't have a way to heal people in those days like they do now. And my brother--he was 11 years old, and he accidentally shot himself with a .22 rifle down through the groin here and cut a big arterie, and he was home alone and almost bled to death. They finally got it stopped, then blood poisoning set in there, and they didn't have anti-biotics or anything like they do now, and he died, and he was 11 years old. But there was 7 of us grew up —

4 boys and 3 girls.

Annette: What'd your dad do?

Doc: My dad was a printer, a publisher of newspapers. My dad had been to college, to the University of Minnesota at St. Paul for one year, but he quit to come westward, and he met my mother in Wyoming and they got married there. My mother was very young when she got married, only 16 I think, and he was about 20. I was born when she was 19, they'd been married about 3 years when I was born. 1900--I think they was married in '97.

Then dad learned the printing trade, and he got to be pretty good at it. He came to Medford in 1908. I started to school in October in the 3rd grade. A little bit late getting started, we were late getting there. All the schooling I had was through the 8th grade and one year in high school, in Medford, then I quit school. I had too many things to do at that time in my life, I thought anyway. Dad came to Medford and he got a job right away on the daily newspaper. He worked there for 20 years. Then he bought a little newspaper of his own, in Central Point, next to Medford. He ran that paper there, the Central Point American, for 20 years or so, until he passed away. He was the mayor of the town, and he was also a county supervisor--county commissioner--for the last 8 years before he passed away.

I moved away from there and I went to Eagle Point. I used to be in the bee business...

Annette: Like honey bees?

Doc: Yeah, I had a lot of honey bees. I've done a lot of things--music has always been just a hobby. For a few years there in the 20's I played in a few dance bands, and I used to play for a few dances then. But I never have made a living at it. I never charged anything, when I played down for the Center, I mean I wouldn't. If they wanted to know what I wanted, I wouldn't have played for less than \$50 an hour. They told me, "Now you're a volunteer, you can eat free down here at the Center." I said, "No, I don't play for my dinner." I'll buy my dinner, but I'll never play for my dinner. So that's the way that is.

Annette: So the kind of work you did, was it mainly the bees? What was your major occupation?

Doc: I worked on farms most of the time. I done dairy work, farm work. About 3 years I worked on the paper with my dad; when he had that little country newspaper, I worked for him. I sold subscriptions and I sold advertising, I never did any actual printing. My brothers were all printers, but I never did that. I never liked inside. You couldn't keep me inside, I love to dig in the dirt.

Annette: Did you stay there until you came to Ukiah? You said your friend Lou brought you to Ukiah.

Doc: Yeah, he brought me to Ukiah. He came back there to visit, to visit a friend. There were some people that lived here that he

knew, named Brown, who moved to Idaho. And this guy played a saxophone, and he used to come and sit in my little band there, some. Lou come out to visit him on a fishing trip. And he told Lou about me playing the piano, he thought I was some piano player. So he brought him out to my house, and Lou brought his banjo, and Lou invited me if I ever come out to Ukiah--come and see him. I told him I have a son over at Anderson. And, like I say, my band broke up, and my kids got married and went to college, and pretty soon I DIDN'T have any band back there, so I came over to visit my son here in Anderson, and he brought me over here, and that's when I first met Lou, and then we played for the Hobo Party.

Annette: My next question was going to be how you got involved with the Senior Center.

Doc: That was when they asked me to come down. We'd been playing around different places, Lou and I, we played down at the Center a time or two--at noontime, like that--so they knew I could play. See, the dance didn't start out a dance; it started out a Fun and Music Night, like I told you before. And they wanted to have games, and they wanted a dance class, and they wanted to sing, and they had different kinds of games that they played. So when we started playing, everyone started dancing, and it turned into a dance in just a little while. One person told another person, and we didn't advertise, we didn't have nothing in the paper, but in just a little while we had that building so full that they couldn't pack 'em in there--we couldn't get 'em in there, see, because they liked the music, and they'd tell another one about the music, and they'd come.

Annette: Do you still go to the dances? Do you ever go anymore?

Doc: I haven't been down there--not since we quit. I quit as the result of another hassle, with Lois Johnson. We're good friends now, but at that time we had a little hassle. She was going to bring a big dance band in here on Friday night to put on some kind of a big shindig, and she done that without telling me. I was a little bit peeved about it, because I was going to have a dance the next night, our regular dance. I didn't see how they was going to support two of them, and I told her off pretty plenty about it. So I quit. And Ione was sick then. And she couldn't hardly walk. She had already resigned, and when she resigned I did too.

Annette: What year was this?

Doc: This was '81. December of '81. The ~~8888~~ last dance I played there was the Christmas dance, December 1981.

Annette: I'll bet you miss it--dancing, and playing.

Doc: I never even thing aboutt it.

Annette: No. I've been wanting to go down, I like the old time dances.

Doc: They have different ones. I talked to Lois on the phone this morning and asked her about how the dance was. She said there was 101

there. They have this Bob Butler--he comes from Lakeport and they got a 3-piece band. But they pay him all the money they take in, pretty near. They take out 10% or something for the Senior Center, and he gets all the rest of it to come and play, see. Because nobody plays for nothing down there anymore, I'm the only one that ever did. We just took up an offering, there was no fixed price. Now they charge \$2 to get in. There was no fixed price then, if you had a dollar fine, if you didn't have anything it was alright. It was a free dance, just for donations, see, and all the money that come in returned to the Center. Now from the time we played there, I turned in over \$8,000 to the Senior Center, in donation money we took in, see. Besides the expense money that we took out of it. Why, we bought food and different things like that, we bought coffee.

We took that out of the donations, but the rest of it, we turned it into the Center. The saxophone player, Vic, we used to give him some money--for transportation, for driving all the way over from Lucerne to play with us. But none of the rest of us ever took any. They tried to give us some money, they wanted to give us a little bit. Helen Boring, she wanted to give us \$5 apiece to pay for our gas. I said I don't want to be obligated to anybody--I'm playing here for the fun of it, and as soon as it gets so it isn't fun anymore, I'm going to quit."

You see there's something about an entertainer--a certain type of entertainer, anyway, and I consider myself an entertainer as well as a musician--you have a responsibility. They expect you to be there. And I expect to be there. That's why I'd go sometimes when I was really sick, because I knew I was the only one that could do it. If I didn't go, the whole band went--see, there were no lead, nobody else to play it. They tried to play a time or two without me. So I felt responsible to it, and I felt good about turning that money into the Center. I felt like it was a donation to my talent, see.

At that time the Center was having a pretty rough time, getting enough finances. They did every once in awhile, there for awhile--boy, sometimes it'd be hard to keep going. So that money come in real good and handy. You ask George about the money sometime.

Annette: Okay.

Doc: You're fixing this history up for George, huh?

Annette: Yeah, George is the one that asked me to do it, and the Board voted.

Doc: Well, okay, that's just real nice.

Annette: It seems to me that it's important to get the stories of people who aren't there anymore.

Doc: Now I've been playing down there quite regular at noontime, see?

Annette: Oh, still?

Doc: Still, except since Ione got sick, then I stay home and take care of her. But I play--in fact, just 3 or 4 weeks ago, I was down there at noon. I had a little radio program going down there.

Annette: I'd love to come and hear you sometime, if I knew when you were going to be there.

Doc: Well, if something happens, I may come back pretty regular again, if I stay around here, I don't know. As long as I can still--I can't play like I used to, not by a long ways. Now I can stumble through some of these rags, but my fingers are giving out. See, I'll be 84 years in May, and that's quite a lot of years, see. I'm deaf in one ear, and my eyesight's getting bad and--I go out and look at the moon at night, and I see three of them up there.

Annette: Can you tell me something about Ione's background at the Senior Center, so we can get her in this history too?

Doc: Ione come to the Center before I did. First I knew about Ione, she was volunteering down there for answering the telephone in there for the bus driver, on the P.A. system like in the afternoons, like Angie's doing down there. She was doing that job. We only had one bus then, but she was answering the telephone--oh, two or three times a week on a volunteer basis. Then she started on the blood pressure when they first started that, over at the old building. And she's been volunteer on the blood pressure there all the time--she got sick now--but all them years. She was sick and almost had a nervous breakdown here, when I first came here, the doctor didn't know what he was going to do with her. We got acquainted, and her husband too, he was here then--he's over in a resthome now, he's got a nervous breakdown; he had ~~an~~ electric shock treatment, and is in bad shape. And we finally got her interested in the dance, see. Lou and I played down there first, she didn't go. Pretty soon she come down and she got interested in it, and the first thing you know she stopped taking valium and she straightened right out, and she run them dances like nobody. She took care of everything--the food, all the other details that has to be done. And the program, what they were going to do next. She'd come up and tell me, and we always introduced newcomers. Anybody's come in, she'd find out and bring me up their name, and I'd call 'em to come up, and if I could get 'em to come up I'd introduce them to the whole crowd--see, the newcomers like that. When I was younger, I used to--at break time--I used to go down the aisle and--they'd sit in chairs on each side. I'd come down one side, and I'd kiss every lady there, and I'd go back up the other side and kiss everyone on the other side. And you'd be surprised, a lot of them liked it, when I'd get through every night. I don't mean that I was trying to be fresh with them, I was trying to be friends with them. I was trying to promote them and make them happy so they'd come back, and they did. And they did. They did, they come back. You'd be surprised, some of them'd blush, and some of them'd turn their lips up to you, and some of them would turn their cheek and some of them wouldn't kiss you at all. But, it it was interesting, anyway. Now I got so, the last year or two, I quit doing that; it was too much work to walk up and down the aisles, I couldn't do it anymore.

But it was interesting. It was part of the showmanship, part of the job to keep the people happy. I knew very well that if you could keep the ladies coming, there'd be some men. The men always come where the ladies are. We never had any trouble with drunks. One drunk we had to put out. One lady also come--I wouldn't tell you who it is--very prominent one, come down, and she was so drunk she fell down. And a few of them--you can tell, they've had a few little drinks before they come there, but there wasn't any drinking down there at all. But this one guy. One guy come in so drunk, and he was insulting people; we finally had to put him out and bar him forever from coming back in. And if he come back, we were going to get the police the next time. And he never come back, we didn't have any more trouble with him. We have a very, very orderly nice dance as far as that's concerned, although of course all dances are built a certain amount around sex. The dance floor is the only place where you can go down and you can hug the other guy's wife up to you and squeeze her around the floor, and nobody'll think anything about it. Where if this guy caught you out in the woods hugging her, he'd just raise cane about it, see.

So the dance hall is, really, more or less an--I don't care what they say--some of it's good, like Orin Gann and Susie, they met at a dance, and they got married, and it worked out real fine--and some of it's bad. But that's the same way anywhere, you can find that same thing in church. Music is very, very good therapy for people's souls. Music is one thing--I know one guy down there, when he first come there, he couldn't hardly dance around the floor one time; he was huffing and puffing, out of breath. And by the time we had been there a year, he was cutting up, just doing fine--he could dance as long as anybody. But it done something to him, not only mentally but physically, see? So I feel happy about it.

Now I been telling you all my philosophy. We had some very nice parties, and I have very nice memories of the cance. But since I've been sick, and since Ione's been sick, I have no desire to go back. And another thing is--all of our oldtimers, that we had so many of there, has all quit going or they've passed away. They're not very many of our age left.

Annette: Before I leave, I want to make sure to get your right name--what is it, in total?

Doc: Carroll Powell.

Annette: Where did the "doc" come from?

Doc: I never was called "Doc" till I come to Ukiah, then Lou said I looked so much like a doctor he knew he started calling me "Doc." Pretty soon everybody was doing it.