

Lenny Brinkerhoff
Interviewed by Loren Webb
For the Washington County Historical Society

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Participants: Loren Webb
Lenny Brinkerhoff

Webb: Hi. My name is Loren Webb. I am with the Washington County Historical Society, and with me today is Lenny Brinkerhoff to my left. She is a local historian from Virgin, Utah. And this is the tenth in a series of oral history interviews sponsored by the Washington County Historical Society. So to start with, what is your full name?

Brinkerhoff: Lenny Wilcox Brinkerhoff.

Webb: Okay. And how did you get interested in history, Lenny?

Brinkerhoff: I grew up in Virgin. I was born there. I grew up with great-aunts and uncles who were pioneers.

Webb: Okay.

Brinkerhoff: And my family.

Webb: And what was it that started to really pique your interest and say, “I think history is what I want to pursue or want to be involved with”?

Brinkerhoff: Well, when I moved back home after being with my husband in the Air Force, I started to get interested in the history more. My mother and dad were great historians, and they always talked to me about their lives, their family, and I just started to get involved. And pretty soon people found out that I was a collector. So I’m actually a history hoarder at my house, and people just bring them to my house and drop them off. And so I’ve, I’ve always had a love for history—not in school because it wasn’t personal—but I just developed a really avid interest in histories.

Webb: Okay. So has your interest, has your focus been in local, regional, state, or national, or international history?

Brinkerhoff: Well, mostly local.

Webb: Okay. And what topics locally have really piqued your interest? In other words, what topics have you researched?

Brinkerhoff: Well, some people think I have a file drawer for my mind, so I, when I find a ghost town or a, maybe even just a family and a history, I kind of absorb myself in that town and the people. And I'm on *Find a Grave*, so I go out and take pictures of headstones, and then I look up their history. And one of my favorite apps, I think is *Your Relatives Around You*.

Webb: Yeah. Those are really good resources. What publications have you written about the town of Virgin, Utah, and other surrounding communities in Washington County, or other non-fiction topics?

Brinkerhoff: That's hard to say because I wrote a short history, I've copied histories and compiled them. I wrote a booklet for the Town of Virgin that they distributed for a long time. They haven't asked for some, but those are available. I have people, I guess you could say, dump their histories at my doorstep, and I redo them. I just finished one on Duncan's Retreat.

Webb: Okay.

Brinkerhoff: For instance. And then if people want them I go have copies made and coil them and just charge them for the paper.

Webb: So Duncan's Retreat is a ghost town that's near Virgin, right?

Brinkerhoff: It's between Virgin and Rockville.

Webb: Rockville, okay. How did you become cemetery sexton for the Town of Virgin? And what work does that involve?

Brinkerhoff: Well, my cousin who moved back to Virgin years ago got me interested in the cemetery when I was on the Town Board. And I sort of slipped into his job. And I had to replat the map of the cemetery because in the old days a wooden coffin was very small, like three by eight, to fit the person. And when we started to put them in vaults, it was five by ten that we had to do it. So that was one of my first tasks. And then because we're a small town and not rich, budget is small, I devised a program on my computer for each block and each plot, and over the years I've had many people come up and help me clean the cemetery. When I took over, I spent six weeks with my grandkids cleaning it. There was the bramble bushes, Virgin being notorious for no water. We sort of, well, I was that for like 20, 22 years. And so I developed a cemetery program where all of the blocks and the plats were, and Wes Craig came by years ago and got a copy of that. It's, I think it's still on the web. But anyway, I started putting all the names in. Then I researched their parents because that wasn't in the records before. So it's just sort of evolved. It's one of my loves, probably because half of my ancestors are buried there.

Webb: Yeah.

Brinkerhoff: And my family.

Webb: Can you describe the cemetery for us a little bit?

Brinkerhoff: You, well, a lot of people that are familiar with Virgin understand when you come through the dip, because you come into Virgin and you go through a big dip. And then on the next left, a small sign, a street sign, would say "Cemetery." You take a left and go up there. The cousin that took over the manager's job in Virgin that I took the cemetery job from, his brother actually put up the rock wall on the west side, and he put the rock wall around the Hurricane Heritage Museum in Hurricane, if anyone's interested. So anyway, it's come a long ways. When we had funerals and everything, the women were getting their nylons torn. It's still dirt. It's a pioneer cemetery. It's the Virgin Pioneer Memorial Cemetery. And the two brothers, their niece is now the cemetery sexton.

Webb: How many people are buried in the Virgin cemetery?

Brinkerhoff: All of them that are dead.

Webb: Okay.

Brinkerhoff: Sorry, that's my humor. But anyway, there's 300 and something.

Webb: Okay. Okay. What do you find rewarding about working there as a sexton? Are you still doing that?

Brinkerhoff: I tease my cousin, tell her she's still in training pants. But she's doing a really marvelous job, and I have records on my computer, and she'll, if she goes somewhere, she'll let me know. And I update it on mine, so we have two copies.

Webb: Okay. Good. How did you become involved with the Virgin Town Historical Square, and what has that involved in terms of building restoration and anything else?

Brinkerhoff: Well, we started, some of the local girls, the women there, started talking about something needed to be done because we'd had the earthquake years ago in St. George mostly. The outside, the plaster was falling off. I actually had a copy of a news clipping, 1943, where they took the clapboard siding off and stuccoed it, so we knew essentially what we needed to look towards to restore it. So we formed a committee, and we started out with quite a few. Eventually there was like six of us holdouts, but it took us 7 or 8 years to get it all together and get it done.

Webb: What does it consist of?

Brinkerhoff: Well, it was, it was built in 1866, as far as I can find out.

Webb: The town or the chapel?

Brinkerhoff: No, the chapel.

Webb: Or the chapel.

Brinkerhoff: The old chapel. I talked to the engineer, and he said it's very unique in how it's constructed because there's 2 x 12s holding up like a stud wall, and then between there's adobe bricks. So it's very unusual. The walls are 12 ft thick. For those who are familiar, there was a place going up to Kolob called Millville. And my grandfather eventually ended up owning that. But they had a sawmill there, and it furnished pretty much the wood for all of that area upriver in Hurricane, LaVerkin. And when they got the floor put in, they got like 2 ft by 2 ft bogs clear full of pitch pine, and it's very rewarding to know that that pitch pine has kept the termites out of the floor.

Webb: Hmm.

Brinkerhoff: But the floors and the rafters and the side and everything were milled at Millville, which was now a ghost town. But the construction is very unique.

Webb: So do you, do you get very many tourists that come in and say they want to see the Virgin Town Historical Square?

Brinkerhoff: Um.

Webb: Do they know, are there—

Brinkerhoff: I don't think it's well known because it's about three blocks off of Highway 9. And there's no sign up there that I'm aware of yet that says Historical District. I've tried to get a Historical District there, and homes designated as historical sites. But we started a historical commission a long time ago, and it never took off.

Webb: So is there anything else that makes that Square unique?

Brinkerhoff: Well, when the Blackhawk War surfaced, the surrounding communities were told to go to Virgin and fort up, and a lot of the people disassembled their homes and took them down there on the Square and reassembled them, and that was their fort.

Webb: Okay.

Brinkerhoff: But they were never attached, so they disassembled and went back to their previous homes.

Webb: Okay. Who have you worked with in Virgin Town government, and what kind of impact do you think they have had on you? Have you worked with several mayors over a period of time?

Brinkerhoff: Not really.

Webb: Not really. Okay. Not that many. Any, does any town government officials, do any particular persons stand out with whom you've worked with, or?

Brinkerhoff: Well, I would say one of the driving forces has been my father and my mother because of the knowledge that they had passing their history on. My mother was a great-granddaughter of John D. Lee. My father's family came, went down from Springville, Utah, the Wilcox and Matthews went to Mesa, Arizona.

Webb: Uh-huh.

Brinkerhoff: And my great-grandmother had a brother living in Virgin, so they were going to go back to Lehi, and her husband got sick and died. So as a widow without any money or anything, she stayed there with her children. And that's how she settled there.

Webb: Okay. So what other positions have you served in within the town of Virgin or in Washington County, and what accomplishments do you feel like you've made during your time working in those positions?

Brinkerhoff: When we came back from Anchorage, Alaska, when my husband got close to retirement, I got interested in politics in Virgin, in the Town Board and everything. So in 1984, I ran, and that was my first stint on the Council. I've been on it three times.

Webb: Three times.

Brinkerhoff: Yes. I've been—

Webb: Okay. You had four-year stints, is that right?

Brinkerhoff: Pardon?

Webb: Are they four-year stints each time?

Brinkerhoff: Yes.

Webb: Okay.

Brinkerhoff: I've been the Planning and Zoning administrator for about 12 years, Cemetery Sexton for 22. Years ago they installed me as the local historian because they said I did it anyway. They, I've always, my mother always said, "If you want something done, find someone that's busy." So I've always been busy. My

husband had, still had two years in, in, at Edwards before he retired and came home.

Webb: Edwards Air Force Base?

Brinkerhoff: M-hm.

Webb: Okay. So when you look back over your service to the town and the community, what stands out? What are some of the accomplishments you feel like you've been able to give to the community?

Brinkerhoff: As Zoning Administrator, people would call me and ask about developments and stuff, and I went to the mayor years ago, and I said we need a subdivision ordinance. We need some ordinances in town. The last one that was written was in 1930, and that went back to how to tie your horse up at the local café and the church, you know, so it was very outdated.

Webb: M-hm.

Brinkerhoff: So I started to work with Russ Gallian who a lot of people know around here. And, anyway, I would—

Webb: Was he the Washington County Commissioner?

Brinkerhoff: No.

Webb: Or an attorney at the time?

Brinkerhoff: He was the attorney off and on for the town.

Webb: Okay. Okay.

Brinkerhoff: So that's how I got to know him. So anyway, I started to plagiarize other ordinances from towns, and I compiled our first subdivision ordinance and then gave it to him, and then I just started moving forward with that. And one day he says, "Why don't you just do it?" Quit bothering me. So I did. And with a friend helping in Hurricane, I wrote the historical ordinance and felt like I did it to suit our town, and it passed the Town Board.

Webb: Wow. That's amazing. Okay. So what other civic organizations, or any particular civic organizations that you've participated in?

Brinkerhoff: Well, I met Doug Alder because my grand-grandfather's sister's son started the Grafton Heritage Society. And they made me an honorary member, and then they voted me in to be the Upper Virgin River Historian. So I've started to, I'd invite you to my home, but I have a library in what used to be my bedroom growing up,

and it's full, and I've been trying to get it all to George Cannon for the Washington County Historical Society—

Webb: Historical Society.

Brinkerhoff: Website.

Webb: Yeah.

Brinkerhoff: And once I do that, if it's personal history, I put it on Family Search. And one of my projects, and I'm halfway through a book that's like 2½ inches thick of funeral programs and obituaries to put them on family search.

Webb: Wow.

Brinkerhoff: So I think, I'm hoping God lets me finish some of these projects I've got.

Webb: That's an amazing project.

Brinkerhoff: Yeah.

Webb: And quite time consuming, but very worthwhile, I would assume.

Brinkerhoff: Yeah.

Webb: What position, if any, have you served with the Hurricane Daughters of the Utah Pioneers Organization, and what have you enjoyed about serving in that organization?

Brinkerhoff: Well, I'm actually with the LaVerkin Camp.

Webb: Okay.

Brinkerhoff: And I'm in my second term, going into a third term, as their historian. I have served with the Washington County East Company historian. My turn was up about 6½ years ago, and a friend of mine took that. And now it's in the hands of another lady.

Webb: So what do you enjoy about the LaVerkin DUP?

Brinkerhoff: Histories.

Webb: Histories. Great. And they do a lot of histories, don't they?

Brinkerhoff: We do. I understand the DUP and Ancestry and the Church have collaborated to get our histories onto Family Search.

Webb: Okay. So where and when were you born?

Brinkerhoff: I was born probably before dirt. I'm just kidding. I was born in 1943 by the midwife Sarah Hardy. I'm trying to think of her other name—Spendlove, Blake Spendlove. And I was the last child she delivered because in February before I was born, she delivered her first grandson, and she and my grandmother were really good friends. And my mother went to Aunt Sarah, we always called her that, went to her and said, "You've got to deliver one more." So I'm it.

Webb: Where was this? Where did this take place?

Brinkerhoff: Well, I like to tell everybody, she was actually a midwife, and she was also the postmistress. And her bedroom was where she had the boxes where you got mail, okay. So I tell everybody that I came Special Delivery.

Webb: This was in Virgin, right?

Brinkerhoff: Yes.

Webb: Okay.

Brinkerhoff: And I actually have, I came across a picture of that old post office where I was born.

Webb: Wow.

Brinkerhoff: It's long since torn down.

Webb: So who else was in your family? In other words, who were your parents, and did you have any siblings?

Brinkerhoff: My father was Leonard Earnest Wilcox. My mother was Devon Maloney Wilcox. Maloney Hill going up to Kolob is named after her family. And I have a brother and a sister, and my sister just younger than me, Wanda, died as a Downwinder from thyroid cancer at [the] age of 38.

Webb: Okay. What did your town look like when you were growing up? Outside of your family?

Brinkerhoff: Well, my kids think it's interesting because when I was growing up, we lived in three rooms and a path.

Webb: Three rooms and a path? Okay. Can you expand on that?

Brinkerhoff: Now if you grew up, if you grew up in the sticks, the path was your outdoor privy.

Webb: Oh, okay.

Brinkerhoff: So anyway, when I was growing up, the streets were dirt. We called everybody Aunt and Uncle. We didn't know any different. They were all cousins, the older people. I guess that was our sign of respect, like in the south when my husband and I were down there everybody was "Miss Lenny" and "Mr. Ray." And they were very respectful. Most of the people in town, when growing up, I was related to. They were all cousins. My kids, when we moved back from Alaska, I told them if you meet a girl in high school, make sure you come home and ask Mom if you're related.

Webb: That's what my mother did.

Brinkerhoff: A small town, right? And my kids said, "Why?" My kids said, "Why?" And I said, "Well, long story, but Mary Leah Groves, [Groves?] the fifteenth wife of John D. Lee, when he was in prison, the Church, Brigham Young, gave them the opportunity to bow out of the marriage. So she did, and she married a man named Daniel Willis Matthews. A lot of people can't follow this. But anyway, when she married him, she had three more children besides the Lee children—Daniel Matthews, Eleanor, and Aunt Charlotte. Well, Daniel Willis Matthews and my great grandmother, Lucy Olive Lee Maloney, were half-brothers and sisters. So my grandfather and my husband's mother were second half-cousins, no, first half-cousins, and my husband and my mom were second half-cousins. So my husband and I were second half-cousins once removed. So I told my children, "You're third half-cousins to each other."

Webb: Oooh.

Brinkerhoff: I had a bishop ask me once, "If you could write all the genealogy on the walls of the church here in Virgin, could you do it?" I said "Yes, but it would take the rec room" because we're so entwined. I used the analogy we're like a bowl of spaghetti.

Webb: Yeah, that's a good analogy.

Brinkerhoff: If you take a fork and bring it out and if you stick that's your shirttail cousins. But we're all still in the same bowl.

Webb: Okay. Good. Where did your ancestors come from?

Brinkerhoff: John D. Lee came from England. My great grandmother, Mary Leah Groves, came from England. MaryAlice Thompson, who married William Nelson here in St. George, came from England. Then, that was on my mom's side. And then on my dad's side, oh, I forgot, almost forgot the Maloney side. My mother's great grandfather came from Whitegate, Cork County, Ireland. And a lot, I can't prove this, but my grandfather grew up with the knowledge that he came West with John

Wesley Powell, with two other guys. My mother said he was born a Catholic and baptized a Mormon and died a Catholic.

Webb: Interesting.

Brinkerhoff: But she, he still talked with the Irish brogue. But he sailed around the Cape from New York when his family emigrated from New York, when his family immigrated to New York. He sailed around the Cape with his brother, and they went up to Washington, or maybe it was Oregon. But it was Coos Bay. He became a ferry boat captain, and he came back down around and went to New York but then came West and joined up with John Wesley Powell. And somewhere along the way they had a falling out and he and the other two guys decided to leave, and they ended up in Rockville after eating lizards and cactus and surviving on what they could.

Webb: Were they called to Rockville by Brigham Young, or did they just—

Brinkerhoff: Well, he wasn't. He, that's where he met my, my great grandmother, Lucy Olive Lee eventually. I found out later he actually owned property in Duncan Flat. But he married John D. Lee's daughter.

Webb: So they just happened to move to Rockville, not—

Brinkerhoff: Well, he came, he came from the Colorado, him and the other two guys, came into Rockville, and my great-grandfather, great great-grandfather, John Langston, took him in. That's common knowledge that he was taken in. So that's something I've tried to prove. And someone said, "Well, his name's in the diary." And I speculated, if you had a diary and you wanted to take something out, what do you do? You delete them.

Webb: Hmm.

Brinkerhoff: But my grandfather and all his siblings grew up knowing that his grandfather got here in the West through John Wesley Powell and then practically starving to death to get into southern Utah.

Webb: And they came to Rockville to farm, right?

Brinkerhoff: He didn't.

Webb: He didn't.

Brinkerhoff: He came, he was a sailor.

Webb: So why did he come to Rockville is my question?

Brinkerhoff: He deserted John Wesley Powell on the Colorado.

Webb: And decided that Rockville was the place where he wanted to stay?

Brinkerhoff: Well, that's where he ended up, and they retrieved him and brought him back to help, I think.

Webb: Okay, okay. So tell me, describe your grammar and your high school years. Anything that stands out there?

Brinkerhoff: Well, my, I, you said you knew my dad Leonard, so he was a finish carpenter, and I went to the first grade in Salt Lake where he learned how to do moulding, and he learned how to make moulding knives. And when I told my Uncle Bud that my dad told me how he sharpened them, he was upset because he never told my Uncle Bud. But anyway, he worked in Fredonia, Arizona, so I went to the fourth grade there.

Webb: Did he work for Kaibab Lumber?

Brinkerhoff: M-hmm.

Webb: Okay.

Brinkerhoff: He worked in the sawmill.

Webb: In the sawmill.

Brinkerhoff: And then we went to Cedar, and Lynn and Reba Orton, who started Lins, we rented from them. They were friends with them. And then my dad got a job in Kanab in '55, '56, so we moved there and he worked in a moulding mill there. And then he, my dad was kind of a bouncing person that would bounce back and forth. But in the long run it was for his benefit because he learned a lot of things. So then he decided he'd go back to Cedar and work for the guy he worked [for] up there. Then he decided he would go back to St. George and work for Leon Jennings, Mans Jennings. So he, Jennings, started J & J.

Webb: So he started working for J & J Mill and Lumber.

Brinkerhoff: Well, he'd worked for them on and off with my Uncle Bud. I, we were living in St. George when my brother was born. So he would bounce back and forth all over the place. And J & J was a good place for him to go back to because they knew he did good work. So he went back there, and we moved on 400 South,, and I went to Dixie High School. And my mother finally said, "You know what, Leonard, I'm tired of moving around. Let's go back to Virgin." And they had built the three rooms and the path [bath] and so they added on the front and bathroom and made it a little more modern. And that was finally our home.

Webb:Okay. So where did you graduate from high school?

Brinkerhoff: In Hurricane.

Webb:In Hurricane, Hurricane High School.

Brinkerhoff: Which it is, Hurricane. It's not Hurricane. My dad called it Herrricane. And Tom Hirschi was a year behind me in school. He was the Mayor in Hurricane. And we found out that the English people that settled there, the English people, actually call it Herrricane. So we figured out that's where the dialect for Herrricane instead of Hurricane probably originated from.

Webb:Okay. What interests did you have in your school days? Were there any particular interests, scholarly, I mean I wouldn't say scholarly, but subjects that interested you?

Brinkerhoff: I told you before, history wasn't one of my favorites because it wasn't personal. But I've always been an avid reader. My mother and dad were readers. My mother taught the classics in Relief Society, and we always grew up at home with a very well-rounded education. And so I was always interested in all the subjects. I still read a lot.

Webb:Any particular books that stand out that you've read?

Brinkerhoff: Challenge me.

Webb:Yeah.

Brinkerhoff: Anything.

Webb:Anything?

Brinkerhoff: Yeah, anything. I love histories, of course, now. And that's where my attention is pretty much.

Webb:Did you belong to any clubs or organizations when you were in school?

Brinkerhoff: No.

Webb:So education-wise, did you attend college or university?

Brinkerhoff: No.

Webb:Okay.

Brinkerhoff: School of hard knocks.

Webb:Okay. So let's, let's talk about, describe how you met and married your spouse.

Brinkerhoff: Well, people laugh about it, but people in the Air Force said, well, of course they would tease Raymond about being Mormon and ask him where was his other wives. And he said the Air Force would only let him pay for one. So that was his big joke. But when they said, Where did you meet," I said, "I knew him since before I was born, because he lived across the street from me." And he had six sisters, and I grew up with them. I was closer to them than him. And when he asked me to marry him, I said, "I can't because you're like my brother." And he wept. So we finally got engaged and he joined the Air Force. And a year and a half later, right after I graduated out of high school, we got married and he went back to El Paso and I had to wait until October until I got my check, \$91, and it helped pay my bus trip to El Paso.

Webb:To El Paso.

Brinkerhoff: Uh-huh. That was the beginning of—

Webb:Oh, my gosh. So tell me about your aspects of family life and raising your children. How many children?

Brinkerhoff: I have four boys.

Webb:Four boys. Okay.

Brinkerhoff: Air Force brats.

Webb:Okay. So—

Brinkerhoff: They're good kids.

Webb:So I understand your husband was in the military. So were you able to travel with him to his assigned military bases? And if so, tell us the experiences that you had.

Brinkerhoff: Well, most of them I did. We were in El Paso, and our oldest son was a month old, and he went to Thule, Greenland, for a year.

Webb:Wow.

Brinkerhoff: He said, "There's a woman behind every tree," and I said, "What?" And he said, "There's no trees." He was a gentle giant. He had an amazing sense of humor, but it was very soft, not like mine. But, anyway, we laughed about that. And he came home and he got stationed in San Antonio, Texas, so we were there for four years. And he came home one day, and he says, "How would you like to go to Alaska?" And I went, "What?" So by then we had a second child. So we left, and because I

don't like airplanes, isn't that good for a girl in the Air Force? We came home, and we drove the Alaskan Highway in the dead of winter. And that was the year that they had the most horrendous snows in Arizona. You're probably old enough to remember that. And they were airlifting hay into the Navajo Reservation. When we left Virgin, while we were here, there was three feet of snow on the ground. A lot of people would say, "Oh, that's hard to believe." But that was in December of '67. Our son was three years old when we went from the United States. Kalts [?], Montana, into Canada.

Webb: Okay, so what was the military base in El Paso and what is the military base that you moved to in Alaska?

Brinkerhoff: We were at Biggs in El Paso and Kelly Air Force Base in San Antonio.

Webb: And then in Alaska?

Brinkerhoff: And then we went to Eilson Air Force Base. It was—

Webb: Alison?

Brinkerhoff: Eilson.

Webb: Eilson.

Brinkerhoff: E-i-l-s-o-n.

Webb: Okay.

Brinkerhoff: And it was approximately 20 miles south of Fairbanks.

Webb: South of Fairbanks.

Brinkerhoff: M-hm.

Webb: Okay. So this must have been pretty cold.

Brinkerhoff: The—

Webb: In the winter.

Brinkerhoff: The cars, when you got into them in the morning, you went around two blocks before they would round out because the bottoms were froze flat.

Webb: Wow.

Brinkerhoff: The lowest we saw up there was -75.

Webb: Wow.

Brinkerhoff: And a lot of people would probably not believe that, but my husband gifted me a parka, and it stood me in good stead because we left there, and we went to Missouri.

Webb: Where in Missouri?

Brinkerhoff: We went to Whiteman Air Force Base. It's 70 miles east of Kansas City, Missouri, Kansas. And we were there two years and he got orders to go to Vietnam. So I could have stayed there and seen what came out. Instead, we opted to come home. And that's when we bought my, our home from my parents.

Webb: In Virgin?

Brinkerhoff: In Virgin.

Webb: Okay.

Brinkerhoff: And they, we, they lived there for a while, and then—

Webb: What did your husband do in Vietnam?

Brinkerhoff: He's always worked in supply.

Webb: Okay.

Brinkerhoff: But he was a pencil pusher, is what he referred to.

Webb: Okay.

Brinkerhoff: So when he came back from Vietnam, the kids were in school and so I joined, he came home in December, and I joined him in June in, at McConnell Air Force Base in Wichita, Kansas. We saw a few tornados. The day we left we saw, my kids and I counted 13 of them, in the sky, they looked like little circles in the sky.

Webb: M-hm.

Brinkerhoff: And while we were there, one touched down and went through the Piper plane plant. And when it left them, it followed the road and then went back up in the sky. But being in the basement for that time was a little frightening.

Webb: Wow.

Brinkerhoff: So he came home one day, and he says, “How’d you like to go to Alaska again?”
And I said, “What?” He said, “I have orders for Anchorage.”

Webb: Oh, my gosh.

Brinkerhoff: So we came home, spent our vacation here, and took off for Anchorage. And we got up there, and we were there three years, and number four was born. So I have two Texans and two Alaskans.

Webb: Wow.

Brinkerhoff: I picked the biggest states.

Webb: You did. And then your husband started working for the National Park Service?

Brinkerhoff: Well, he—

Webb: In various locations in the Southwest, right?

Brinkerhoff: Well, well, three, actually. Because when he retired from Edwards, he came home.

Webb: Edwards Air Force Base in California?

Brinkerhoff: In California, yes.

Webb: So he went to Alaska, and then he came back to California?

Brinkerhoff: When he got ord—well, he got orders for Andrews Air Force Base, and I wanted to go there because it’s close to D.C. And he finagled it to where he could go to Edwards.

Webb: Oh, okay.

Brinkerhoff: And I said, “Well, you’ve got a year and a half left. I’m going home.” So I came home, and he commuted every weekend from Edwards. So when he retired, I was working for Moroni Feed at the Turkey Farm.

Webb: In Moroni?

Brinkerhoff: No, in Washington.

Webb: In Washington. Okay.

Brinkerhoff: Where Kings Row is.

Webb: Oh, yes, yes, okay.

Brinkerhoff: And I, I worked there sometimes. And then remember the fire in Turkey Road? Well, there was a Turkey farm up on that road, too.

Webb: Right.

Brinkerhoff: So I worked there, also.

Webb: North of the City dump.

Brinkerhoff: Yeah.

Webb: Yes.

Brinkerhoff: So when he retired, he thought, I don't really know what I'm going to do. But he'd been working weekends for Lyman Gubler in Hurricane, so he worked for them a while. And then he changed jobs. I'll just say that. So he thought, well, what am I going to do? So he got a job from my brother. He was the manager at the turkey farm. And he says, "I don't like this." And one of his friends at the auto parts, he worked for the auto parts company up here on Bluff for a while, too, and one of his friends came in and said, "They're looking for a guy in Zion for contract." And Raymond said, "I've been doing that for the last ten years in the Air Force." So he says, "Well go up there." And luckily, he got on. So not one to, I guess, keep the ground underneath your feet very long, he put in for a job at the South Rim of the Grand Canyon, and he got that one. And so I said, "Now What?" He says, "Oh, I'll be home every weekend." And he was.

Webb: Oh, my gosh.

Brinkerhoff: And he came home, and I—

Webb: That's a five-hour one way.

Brinkerhoff: Yeah, yeah.

Webb: Five-hour trip one way.

Brinkerhoff: He used to say he could drive it with his eyes shut, just turn the car on and come home.

Webb: Wow.

Brinkerhoff: But he would come over.

Webb: And you're raising children.

Brinkerhoff: Yeah, pretty much.

Webb: During the, during his week-long absence, right?

Brinkerhoff: Yes.

Webb: Okay.

Brinkerhoff: I'm a pretty hard—

Webb: How did that go?

Brinkerhoff: I'm a pretty hard taskmaster. I think the one mistake that he made was they all followed in my footsteps personality-wise. They're not the mild-mannered guy that he was. But anyway, he decided that he didn't like it there, so he put in for a transfer and got Death Valley.

Webb: Did he commute from there? That's even lon—let's see, I'm trying to think how long was the commute from Death Valley to Virgin?

Brinkerhoff: It was pretty long.

Webb: Wow.

Brinkerhoff: And—

Webb: How did you cope with that? How did you deal with those—

Brinkerhoff: I, I don't know. I've always been a strong-minded, strong-willed woman. I remember when he came back from Vietnam he liked to tell everybody when he came back he was married to a new woman. And they says, "Well, I thought you'd been married to Lenny all this time." And he says, "No, when I came back, she was the new woman." Because I became very independent. I still respected him as the head of the house. My children were never ever allowed to talk disrespectfully to me. They still don't. After, after he retired, he went to work for the auto parts, Carquest on Bluff. So he had, we both had a large circle of friends, and I'm still in contact with a few of them that he was with in Death Valley.

Webb: So did you, did you go on any major family trips during, all during this time?

Brinkerhoff: No.

Webb: No.

Brinkerhoff: I am the avid deer hunter. I just gave my 30-06 to my grandson about three years ago. The last deer I saw out on East Zion wasn't worth shooting, so we just sat

there and watched it prance around in front of our truck for about two hours. I'm a pioneer girl. My mother was 5 ft 3, and she, it will probably offend somebody, but she could gut a deer faster than my dad, and she's the one that taught me. And so my kids didn't know I knew how, so the first year I shot coming home was on East Zion. So we took, my husband says, "We'll take the boys." And all four of them were out there. So it wasn't years later, I won't go into that, maybe later. But he asked them if they would gut Mama's deer. And a number of years later, my brother who was handicapped shot one, and he couldn't do it. So I'm telling tales out of school, but my oldest son started to get sick trying to gut it because it was in the middle of winter, and anyone that's done a deer knows that's pretty bad. So my brother said, "Well, give the knife to your mom." And they said, "What?" So anyway, eventually I taught his oldest boy how to gut his deer.

Webb: Okay. So during all this time when your husband was away working for the National Park Service and you were raising your children and you had this hobby of deer hunting, right, were there any other interests, were you able to continue your pursuits with history, compiling history, anything that—

Brinkerhoff: Well, at that point in my life I was busy with the Town Council and I did a short stint as the Virgin Mayor.

Webb: What was that like?

Brinkerhoff: Very interesting. My kids and a lot of people have said that I am a strong woman because all the men quit. And somebody said, "Well, how did you get to become mayor?" And I said, "Default." And they said, "Why?" And I said "It was default of the men" because they quit and I was the only one left.

Webb: Oh, wow.

Brinkerhoff: So—

Webb: I remember back, I think it was back during the 1980s that there was a promotion that went on at the U.S. Post Office in Virgin. Right, you have a Post Office there in Virgin?

Brinkerhoff: Not any more.

Webb: Oh, not any more.

Brinkerhoff: We go to LaVerkin.

Webb: Okay. So, but there was a Post Office there, right? When did it close?

Brinkerhoff: Um, I think six or seven years ago.

Webb: Six or seven years ago. Tell me if I'm right on this, because I remember there was a promotion from the Post Office or from the town that said, and the stamp itself, said "The only Virgin in Utah." Have you heard anything about that?

Brinkerhoff: No, but we've always been the butt of jokes.

Webb: Okay.

Brinkerhoff: Because of that. But I remember Lucky Severson who is my second cousin, his mom and dad owned the Mohawk Café.

Webb: Okay.

Brinkerhoff: And when they sold it, this couple put up three arrows going in a circle and named it the Virgin Recycling Center.

Webb: Okay. Interesting.

Brinkerhoff: And my friends that we had in the military, back in the day when you had to call the operator and ask where this person lives so they could find our number, they would always ask them to spell Virgin. And when my husband got Airman of the Month in San Antonio, he, I've still got the clipping. He was in the paper, and they put he was from Virginia, Utah.

Webb: Virginia, Utah. Okay. So as you look back over your life, what would you like to be remembered for, Lenny?

Brinkerhoff: I think first thing being a good wife; second, a mother, grandmother—family's number one. And then I hope people remember me as a mover and shaker for the town, and a historian; caring.

Webb: Okay, great. Is there anything else that you feel is important about your life that I haven't asked you, that you'd like to share?

Brinkerhoff: I think I've shared a lot that I dare. I remember my mother one time said, "Wait till I'm dead before you really write the history of Virgin." And I said, "Why?" And she said, "I don't want to be sued." I was the child that sat on the couch and listened to the gossip. And that's probably why. But I had to learn to maintain a code of silence of some issues, not only families but politics. I remember one time I worked at the sleeping bag plant as a sewing instructor in St. George for 13 years. And I remember one time a friend of mine said, "You need to be careful what you say because you have a tendency to be authoritative and knowledgeable. And probably one of the best things that I've ever been told in my life, and I took it to heart. And the things that I do, I have a Far Side sense of humor. A lot of people, one of my DUP partners in LaVerkin was picked up by a daughter-in-law, and she asked her what her name was, and she told her, and she says, "Do you know

Lennie?” And she says, “Yes.” She says, “Well, people either love her or they hate her.” So anyway, I like people, I love people, I love histories. I wish people would get more involved with listening to their grandparents. I remember sitting on the porch of my great-aunt and uncle. An interesting aspect of this is when the Wilcoxes moved back from Mesa and they were stuck in Virgin, thank goodness her brother was there to help her. They met up with the Flannigans. So my grandfather and grandmother were the odd couple because my grandfather had three sisters and he was the brother. And they married my grandmother’s three brothers, and she was the sister. So I don’t know if they can pigeonhole that in their mind, but that’s why I call them the odd couple instead of having four and four, like the seven brothers for seven wives—remember that movie?

Webb: Yes.

Brinkerhoff: Well, we’re all double cousins. And my grandfather’s sister ended up marrying my grandmother’s first cousin. So their kids I’m related to like three times. That’s why I liken it to a bowl of spaghetti.

Webb: Yeah. Have you ever felt when in compiling histories of individuals or of the town itself, have you ever felt like if you didn’t do it, no one else would?

Brinkerhoff: I had a friend tell me that I must be the keeper of the grail. I try to find people that would follow in my footsteps. It’s interesting, I think there’s always that one person in the family that is that keeper. Do you remember when Roots came out, the book Roots?

Webb: Yes.

Brinkerhoff: And he went to Africa and I guess that piqued my curiosity when he made the comment that there’s always the legend teller, the one that tells the story of the past. And even today my brother and his current wife live in New Mexico and she teaches on the reservation. And we visited some of the reservations down there, and I’ve talked to the Navajo ladies, and that’s how they pass down their history. And of course the written word is only as good as the transcriber. It’s like a diary. You can write the diary, and if someone goes in and abridges it, it doesn’t have the full story there. Juanita Brooks, when she did our family a big service when she wrote her book, she abridged it, and abridge means you sometimes take things out. And a lot of the information that she didn’t have then we’re privy to now.

Webb: Okay.

Brinkerhoff: And I’ve become a scholar of John D. Lee, I think, in a lot of ways.

Webb: Okay. All right. Thank you so much for taking the time to be with us, Lennie.

Brinkerhoff: Thank you for asking me.

Webb: Yeah. We just want to also thank the Community Education Channel for allowing us to use their facilities. We also want to thank you, the viewer, for joining with us today for this oral history interview. And until next time, I'm Loren Webb with the Washington County Historical Society. Thank you.