

SUN CITIES AREA HISTORICAL SOCIETY

Jane FREEMAN

Interviewed by Beverly Brown August 5, 2007

Transcribed by Belva McIntosh August 30, 2007

Today is August 5, 2007. I am Beverly Brown, and I am interviewing Jane Freeman in her home for the Sun Cities Area Historical Society.

BROWN: Jane, if you would state your name, then tell us a little about yourself and how you came to Sun City.

FREEMAN: My name is Jane Freeman. Before we came to Sun City I was born and raised in Erie, Pennsylvania I still have a twin brother living back there Education wise - after high school I went to college. I came through with degrees in bachelors and masters and a doctorate at the University of Virginia From there I went to New York State took a position up there and ended up at a brand new community college. At that time it was called Director of Student Personnel, but it was ultimately changed to Dean of Students. I was there about ten years.

My husband and I decided it was time to retire. He got to checking his income and he decided he would get more money retired than he was working. So we started looking around at retirement areas in Florida, Colorado. In the meantime his sister had moved to Sun City so we thought we would come and see what that was all about. We decided we didn't want to live with all those old people but we came back the next year and it looked pretty good so we did sign up for a house. We moved out here in 1970. The first few years, like everybody else we were involved with a lot of golf and activities at the recreation centers, primarily in silver craft and lapidary. Then my husband died in 1977, not too long after we moved here. That is when I became involved in community volunteer work.

BROWN: So what did you start with? What was the first thing you did - first volunteer activity?

FREEMAN: I don't know what the first thing was but I know I became involved with Meals on Wheels, and I am now in my twenty seventh year for that. But in the early '80's the Daily News Sun and the Sun City Independent formed what they called a press council. It was composed of about ten or twelve people in Sun City, sort of an ombudsman sounding board.

At one of the meetings it came up that we didn't have a city hall, we didn't have a chamber of commerce, there was no place of central information where people could go. I said, "We've got an anniversary coming up," that was about in 1982 or '83. Nobody has got any history, nobody has collected anything. Somebody said why don't you write one and I said oh sure, like I am an author. But Glenn Sandburg was on the committee and he had done some writing and was doing a newspaper column, so I just facetiously said well, Glenn, how about it, and he said, sure let's do it. Fools walk in where angels fear to tread. We took on the 25 year history which turned out to be a book called Jubilee.

I will say the community was wonderful in its support. We put out a call for help and people started sending in all kinds of information and people volunteered to do preliminary work on various chapters and collecting information for us. We couldn't have done it without them. We were working out of our homes, then Bert Freireich, who was then the owner and publisher of the Daily News Sun, had a small room that he turned over to us. So at least we had someplace where we could keep all this information. That was a big help. We just gradually worked - it took us a good 2 to 2 ½ years to pull everything together.

DEVCO, which is the Del E. Webb Development Company, was a subsidiary of the Webb Corporation, and DEVCO as we call it, was what was building Sun City. They gave us a lot of information and helped us a great deal, particularly when it came to copyrights and that sort of thing. They did a lot of the legal work for us, which was a big help. Later, when we bought our house, they helped us go through the deeds and all that legal work. Along the line they had a change of administration at DEVCO and John Meeker resigned, and Jerry Svendsen , who was a PR man, resigned.

BROWN: What year would that have been?

FREEMAN: I don't remember the exact year but it was in the '80's. The orders came down from the home office to clean out all the records. I just happened to be in the office the day after that came out and the secretary was packing everything in the boxes. I said, what are you doing with it and she said we are throwing it out. I said, can we have it and so that is how we got so many photographs, all kinds of records, newsletters, model home information, boxes and boxes and boxes of it. If I hadn't been there we would have lost it. That is really the bulk of our collection, even today.

BROWN: So that is how you started the Historical Society?

FREEMAN: So after Jubilee was published, which came out - we had it available for sale Thanksgiving 1984 at the big fair that they have at Sundial. But going back to Jubilee . We didn't have any money to print it and we had to seek some funding. So we went to DEVCO and they said yes they would do it, but they wanted to have editorial rights and take it over and we said no, because they would be making it a marketing tool. We said no we would look elsewhere. That is when the Boswell Foundation stepped in and gave us underwriting for the entire cost and an interest free loan and I think it was about ten days after the book went on sale that we were able to repay the loan. The Boswell Foundation, even to this day, is very supportive of the Historical Society and Boswell was very, very pleasant to work with. I think we had about 10,000 copies printed and at that time it cost us \$3.65 a copy to print and we sold it for \$5.00 because we wanted to make it available and people could afford it. But part of the reduced cost was we had to do all the paste up work because we didn't have computers in those days. The printing company would do it or we could do it. So Glenn and I had a good education for preparing a book for printing. But it was fun and we learned a lot.

Here we had all these boxes of information and Bert Friereich needed his office and Dr. Crease who had a lot of medical offices, which is now Arizona Medical Clinic, had a small office which he made available to us at no cost, which was a life saver. We could keep everything down there

and we had a phone and we had a couple of people who were helping its kind of pull things together. Then we thought - what are we going to do with all this? Some said let's form a historical society. Of course I didn't know the first thing about forming a historical society and didn't even know where to go for help but we managed it. We had an organizational meeting on the 14th of November 1986. We met at Sundowner Restaurant, which is now a Chinese restaurant there at 107th and Grand Ave. We met in what was called their Marinette Room; of course Marinette being the town which is now Sun City. That was the beginning - I was kind of initially the first president. Officially Glenn Sandberg was the first president after we had gotten organized. We got our articles of incorporation, and again DEVCO people helped us go through the legalities of that. That was a big help. They have been very supportive.

I can't remember the exact date when the house came on the market - must have been late '88 or early '89. The very first model home at 10801 Oakmont Drive came on the market for sale. We thought that's it but who had \$41,000 to buy it? So again we put the call out and again Boswell Foundation came through. The Del Webb Foundation came through and I think DEVCO gave us \$5,000. And of course community support and some of the earliest founders put in some money and we were able to buy it. It is the smallest house of the first five models and it was called the Kentworth, 858 square feet, and it had a storage and carport with 306 square feet. The basic cost was \$8500. Now if you wanted air conditioning, that was \$600 more. The fact that it was on the golf course there was a \$1250 golf course fee you had to pay. It had a living room, two bedrooms, kitchen, and a bath and attached car port and a storage room.

The people who lived there, the Mac Donald's occupied it from 1962 to 1984. They were not the first owners. The first owner was a gentleman in Phoenix, we don't know his name but he never lived there. I guess he bought it as an investment and then the MacDonald's lived there. In 1984 Jean Painter bought the house and she had a dress shop here in Sun City. She bought it as an investment and rental property. In 1988 she put it on the market for sale and that is when we stepped in. That is how we happened to get the house. It has been a great location. It is right next to the recreation center, which was the first recreation center, and it has been fun building it up. We got the house - we didn't have any files or desks, it was empty. The MacDonald's had put an addition on the back which included a third bedroom, a full bath and an Arizona room. So when we bought it we tore out the bath and just opened that whole back area because we wanted it as a work area. Again DEVCO came through. We could go to their warehouse and pick out files that they weren't using and desks. It was a hodgepodge. Nothing matched but it served the purpose at that particular time. It looked like a hodgepodge. It has just been this past year that we have really spruced up and gotten things in that match and it looks very professional.

The society has had three publications. One was Jubilee, the 25 year history; then Emil Fischer did The Churches of Sun City which was pen and ink sketches of all the churches. He had been Dean of Architecture in one of the universities. They were beautifully done. And of course the third publication was Sun City West 25 Year History. So we have three copyrighted publications. They are now working on, not SCAHS particularly, but a group is working on the 50 year history. They have agreed to have SCAHS have the copyright so that will give us four copyright publications.

We are still sorting material that we got from DEVCO all those years ago, pictures, model home

information. Strangely enough they never dated anything. So we have all this printed information, model home information, price information, no dates on any of it. So this has been driving us crazy trying to figure out was it here, was it there. Sometimes we just have to estimate and guess. We had to identify all of the pictures and put them in archival safe folders.

We are maintaining what we call the vertical file. This is newspaper clippings that we transfer to archival acid-free paper and that covers everything that people might want to know about Sun City and Sun City West. We do limit it to those two areas.

BROWN: How did you decide to include Sun City West in the first place?

FREEMAN: Well, it was part of the DEVCO operation and it was a sister community. Now when Sun City Grand came into being we said no. Technically, that is in Surprise anyway. But they are now starting their own Historical Society. I wish we had known it sooner because we discarded a lot of Grand information which they would have loved to have had we only known.

So the work goes on. People still bring in things and if we can use them we certainly take them. We have tried to restore the house back to the way it was as a model, particularly in the living room, with the furniture and the displays. We are still working on it. We did add what we now call the Marinette room, which is what was left of the original construction shed and sales office. We call it the Marinette Room because in it we have pictures and photographs of the Marinette community which became Sun City. It was a cotton farming community at that time. In fact when Sun City was starting there was still a little portion of it which would be at approximately 105th and Grand Avenue. There were still a few buildings standing, but that quickly went. We are still collecting history. We kind of use as our motto, today is tomorrow's history. If we don't collect it now we don't have it.

BROWN: Do you have a lot of visitors to the Historical Society?

FREEMAN: On the days we are open - some days we won't have any, some days we will have fourteen. We never know. We do have quite a few small groups that want to come in. Surprisingly enough we have quite a few from France, England, Japan, we probably have more from Japan than anywhere. But it is interesting when the foreign groups come in. To them this is an entirely new concept, and they don't believe it works. They are impressed with the volunteering that goes on. It is interesting when those groups come in.

We also have quite a few graduate students coming in doing research on retirement communities, sociological aspects, that sort of thing. We have the University of Minnesota who is publishing a book, University of Michigan, University of Maryland. We have had two or three foreign scholars doing research and it is fun to work with them. We try to help them as much as we can. Once in a while, which is really fun, we get a high school student doing a term paper. They are just real excited you know. It is fun to work with the younger groups. The graduate students you can kind of leave on their own because they know what they want and what they are doing.

BROWN: Well, let's go back to when you first moved to Sun City. Tell me what it was like when you first moved here.

FREEMAN: We came in '70. There were still a lot of what we called pioneers left. They were the people who moved here in 1960 and 1961. They were a lifesaver when it came to getting information for our history. They had a pioneer club and we worked very closely with them. It was a considerably much smaller community. When we moved that had just jumped Grand Avenue, as they say. They had moved from the south to the north of Grand Avenue. It was still a very friendly, small community. It seemed like everybody knew everybody. The social groups were a lot of fun. They had a lot of barbeques and cookouts. It was - I don't want to call it a country town, but it was a village type. Everybody was with everybody else. The neighborhoods had parties and backyard cookouts. And of course as it grew the houses became larger and more opulent. People came in with higher incomes demanding more. It was gradually becoming more of a big town. But it still, I think, even to this day, it still has that hometown feeling and that hometown kind of touch. At that point we felt perfectly safe. We never locked the doors. We would leave the patio door open all night long and feel perfectly safe. I think it is still a fairly safe, secure community, but we are having more incidents where you have to be more careful, unfortunately.

BROWN: Do you have a feel for where the people came from?

FREEMAN: They came from all over. Probably the majority - the two biggest states, of course Phoenix, were California and Illinois. When it opened in 1960 they had a tremendous advertising campaign, the Webb Corporation, in the Saturday Evening Post and all the big magazines and they really sold. That first weekend, I don't know how many thousands of people they had for opening day. It was phenomenal. The sociologists said it would never work. I think the next year they held their convention out here to see why it was working.

BROWN: Did they ever decide why it worked?

FREEMAN: Well, it was a homogeneous grouping, we had interests; we could talk the same language; although we missed the grandchildren and the little children, but on the other hand we didn't. It was wonderful when they visited and we went back home to see them. I think it was the homogeneous grouping. We all just kind of blended in and we belonged to each other. If you needed any help there was always someone there to help you.

And that is another nice thing to this day that is still true. The various organizations began developing. Community service groups started to develop; Sunshine Service which provides medical equipment at no charge as long as you are a resident. The Interfaith Community Services came into being. The SCAT, local transportation came into being; all because of volunteer efforts.

BROWN: So it wasn't something that DEVCO said, you will do this.

FREEMAN: No. The people did it themselves. As I say, the Sunshine Services, Interfaith Services, SCAT and then we had an information and referral service; of course the Home Owners Association and the Taxpayers Association. No, DEVCO never dictated as to what it should be. Del Webb is said to have made the comment, I can build you a city, but the people make the community. And that is so true. And even to this day if there is a need the people will

step in and see that it is met. So we haven't lost that closeness yet.

BROWN: You were very active with the hospital?

FREEMAN: I did a lot of volunteer work with the hospital, primarily with the Sun City Foundation, but I also served on the Boswell Board and the corporate board. I served as secretary of the corporate board for several years.

BROWN: What is the Sun City Foundation?

FREEMAN: The Sun City Foundation - that is the fund raising arm, where they raise the money for the additions and the wings and the equipment and everything. I was on that board for about fifteen years. It gets to a point where it is time to retire and bring in some new blood; and particularly the area that was expanding. I said we have got to get people on the board not from Sun City but the outlying areas; Litchfield Park, Wickenburg, bringing them in because that is where the people are living. But I have kind of retired from Sun Health. It is time for younger blood. But I enjoyed it and I learned a lot.

BROWN: Yes, because you were in education, right? And this was a medical deal.

FREEMAN: Yeah. But it was fun and I enjoy volunteer work because you feel like you are doing something for somebody. Particularly Meals on Wheels, the people are just so grateful and so glad to see you.

BROWN: What was the relationship between Sun City and Youngtown early on? Or was there any?

FREEMAN: I don't know that you would call it a relationship. When Sun City first opened I understand that the people in Youngtown could use the recreation center. But as Sun City became larger they had to withdraw that. But there has always been a good relationship as far as I can understand.

Sometime back one of the Youngtown residents, Lucille Rutherford, came to me and said we want to start a Historical Society. So I worked with Lucille in helping her get the Youngtown society set up. It is a very small group but they are doing a great job. They are still in there pitching. Every now and then we also schedule a meeting with the Sunnyslope Historical Society, Glendale Historical Society, Peoria Historical Society. We get together and swap ideas and we usually try to bring in a speaker who can give us new insights. I want to get together again this fall. We haven't done it in about a year. It is fun to see what the other groups are doing too.

BROWN: So the Sun City Grand people who wanted to start their Historical Society, did they come to you?

FREEMAN: Well, she called me and she wants to come in some time this fall and see what we have done and I said I want to get you started with a professional. So I told them the person to

contact at the Arizona Historical Society, Tempe Branch. I said they can get you set up as it should be set up. We just set up - I was not a trained archivist. I didn't know how to catalog. I didn't know how to accession things. I didn't know how to keep the records. We just kind of bumbled our way through. I did go to workshops and meetings and conferences and tried to learn as much as I could, but it's not professional. Right now we are trying to find somebody to come in and spend a whole year. It won't be cheap. But to get everything catalogued and what we call accessioned, everything in the computers so we know what we got and where it came from. But I said starting out, start out right. But by all means come and see us and we will show you what we have got and give some ideas. I gave her name to the Arizona Historical Society contact. So they were going to get together and get started. We will certainly help them in any way we can.

BROWN: Was it your idea to start this oral history project?

FREEMAN: Well yes. We were looking around. And that's interesting. At our organizational meeting our main speaker was Doctor Stoll, Noel J. Stoll, ASU. He was chairman of the Department of State and Local History. He mentioned something about oral history. I had never heard of oral history so we pursued that. But he had a student, a graduate student who was finishing her master's degree and had hopes of going on for her doctorate. He said let me see if she would be interested in doing an oral history. That was Melanie Sturgeon who is now the State Archivist. She did our original oral histories. Now she was not a trained interviewer but she did a good job with her background. She lived in Mesa. She commuted to Sun City. She didn't charge us anything. We insisted that we pay gasoline and her materials. But she said she couldn't take a salary as a graduate intern type student.

BROWN: What was her degree going to be in?

FREEMAN: In history and museum type sort of work. She continued right on through her doctorate degree with these oral histories and as a result we became quite friendly. How she did it I don't know. Shortly after she started - she had I think four or five children —and her husband left her -just left her and walked out; had nothing to do with them, no support. Here she was going to school, putting kids through school, trying to work full time. I don't know how she did it, but she did it, and she did a good job. Her kids all graduated from college and are doing fine. And as I said she is now the State Archivist.

BROWN: So she interviewed the pioneers.

FREEMAN: She did a lot of the pioneers and original residents. She really got us started in the oral history.

When we first moved here the houses were very modest and as I indicated they got bigger and bigger and more expensive. Now, today, the people coming in and buying the houses are literally gutting them and remodeling them, changing the exterior as well as the interior, enlarging so you don't even recognize the original home as it was built. It is interesting that the people coming in are doing that.

BROWN: That means that the homes were well built in the first place.

FREEMAN: The homes were very well built in the first place. They were of cement block construction. In the 70's there was a strike with the cement block layers and that is when they went to some kind of lumber, I don't know what they call it, pressed board or something like that. But we could still get our choice of cinder block at that time but the house would be later getting started. But the strike was settled and we held out for cinder block because it made great insulation. But then they stopped using that. But they are - the early houses were very well built. Now later on they put up the whole side at one time.

BROWN: It was more like a tract house?

FREEMAN: Yes. They had certain models and they would put up this wall and they would put up that wall.

BROWN: So the baby boomers are moving into Sun City now?

FREEMAN: Yes. And again they say the volunteers aren't like they used to be, but many of these people are still working.

BROWN: So it is a little early to judge whether they are going to volunteer like your generation.

FREEMAN: If you are working during the week, five days a week, you aren't going to take your two days off to volunteer. Although we do have some in Meals on Wheels who work five days a week and volunteer one day a week. So there are some that will do it. But I have found that if you are looking for a volunteer, they may not volunteer, but if you ask them, more often than not they will say yes. So we have learned to ask people if they would help us. And by the way, the Society can always use volunteers. But it is interesting how the housing is changing.

One thing that has changed in the housing picture, in the 80's early 90's, of course Sun Valley Lodge was an early, kind of combination of retirement and mainly nursing home care. Then in the mid 80's Royal Oaks built and that was a very large apartment complex.

BROWN: Now was that part of DEVCO?

FREEMAN: No, that was a separate operation.

BROWN: But it is in Sun City isn't it?

FREEMAN: It is in Sun City and that was the first big retirement apartment complex.

BROWN: So were they given the land?

FREEMAN: No, they had to buy it. The group had to buy it. It was originally sponsored by the Faith Presbyterian Church, a group of people from the Faith Church got it started, raised the money, bought the land and it is a very large retirement complex. It has since grown - they have a complete nursing home, assisted living, and Alzheimer's unit. It is a buy-in. You get lifetime care. Since then, I don't know how many retirement centers we have. Some are just strictly

independent living, others have the combination of nursing home care and home care, but it is a big business now.

Another aspect as far as our health care, which I think we have a marvelous health care system in the hospitals. We have a lot of home care agencies who will come in on an hourly basis and give you help. We have wonderful medical and health facilities. I think that is one of the reasons we live so much longer. Where I am living we have three people who are going to be 101 or 102 this year. I am one of the younger ones. They call me the kid and I think the whole life style you do live longer.

BROWN: So people have moved when they couldn't take care of their home then they moved to...

FREEMAN: We have transportation; all kinds of activities are planned for us, field trips, programs in the house.

BROWN: So do you think this industry grew up around Sun City because of Sun City and because of the need?

FREEMAN: I think it was because of the need. As people got older, as in my case, I had a 1400-1500 square foot house. My husband died in '77. I certainly didn't need three bedrooms, a living room, a dining room, Arizona room and a kitchen. I didn't need that much space. Just the upkeep - and I had a grass lawn. You reach the point where it is too much. In the case where the husband is living he usually gets infirm sooner than the wife unfortunately, and they will move in as a couple. Then he will be assured she will be taken care of if anything should happen to him or maybe they both need the help. I think that with the aging population it was one of the needs and again it was met. Where we used to only have Sun Valley Lodge, golly how many do we have now.

BROWN: Can you tell me a little about the rec centers?

FREEMAN: When we came in '70 they had what is now called Oakmont Recreation Center and Fairway and Mountain View. Those were the three rec centers. And when we moved here Lakeview Recreation Center had been finished because it became part of the model home display. That was their big selling point. Initially it was a round circle, very spectacular with a round swimming pool in the middle, on the lake, very picturesque. That was the biggest, I mean that was state of the art. And since then over the years Sundial Recreation center was built and then Bell Recreation Center, which is the largest by far. Then the people north of Bell said well, you promised us a recreation center; they had run out of money but they did build Marinette which is a small recreation center. But there again every thing is there that you can imagine. If it isn't at one it is at the other. Woodworking, metal craft working, all kinds of craft shops, weaving, stained glass, silver, lapidary, art, racquet ball, hand ball, of course the swimming pools. And when you buy a house in Sun City you are required to become a member of the recreation centers. That entitles you to the use of any of the recreation centers. It is a fee and of course it is the fee that keeps the recreation centers going; because it is an expensive operation. And that includes seven golf courses. It is a golf haven. That has attracted a lot of the residents.

Particularly the men, they want to play golf all year round. They don't want to get out and shovel the snow in the winter. That is one thing that attracted my husband when we came out. So the rec centers really are a very important part of the life style. The women can do craft work; they have sewing, coffee klatches, bridge games and all kinds of sporting events, bocce ball, lawn bowling. We have more lawn bowlers here I think than in England.

BROWN: And probably if they don't have what you want you could start your own club.

FREEMAN: Absolutely and they do. When computers first came in we didn't have computer clubs but now they are the largest clubs in the rec centers. They have 2-3 hundred members. And of course it keeps changing because new computers keep coming on the market all the time. Churches have played a very important part. I think we have some of the most beautiful churches I have seen in my life, architecturally speaking. Every denomination is covered. We have the temples, the Catholic Church, Christian Science, any of the denomination. They are well attended. It may be that as we get older we get a little closer to where we might need some help. But they are important and they too provide activities other than the usual Sunday church service. They have activities during the week for their members. They have outings, parties, study sessions. But the physical churches are beautiful.

BROWN: Now they have grocery stores and things - was that part of the plan to make this a total community with grocery stores and drug stores?

FREEMAN: When it opened in 1960 nobody lived here. The Grand Avenue Shopping Center had a Safeway grocery store. Nobody was living here but they had a grocery store and a gas station. Again that was part of the attraction because all of the facilities were advertised, that there would be a recreation center and a golf course. They were up and ready to use, all the equipment, the golf courses playable, the grocery store available, of course the people in the outlying areas could use the grocery store. But since then, the community was planned with shopping centers in strategic locations as Sun City developed. Where the Fry's shopping center is now located at 107th and Grand Avenue was originally King's Inn which was a motel and they had what they called vacation apartments where people coming to visit Sun City could stay for a few days. They had a swimming pool, a wonderful dining room. People were lined up Friday night for this fish fry waiting to get in. Then the land was sold to a shopping chain outside of Utah and they tore down all the units with the promise that they would keep the King's inn, but within a year the King's Inn was demolished too. It was a shame because it really was a part of the history. When they started Sun City had no hotel. Visitors coming in had no place to stay. But eventually a couple of motels opened up on 111th and Grand Avenue for visitors coming through. But we hated to see that King's Inn go because it was part of the community. But where Safeway store was located, gradually other stores came in. We had a variety store. We had a drug store, a clothing store, furniture.

BROWN: Was this coordinated through DEVCO to make sure there was a variety?

FREEMAN: Yes, they sponsored the shopping centers until they got started. The same with the recreation centers, they subsidized the recreation centers until the residents could take them over and run them. So they were very good at subsidizing a lot at the beginning to make sure it would

work. They really were behind it and it was probably because of their support that the community thrived. People felt free to go to them. If something was wrong with their house they were right up there at that DEVCO office and they had somebody out there checking it out.

BROWN: It wasn't Del Webb himself though? FREEMAN: No, but people think it was.

BROWN: Jane, thank you very much for sharing your stories. Do you have anything else you would like to add?

FREEMAN: No, but it took me back a way, reminiscing; it was kind of fun.

BROWN: Well, thank you very much.