

Socorro County Historical Society, Oral History Tapes

Anne Olsen and Judy Brown interviewed by Sue Little

Tell us about the sidewalks. Well, they were boardwalks on both sides of the street from the park down to the Depot. Now, it didn't go down both sides all the way on the south, but on the north it did. People used to go down and meet the train - that was some fun and diversion, you know. *Did you ever find anything?* Yes, I found a five dollar bill. *On the sidewalk?* No, the wind blew it up against a billboard, but I did find a five dollar gold piece once when they tore down an adobe building on a property just north of the Rogers now. That used to be an old stable and hayloft there. They tore it down around 1906, I guess, maybe a little later. And we were playing out in the street and I found a yellow gold five dollar gold piece. Well we were buying a piano, so that went in on payment of the piano. ---- *Tell me Ann, were you born in Socorro?* Yes, I was born on --no, Judy was born in Oklahoma. *Where were you born here?* Do you know where the Zimmerman home is across - down on that farm to market road? Well about two ranches, we'll call them ranches because they were ranches then south of there we had a ranch with an adobe house, a storey and a half and I was born there. My older brother and my sister and younger brother were all born in town here. *You were a country girl?* Yes, I was a country girl. My father used to call me his swamp angel. *Tell me about the roads coming into Socorro at that time.* Well, of course the road to Albuquerque, well, of course, they were just roads, they weren't highways or anything like that. The old highway to Albuquerque, of course, was across the river. You crossed at Escondido and then went up on a very narrow winding road to what they called French Hill and then went over Johnson Hill, I believe. But around 1928 or '29 they built the highway on the west side of the railroad on the river. *You mean it's only been there less than 50 years?* Hal was working for the American (Minerals?) Company just before we were married, and two of my friends and went up there - it was a summer resort up at Erwins? On the road up to the mine and we stayed there. Well, the first thing, I went with my brother and stayed a few days there, and that's just when they were building the road in 1929, about that time. --- Of course they had a lot of rail travel then although we were stuck with night trains at the time - two o'clock in the morning, 5 o'clock in the morning and 4 o'clock, but at least it got us places. *Yes, you could go to Albuquerque and go east and west or Belen and go east and west. I am one of those that (--) the railroads.* I think they have been misjudged or something. I don't think it's fair for them to have to close down all together. But I guess they were in business and they have to manage as best they can. *Well, the railroad was not only transportation, but when we went to the railroad station, especially on weekends, it was a social occasion.* Well, there wasn't much to do around town at that time. They had ball games - baseball and it was always where Clarke Field is now. They had bleachers and always played on Sundays. They had more dances. There used to be dances in the Opera House and in the KC Hall. *Did they used to dance there?* Oh yes, a very good floor, I guess the floor - they used to play racket ball there and one of the boys broke through the floor when he jumped. I don't know whether he hurt his leg or not, but anyway they had to mend it. But yes, they had athletics there and they used to have stock companies stop by here. I remember that's when I saw Little Eva. *Do you remember the play, Little Eva?* No, that was the stock company. No, I don't remember that. We had a program from there - *because I heard stories that (--) and Jenny Lind played here.* Oh, I don't think either one of them did. I don't think they did. *Socorro was a very large town at one time.* I remember, really that they were able to find out definitely how large it was, but --. It was larger than Albuquerque, you know, in 1911, Albuquerque had only 14,000 people. I read that in an authentic report. It doesn't seem possible. *You mean Socorro was the largest town in New Mexico?* At one time it really was. *Larger than Albuquerque?* Yes, but I have been able to find out that in 1911, not too far away, that they only had 14,000 people - and they used to have racing, and what do you call it - fairs, state fairs there - I guess I wasn't more than fourteen because we went up one time that I remember very definitely. *They probably had special trains.* I think they might have. Of course, there were no buses then. (Judy:) I don't remember any real interesting things, but I remember the old road it was terrible. I remember one time we were going to Albuquerque --- and we saw something up ahead, and we said, "What is that?" and it was a camel. Here was this poor old camel and we were so amused - we found out he had been lost from a circus. It was a sight to see a camel like that. They built the road and it was the first pavement up there 20 miles from Albuquerque, and we were always so thrilled when we got on that little strip of pavement. ----- (Ann:) Well, one thing though, we didn't have such heavy rains out here. (Judy:) Yes, we did, and I think

we had rains and we had more snow too. I remember playing in the snow a lot. We even had a sled. *You don't need one now.* No, and you see, east of 6th Street was a place called Stevens Lake and it was filled with cockleburs and stuff, but one winter there was enough water there and it got cold enough that people skated down there. (see Smith Collection for photographic record.) I almost learned. *Well, we used to stop by the arroyos there.* Yes, I think we really used to have more rain than we have in recent years. I think they had it in the state. We certainly didn't have much snow this year. (Judy:?) You hear people tell - I had a cousin come out here and he was a young boy, about 70 years ago, I guess. *A boy? I thought you were talking about Dorothy Egan? She was the only cousin.* No, I'm talking about the one that married Sammy. *Oh, Mr. Baines?* Yes, he was just a young boy. In fact he started that story, and he had written just in his cabin - his own version, and we have it. A man came and said he was interested in writing a book and I showed it to him and he was interested in it, so he said, "Could I take it?" and I sent it and he never sent it to me, and he told about how primitive it was. *What a treasure that was!* He told about the undertaker and how a man had his legs cut off because --- the coffin --- *Oh, you mean so he would fit?* And instead of the coffin fitted the man, the man fitted the coffin. You know the little alley that runs east from Mr. (Shina's?) café? Well it was called White Alley and then they called it Coon Alley. There was a colored man who was a barber and he couldn't find any place to live except a house on that alley. There were houses along there on the north side. Of course, the south side was the back doors of all these business places. But anyway they started calling it Coon Alley. *When did you (Judy?) come?* April, 1921 and it seems like fifty years (Ed. note: 51) and there were a lot of stories told, but it always seemed just fine to me. *Tell me about daily life and what you liked about it.* Of course, I see a great improvement now that I think about it but it was never that primitive to me. (Ann:?) Well it was pretty primitive in the beginning all right. There were no sidewalks except on Manzanaras. I remember one time I was objecting to the sidewalks, and I said it just spoils the look of the street and someone said, "You ride all the time." *Well, wouldn't these wooden sidewalks be quite slippery if there was any ice at all?* No, I suppose the wood sort of absorbed that - it didn't change temperature as soon as any other material might. It didn't do like a cement sidewalk. I remember when we were married, we were met at the Depot with a big team and carriage and a big fat man on it. I think it was David Stackpole. It was quite interesting I thought, and we rode up town. *That was by some livery stables, wasn't it?* I don't think we had the livery stables then. Oh, Mr. Cook, of course. He had bus service. Mr. Brown had a hearse with his brother-in-law. In fact we used to play in the hearse - a vehicle called the landau - *And you used to play in there?* Oh, yes and we had carriages almost where the Val Verde is - where the hotel was - you see and his place of business was just west of that. The first building west of the Windsor Hotel was the great large - open - but it was better than a barn - the carriages were lined up on both sides and they rented vehicles and carriages for people to use. *Mr. Brown had (---) to Silver city?* Yes, he had a buckboard and a team of horses ----it was an odd little town. I lived in New Mexico before - in Carlsbad - the eastern part - it was very different. But I thought Socorro was so much more interesting. ---- I always say I can't see it with a stranger's eye because I always lived here, but it was an exceptional time. --- I came out in '46 ---and came to Socorro then on girl Scouts --. *Where did you live at the time?* I lived in Albuquerque and ---the Navajo Reservation --- I got into the state quite thoroughly and it seemed to me that Socorro was one of the real interesting spots. *When you were at Gallup ----.* I passed through it, that's all. (Rambling) Yes, and Gallup had the miners. You really have a greater mixture of people there than you do in Socorro. *Somebody asked me the other day how old the ValVerde was and I didn't have any idea because I was at the University when that was built and I had just met John Brown and one the girls came to me and she said "Have a date with him because they're building a new hotel down in Socorro and maybe if he likes you he'll ask you down for the opening. I thought about 1928.* In 1919 it was being built and I was married in 1921. *But you didn't get an invitation.* I think one of the greatest improvements was when they started having 24 hours of electricity with ironing at night. We had only night lights. At that time we were living over in San Antonito with Tom and then his father died. Oh I remember very well, he said well, let's have 24 hour light. (Rambling) And I remember we used to go toward Truth or Consequences or Albuquerque and come back just to see that blaze of light. A beautiful sight - over the hill there - and we had a priest here several years ago and he said he started out to Albuquerque and he turned around and saw the lovely lights and he turned around and started back. *Well what a big event it was - to have 24 hour lights.* Well, my husband, and he was mayor at one time too, and he said we needed more lights to look at the pretty women and we said let the women stay home at night. *We didn't think about electricity for ironing - it was a long time before we got the electric irons.* And electric washing machines. *Oh much later - still later.* I tell you it's amazing how we depend on electricity. --Rambling-- We are so proud of the Socorro Library today, and when I walked

over here I was so proud of that and just look at this beautiful building. *Is it two stories?* Two. They have quite a program of activities here, you see ---Rambling --- *Did you ever go to Mogollon?*
--unintelligible --- The wind doesn't blow like it used to. I'll tell you one reason - well it may blow, but we have pavement now and sidewalks. We didn't used to have that. On the Plaza they have this Capitol Bar - anyway the sand used to blow up against that place there - it would be a foot deep, and then the next wind that would come along would blow it over to the other side. There was nothing to hold it, you see. *Well I remember the sand too, but one of the worst things was the mosquitoes* Oh, yes. We used to come on the porch with a broom and light it and wave it very fast. *Well, I think that pesticides gotten most of them - we didn't have as much standing water. We had them where it is wet and green and water standing.* But no real problem. Yes, we don't have them like we used to have them. *We had a discussion the other day about snakes and people were afraid of them.* Did you ever have contact with snakes. *No, not contact but two have been killed in our garage. One when we first moved there and then later on.* Over a period of 20 years. *See we lived out there about 20 years. The first time was about 20 years ago and the second about eight or nine years ago there was water came down the channel and there was a thirteen foot one that they found up on the ditch and Harold went over and shot it and one night I heard this noise outside the bedroom window and I thought well that isn't a katydid and that isn't a cricket and it was not a deer, so I went out and looked and it was a little rattlesnake rolled up under the window. The cat had frightened it. It was rattling and Harold killed that one too. Of course they killed one or two up at the (-) house possibly up at the scholo, but there are not many around here any more. Well about seven or eight years ago there was a family that lived above the ditch, he was the cattle brand inspector, Mr. Tucker, and they had a little black dog called Old Danny Tucker. Any way this poor little dog got bitten and it killed him. They had some small children and I worried about that, but they moved away shortly afterwards.* The snakes are no real problem here. *No, I think not.* I remember about a couple who moved out here -- and they was takin' a walk out among the rocks and they found a rattlesnake and she stumbled over the rocks and had to be brought in and treated for injuries to her knees and it was a big rattlesnake, and when I had lived here I never did see one, and they come out from Chicago. *I never saw one until I was 16 years old. We were climbing Socorro Mountain and I stepped over this bush and I heard the noise, and my cousin said, "Look out! Step away real quick- it's a rattlesnake." And it wasn't a long one - about 18 or 20 inches long and it was the first one I had ever seen.* You said something about a couple from Socorro being more interesting or something. Why? Tell. *Because where I lived was a nice town - Carlsbad - and they started cutting the trees and paving there and it got to looking just like any Kansas town to me but I came over here and everything - all the mountains and the climate and just everything.* Well, I notice that when I go downtown, people don't talk right, I miss the ---. Why don't you come back to Alabama and Tennessee, and I said, well, the sun shines 361 days a year. Do they all speak English, and I said, no, a lot of them speak Spanish and Indian. ---*On television they'll show something like when we used to go up to Santa Fe and it's just a big thrill* -- I feel badly about that lovely hotel. Here we don't have a planning board do we? And when I was here --- well what can you do when it's personally owned? At that time they had been improving over in Lincoln and they were making money and Conrad Hilton lived here, you know, and he was a hotel man and his sister was married to my husband's brother and so we wrote several letters to Mr. Hilton and asked him to give me one of the (---) and he wasn't interested. It wasn't too bad. ---*Sometimes I think that tall building back behind the Safeway - that tall building - s live, Oh Yes. No where the Monettes live.* I don't mean that house that they bought - I mean that building ---*Oh, I'm hoping the City has bought that but when they build the new City Hall, if they ever do they should put that back and have it there -- well I think they ought to restore it for City Hall and we were hoping that they would let the Historical Society have the upper floors. It was my idea and I kept harping on it and I told Harold I'd like to buy that building ----- Well, you know that little white house -it' white with a pink trim now and it's a platform building I believe. I remember visiting in that when I couldn't have been much more than five years old, so I know that that it's over 75 years old.* I read quite an article about that place, but I believe it is part of the Catholic Church and the people that started it were aghast at some of the church property that was being destroyed. *So now they are training priests - it's a required part of their training and they should star in on that church here. It's been renovated and changed until---* *Well you know one part of it is older than the one up in Santa Fe - that little southwestern corner part. But someone was asking me the other day, what had become of the statues that were in there before they put in the ones now recently. I was quite concerned about the bell. And of course the bell is still up there but the scaffolding is so weak they don't dare use it. But that building is beautiful. They put in an electric bell or something - they said it was dangerous - they used to tell - it was some young boy, I suppose - in the family, that he was supposed*

to go and ring the bell, but you can't tell them that, but he used to be told and he did it. I think someday, probably, if there's enough interest about it, it will have a new scaffold and we'll use it again. It certainly had the most beautiful tone of any bell I ever heard. *What's the history of the bell?* Well I have always heard that the people gave their gold and jewelry to be incorporated in it and give it a good tone. Harold said the other day there was a place across the river at Escondido over a ways where there was a copper mine and a smelter there and they used to cast bells over there so I don't know but I have a picture of this old bell that Mr. -- the man that was down here writing on the architecture of the church - I think it was Mr. Ritchie and it has some writing on it - you can read a part of it but not all of it, but it would seem that it was cast somewhere in the East. So I don't know really the true story of it. *How long has the bell been there?* Well everything I can remember - when would you say about 1920 or maybe 1930 or something like that. --- I was talking to some one in Belen and I said something about our church and he said are you a Catholic and I said no, and he said why did you say, our church? Well it is our church. All the churches are our churches. That's the way I look at it anyway. --- *about the altar rail that disappeared and that was 20 years ago.* Yes, it was, well we heard that it was buried. *That is probably the most prevalent story - that it was buried. Someone was telling me that not too far from the church in January, I think ---so they are still looking for it. Another thing about Socorro, there are so many legends.* Now, Mary Douglass had a paper on legends around here and customs - some of them I had heard and some I hadn't. Well Ann Olsen said years ago that we should start writing - putting down things that we knew and my husband says that too. *We would ask my mother and her sister, Mrs. Brown, Judy's mother-in-law, how about old times and everyday life.* ---*Rambling* --- *If you write it down and you don't think it's very interesting then when you read it back later then you think I didn't know that.* And speaking of old houses, that house east of Widger's laundromat was there in 1881 - I know that. Because my mother and her family stayed there the first night they arrived in Socorro. The hotel was full so they took them in the house. It's a nice house and a well built one, I don't know who lives there now. On the north side of the street. *Do you remember the gypsies?* Oh yes, they used to have gypsies come through every so often. It was before World War I - they had their national meeting here. *Well, I don't remember that it was a national meeting, but we had gypsies every year at a certain time of the year. They probably were camped somewhere - that place that I said was Stevens' lake - that place between 6th Street and the railroad? When it wasn't covered with water it used to be a place where the gypsies might come and camp. Another question, how about witches? I don't know - I never heard of a witch. Well now with the Spanish, maybe they knew of some.* I heard a lot about earthquake trouble here I remember when we were remodeling the Brown house they almost gave it up because they had to stop work ----- (reference to Hollister) They have one just about every day there they call it earthquake city. Well we had one here- a pretty bad one in '69. It didn't do any damage, but it registered 5 or 6 or something. Well I know my husband was a very young boy but about 1906 he was knocked down. We had them all that summer. We slept out in a tent that summer. So many of the houses were knocked in so they started rebuilding with shingles instead of adobe. There might still be some houses around that are shingle adobes. They did it so they wouldn't have the same trouble over again. *I remember you wouldn't go down certain streets or alleys, you'd go around them.* By the Safeway, Billie Thompson would go all around. Well we still have a lot of old houses that could be fixed up. ---across the street. *Back of Mr. Shinas'?* Oh, the road to the School of Mines. I remember when Dr. Workman was here, he was quite interested in the School of Mines road and he offered if he could clean the street and take down the old fences. But he said, let's clean it all off and when the time came and --- and when the time came it would be a beautiful sight. And he said wouldn't that be a beautiful street and it hasn't been improved too much -it's cleaner. During dogwood season the traffic was bumper to bumper. I think it looks entirely different to me and it looks -- it doesn't look any different from other towns now --- he said come back in a year and you'll see a lot of things --- Another thing I think was too bad to tear down was the convent. That old convent was lovely to me. It was a long building across - well it is U-shaped now and it is a long building with an upstairs balcony. The chapel was upstairs and there was a staircase going from the patio up to the second floor and that was entirely enclosed (Ed. note: photos in Smith collection) There was an entrance hall right I front and right opposite there was another hallway that went out into the back yard, but all the students at recess time were in that little patio and it was such a pretty place. They tore it down and built that new one. I hated to see that come down, but it was a very bad building. It was in bad condition, but interesting. Well I went to kindergarten there and I went to first grade for two years - I was pretty dumb - and then I went to the public schools for second grade and then for third grade I went back to the convent. In fourth grade I went back to public school. *Somebody said you had to be a Catholic and I said no that isn't true because my husband when a little Catholic boy couldn't answer, he'd*

say, let me answer for him and he'd make him be still, he wouldn't let him answer for little Joe or whoever it was. I remember him telling me that many times. Well, they had catechisms when I went but I didn't take part in it. Sister Josephine was my teacher in first grade and she was one of the early sisters that came over - she was quite old when she taught me and her sister and she came out by wagon train from Kentucky. On the way the Indians attacked and she said her sister died and was buried right there and I have that written down somewhere - what her name was. ----the front yard was divided into two parts and then about 25 feet in front of it was a wall and trees all over and shrubs and then you came to the second gate and the front yard. The high wall was on the south side - I would say about 12 or 13 feet high. ----Adobe is such good building material too, I think it could have been reinforced an repaired. Well I think that's been an American quality to tear everything down. We tried - but not very hard - to do something about the old Opera House and they said there's cracks in the wall and nothing was done to it -- well restore it. It's on the state archives - if we can get on the national archives we'll all have fun. I haven't been out to California for two years, but we go around the mother lode country- Elizabeth town - and they've still got their one-room schoolhouse and you go in there and you can't believe it. We wanted to talk about the little red schoolhouse-- Mary could tell you about --- I went to school there in the little red schoolhouse -I went there in the second grade, the fourth, and the fifth, I think. And then I went to the old grammar school for the sixth and seventh. I went to the School of Mines for high school. You know that (---) there - that wa a two-room unplastered adobe house. The School of Mines furnished the teachers from their faculty to teach high school. They taught in Driscoll Hall, the same faculty teachers and my younger brother went to high school - 11 years younger than I am so I don't remember when the first trade? school was built, I think we have an early yearbook. Well, some people hated to see the Court House torn down. To me it was one of the attractive buildings. Well it was historical. And it was unusual. It was two storey to start with and I remember standing in our front window where the El Rio hotel is now and we'd hear a thunderstorm and I saw this thunderbolt hit the school and they said it went down through the chimney - I believe it was on fire and destroyed the upper rooms so they just took it off. I do think the new Court House is very attractive. The Park Hotel was the most outstanding. They had little shops in there I think. If the right person had the money and had the willingness to take the thing and do something with it, it would have been wonderful. Now they are more interested in having a senior citizens' building. I was surprised to hear that in six months they would break ground. I hope it's true. Judy Brown is visiting us from California and we appreciate your coming.