

Socorro County Historical Society, Oral History Tapes

Elizabeth Vigil interviewed by Gladys Long

The first few sentences of this interview can be heard on Tape # 31 but not on 29 or 30.

March 7, 1973. Elizabeth Vigil, nee Torres, comes from a family that lived in New Mexico Territory and she married a man who came to this area about the same time as the Torres'. Tell us something about Kelly. All we can see now is foundations and a little church and a cemetery foundations and a little church and a little cemetery. Betty knows quite a bit more from what her father has told her. Can you tell us about that? Well, first of all, I think I should mention that my father was Adolfo Torres, and he was born at La Joya. My mother was Luz Torres, and she was born at Socorro. My father and mother and their first three children moved from Socorro to Kelly when the mining business started, and his brother built and operated a saloon for several years. Only the rock foundation still stands. According to what he told us, there were hundreds of tough characters employed in the mine diggings. They didn't hesitate to shoot each other at the least provocation or shoot up the whole place in drunken sprees. There was gambling and they often shot each other over arguments. No woman or child went out after dark when the one-lane street was full of miners. The few families that lived a ways out of town would walk or ride their horses and wagons or buggies to the town for provisions and attend the church on Sunday. This church is the only complete structure still standing. There was one general store, blacksmith's shop and a few other business places. There was no plumbing and everybody used well water. Was there a lot of diarrhea and dysentery? No, not in particular. There were only outside privies. At that time they mined silver and copper. Around 1905 the family moved to Magdalena. My father built and operated a general store and he also built a building next to it and his brother operated a meat market. These were on the main street. Did he keep the saloon in Kelly or did he sell out? He sold out. Things were getting pretty rough and it was just a little too much for him and he didn't want to raise his family in that environment. The businesses that they had in Magdalena is sort of interesting. They delivered the groceries by horse-drawn wagon. Of course there were very few cars. The main industries in Magdalena were cattle shipping and wool shipping to the eastern states. Approximately how far would you say people drove their cattle and wool for shipping? Well, they came from close to the line of Arizona. That I'll tell about a little further on. In Magdalena I remember going to the Princess Theater on Saturday matinees. We weren't allowed to go out to the show at night. There was a balcony inside upstairs and that's where I like to sit. A big bag of popcorn cost five cents and almost all the kids want some. The popular pictures at that time were the series of Pearl White and Tarzan. The original Tarzan, Johnny Weissmuller, I think (more likely Elmo Lincoln). And other movies were William S. Hart and Tom Mix, and the comedies were Charlie Chaplin and Harold Lloyd. How much did it cost to get in? It cost five cents for the children under twelve for matinees and ten cents for the older children and I don't remember seeing any grownups there. There were two banks, two hotels and a men's clothing store operated by a Mr. Stuckey. The Becker McTavish store that sold everything from cut glass, groceries, to dry goods to nails. The Ranch Supply Store - this rock building still stands

on Highway 60. It also sold everything from tea to supplies for ranchers. The big ranchers from out west of Magdalena from Datil and Quemado, Aragon and Mogollon all brought their cattle and sheep to Magdalena by land to the shipping yards near the depot. *What were the names of some of those people?* I do remember the Aragons - I believe there are still some out there living on the ranch. I don't remember too many names from the out-of-town people. They brought them to the shipping yards - they are still there. These were eventful occasions. The town was full of cowboys, ranch owners, and miners from Kelly. There were cowboys and miners up and down the street and many shootings and killings took place. I remember Mother kept us close to home during these occasions, but one time I sneaked away and went into the back door of my father's store. He had the front door locked and there was a ranch owner inside. My two older brothers were busy filling boxes with merchandise for this rancher. The rancher and my father were holding their 45 pistols standing by the front door and talking excitedly about what was going on in the street. There must have been a lot of fighting and shooting. One of my brothers bawled me out for being there and took me home. There was also a drug store, the Romero Drug Store, which sold medicine and had a soda fountain. *About how many times a year did this happen?* Every time there was a shipping - during the shipping. *Spring and fall?*

About twice a year. *And that's when everybody got prepared for trouble?* Yeah, big guns. *Was there anything to entertain them?* No, they just came in to transact business, and, of course, the ones that did all the shooting and celebrating were the ones that were drinking and the miners that came down from Kelly to join in the celebration. It seems like they usually had it on some weekend. It lasted about three or four days. *Did they have a posse or anybody to try and get law and order.* The sheriff from Socorro would even go down up there to Magdalena, and of course, all the deputies, you know. The jail was very small and they didn't bother to jail very many. There was a jail - a rock building - it's still standing. It's right off the main street - I don't know the names of the streets. *On the street with the drug store?* About a block from there towards Kelly. *You were talking about a drug store in Magdalena, is that the same one that is there now?* No, no, this one was up much farther toward Kelly. I believe it burned down. It was near the other theater that they built later on by the K of P Hall. There were two schools - I believe the two-story rock building only taught up to the eighth grade. The adobe building that stood nearby, I believe taught up to the fourth grade. *Would that be approximately where the present school is?* Yes, it's on the right hand side. *About where the Indian school is now?* Oh, no - this was right in town. *In those days were the businesses mostly on the Kelly road?* No, the business part was centered around Highway 85 (?) and Kelly. The school was up about three blocks on Highway 85 toward Kelly. The old school is where the new one is now. There were three doctors, Dr. Mays, Dr. McCrary, and for a short time there was a Dr. Maes. I heard he was from Spain. Their homes are still occupied, and Dr. McCrary's office is across from his home - a two-story brick building that is still occupied. All doctors made home visits and delivered babies at home. There wasn't any hospital. All treatments of bedridden persons were given by the doctors in the homes. My father paid for Dr. McCrary \$300 a year for any services he had to administer to our family. *Did a lot of people do that?* I don't know, I remember hearing Dad talk about it though. In 1917 we moved to Albuquerque due to my Mother's health. My father bought a brick house on Fruit Avenue and I attended St.

Josephs's Convent nearby. Dad bought a store on South Edith and my two older brothers helped him operate it. The highlights of the few years we lived there were the flu epidemic and Armistice Day. Our whole family was down with the flu except one of my brothers. The doctor sent a male nurse to look after us day and night. The church bells tolled all day long for people dying and we heard there were funerals all day. *We don't toll now?* No, we don't toll. *I remember when I lived in Iowa and someone died and it wasn't Sunday morning the bell would ring. And after the funeral the bell would toll from the time the body left the church until you couldn't see it anymore.* The churches all over Albuquerque were tolling all day long. It was pitiful. Everyone that left their home to go out among other people, well they wore a kerchief tied over their nose and mouth. Another interesting thing is - I don't know if everybody did this - but the doctor had us all wearing a little bag containing garlic and some kind of crushed herbs and some kind of salve all mixed up inside of this little bag tied on a string around our necks. This was supposed to kill the contaminating germs. *Did it work?* I don't know. I guess it didn't because we all had the flu. Now on Armistice Day we all went to the depot. There were hundreds of people on the streets shouting and blowing horns and jumping up and down. There was a big parade and a band with soldiers in uniform. We couldn't get close to the train where soldiers were getting off and there was a lot of people crying too, I guess for their loved ones that didn't come back. There were speakers on platforms that were decorated like bunting and the loud band music was something else. My folks being real religious, we drove to the church to join the mob in prayers - well, one was so glad that the war was over. We couldn't get inside the church. There were hundreds of people for blocks around kneeling on the streets and everywhere, and they all knelt too. It was a joyous and sad occasion combined. *This is interesting because when World War 2 was over we did more or less the same thing. Everybody got out in the street and was laughing and crying and it was really exciting because when we heard the cease fire about Viet Nam recently we watched television and read the papers and talked about it. I wonder if there is more excitement in the cities than we felt here.* Well, the only excitement now is about the POW's and all. It was a different kind of war - there wasn't the urgency or hatred even between the nations, you know, I think, that made a big difference. It was just one of those things that came on us without expecting it and it just seemed such a simple thing you know, but I think everybody is just more or less disgusted with the whole thing. The prisoners that are coming back suffered so much unnecessarily, you know. In 1920 we moved back - this time to Socorro. My Dad bought a house, built three houses for rental and went into the real estate business. At that time the old two-story Court House was in existence where the present Court House is now. Henry Dreyfus, my mother's sister's husband was Sheriff of Socorro County at that time. There was a separate two-story brick building back of the main Court House. This is interesting. There was a connecting closed-in passageway from the jail quarters on the top floor of the main building. I don't know if there are any pictures of this, but I sure wish I could find one. *The jail was on the first floor?* Yes. The sheriff's living quarters were on the second floor but they didn't live there. The deputy and his wife and child lived upstairs and I believe it was the jailer too. It was in the round section and it was connected with the passageway, so when they brought the prisoners through the main Court House, the big building in front, they would take them upstairs through this passageway on the back where the jailer's quarters were and they were taken downstairs into the cells.

They tore all of that down and put in this new one. Do you know what year it was when the present Court House was erected? I don't remember - I think the date is on the outside. *Was that built by the WPA?* Yes, that would have been in the thirties. Inside the round jail quarters there was a balcony all around and you could look down to the jail cells on the main floor. Elfego Baca was a lawyer at Magdalena at this time and became sheriff right after Uncle Henry was sheriff. Dad used to tell us about hangings that took place when he was a boy and living in Socorro. One man he saw hanging from a tree where the tree is now on the corner of the present Court House. By the way he was taken some milk in one of those little lunch buckets that they used to take milk in, you know, some relative real early in the morning when he saw this man hanging from the tree right there at the corner of the Court House. *Did he recognize him?* It scared him and he dropped the bucket of milk and ran back home and told his mother, you know. He said that very often happened - he saw two or three more at different times hanging from that tree. They called it the hanging tree and they didn't know when it happened or who did it or anything. *And that would be the great big round tree that stands on the north?* I can't vouch for it's the same tree but it looks like a pretty old tree, anyway. Also he saw the man hung on Death Alley Dad's folk lived in a little adobe house where the Paul Marshall building now stands. Garfield Street was Death Alley. I suppose it was called Death Alley because so many hangings went on in this area during the vigilante and newcomers' period. By newcomers I say these cattle rustlers and fellows coming in on their way to Kelly to the mining - just like going to a gold rush or something like that, you know. They were coming in to find claims and so forth, you know. *That was what, about the 1880's or '90's or around the turn of the century?* Yeah, it could have been later than that. Yeah, close to the turn of the century. *The vigilantes were what?* They were the Ku Klux Klan. There was an organization here in Socorro by that name. A few people in town got written threats from these Ku Klux Klans and I'd rather not mention any names, but it was (facts), you know, and they were very opposed to I don't know who in particular - local people in town especially people against religious organizations. *Would they march in the streets wearing their white sheets?* No, you just didn't know who I was. You just didn't know who they were, you know. *What kind of threats would they make?* Well, that they would have to cut out what they were doing whether it was a religious organization or that they would take care of 'em. And that was it. *Were they Catholic or anti - what were they?* I don't know. I know they were antisocial on Catholic dealings that were going on - Catholic organizations. *And they would threaten organizations, too?* Oh, yes, definitely. *But the organizations continued as they were.* Well, uh I don't know - I don't remember Dad saying very much about ---. *Did they take protective measures?* No, they were terrorized - they just quit - whatever organization that was starting up they just dissolved and that was it. They were afraid of them, oh yes. *Did they know who it was that was doing ---?* No they didn't know who it was. Around 1920 the Illinois Brewing Company manufacturing and dispensing beer was on its last legs, so to speak. *Were there no sales for it?* Well, I don't know if that was around the time that they started a tax or only allowed 'em to make so much - I don't know what it was. (It was the Volstead Act - national prohibition.) *Was that the date when they would sell you a five-cent glass of beer to go with your lunch?* Nineteen twenty - it could have been. *If you bought a glass of beer you practically had your meal set before you. Did your father have (---) from Kelly, too?* Oh no, I don't remember him having even pretzels

or anything like that. I don't remember him having any kind of beverage or even pretzels or anything like that. And then the Brewery gave up the beer business and they converted into making and delivering ice. People ordered squares of ice according to the size that fit in their wooden ice boxes. One had to remember to empty the pan of water under the ice box or else mop it up. Francis Epple delivered 25 pounds of ice to our home every morning. Now my brother Ed and I loved to get small chunks of ice from a horse-drawn delivery wagon. That was fun. Now for the little bit of entertainment that there was in the town. Oh, the family went to the show when my father decided he wanted to see the picture. It had to be a war picture - if just children --- didn't do it a bit. And once in a while or about twice a year there was a group of performers came to town and they had sort of a play or performance at the old Anastasio Torres dance hall. This building still stands. Their home is right on the corner of Highway 85 (California Avenue) and that street that goes to the ball park - Spring Street. And they had dances there quite often but this (Maroma?) was quite interesting because everything was in Spanish. The jokes were in Spanish - all the play acting was in Spanish and everything was carnival - nothing was serious and everyone had a lot of laughs. You had to buy a ticket to attend these performances and the men- I don't know who the men were, but they would go around to the different homes and sell these boletas which were tickets, you know. They weren't invitations but they were some kind of special ticket and it was a dollar per family. If there was ten in the family or if it was two, it didn't make any difference. *And that included all the entertainment that was going on?* Oh yeah, it lasted about two hours maybe. *And this was in a building on the corner of Spring and California?* Yes, the old Anastasio home is still on the corner, but is attached to it. Later on the first El Defensor Chieftain - then it was just El Defensor and then Mr. Morgan bought it, Albert Morgan - he bought the business, not the building and he called the paper El Defensor Chieftain. *Well, Albert was in charge when I came here in 1963. Do you have any idea how long it was before he sold out?* I don't know when he sold out to them. Well, another mode of entertainment was we used to walk to the park not every Sunday, but quite often, and the band played on the platform at the center of the park. There was a platform there- what do you call it - a bandstand, oh yeah. Oh by the way in the good old old days when my dad was a young man, he played in the band and he played there at the bandstand. He played, I believe it was, the cornet. *Did you get any entertainment in the old Opera House?* Yes, I used to go to dances there my cousin would take me with him and --I can't think of the dance steps just now. I used to go there when they had dances for the Fiestas. The old Opera? It was just a place for dances. Oh, later on they used to have boxing. They had a ring there for boxing - of course just the men went to that. My brother was in charge of the boxing, that was Paul. He used to have them come down from Albuquerque and all. *Did you used to go out to the Evergreens?* Yeah, well I didn't swim, myself. We were from the mountains, you know, and we didn't go in much for swimming. We used to go out and watch them. I don't remember how much they charged - a nickel or a dime, but there was an awful lot of boys and girls swimming out there. A lot of people would take their lunches, you know, and spend the whole day out there, especially on Sunday. There was a big orchard, and I don't remember the names of the people that owned that place, but people would stay out there and picnic all day long. *Did they have games like baseball, football, basketball?* Yeah, baseball. There was a baseball every Sunday, and I remember I used to sit out in

front of Dad's house which is located on Highway 85 where my brother lives now, Ed Torres. I used to sit there and watch people go by. Very few people had cars then, maybe there were about five or six cars including trucks. Everybody walked to the ball game and back, out there at Lyons field. The Greenwald flour mill was going full swing at this time, but it closed up a few years later. The bank on the corner of what is now the Standard filling station on the corner of Highway 85 and Manzanares and next to it south was the old Fair Store. Where the Fair Store is now was the Rancher's Supply, a general store. The Post Office was on the corner of what is now a parking lot on the corner of Highway 85 and Manzanares. It was moved to where Gene's Flower Shop is now. So many changes have been made throughout the years that one of the buildings that should have been preserved by the State or City was the old Park Hotel on the plaza. It was a flat top building and the main office was where the telephone building is now and there was a big sign out in front that said Park Hotel. The office was there and then there was a dining room combined with it with two sliding doors. There was a dining room and they served family meals. There was a courtyard in front and it was all enclosed with a porch. There were rooms facing the courtyard and there was a hallway to the back, and there were more rooms back there. *How many people could it take?* Well, if it was filled up, I imagine, let's see, I think there were about 12 or 15 units. *Were the Aztec Apartments a part of that?* Yes, they were a part of it. Right next to it north, there was a little ice cream parlor there and candy store combined. My brother, Hall rented that for quite a while, and he ran that for several years and right next to that was the Gem Theater where the Safeway Store is. The Gem Theater and then Keith's Garage was right on the corner. *Was the fire station where it is now?* Yes, there was always an alley behind where the Safeway Store is now. *How many were there in your family?* There were seven. The oldest one was my sister, Janie, she passed away here. And then was my brother, John - he's the one that had the mines in Kelly. He lived in Magdalena. And then Tony, my sister Tony that died in California. Paul was the one that had the boxing matches and he had a mortuary too. *I remember when the candelabra from the old Kelly church came to the mortuary, but it came to the mortuary and then he sold out to Steadman?* I think so, yeah. Steadman had his first place on Highway 85. There was a brick house there, and that's where he had his mortuary. It's Paul and then Adolfo, he passed away - he was working at Los Alamos - he worked there 16 years from the very first time that it started. I don't remember what department he was in. He passed away in Santa Fe, but he's buried here. And then there is Ed, the retired grade school principal, retired after 44 years. *And then you, working in the Health Office.* I worked in the Health Office for three or four years and then I was Assistant Clerk at the Selective Service.

End of audible recording