

Socorro County Historical Society, Oral History Tapes

Mary Harris Watson, interviewed by Sue Little, April 21, 1972

Our guest today is Mrs. Mary Watson who has come to visit us from (inaudible) Los Angeles area, but she really is a native. You were born here, weren't you, Mary? I was. Tell us a little about your parents. Well, my dad came from the state of Vermont. I came to Socorro with the idea of settling here, we knew something about the surroundings of Socorro and something about New Mexico, and my mother came from California. Her parents came from Tennessee in 1846 and 1847 with the Donner Party. We settled here in Socorro at the old Park Hotel on the square downtown. At that time I don't know that there was any square, anyway the Park Hotel was there. Well the tragedy is, it's no longer there. *That is right, that's very true.* But that is where they met. I don't know just how long they were here before they married, and then they went over on the south side of Socorro, and Dad had a land grant, and as I understand, it was granted to him in Washington D.C. I don't know whether he had to go there or not, but he (seemed to know?) New York City. Quite a lot of things at that time to me were foreign now and it would have been true, of course, but he seemed to have a pretty good understanding of much of that. *Let's detour a little bit. What other stories have you heard about the Donner Party from your dad?* From my mother! My mother's side. Well, they had a terrible time making it out here and my granddad on my mother's side was William T. McCutcheon, and he had his own - what did they call it in those days - wagon train and his own set-up, and all that, and he and Donna McCutcheon came out and she, I believe, was born in Missouri, but he was born in Tennessee, and they came out here and settled and we had the family. They lost their baby at Donner Pass, and they came on in to California and reared a family and I know there was two girls and I think three boys - and my mother came here and settled and there was one brother, the youngest child, and that was the second generation as far as the mother was concerned. Because Donna McCutcheon, my grandmother, passed away and this was a second family and he established himself in San Francisco and was a corporation attorney for over fifty years *But your mother came to Socorro?* Yes, but that was after, you understand, -- *And why did she come to Socorro?* She was a (modiste?) and an art student in San Francisco, and she and a lady friend wanted to study art so that is what gave them the idea of coming here. And they made friends with her dad and mother by the name of Brown and they were the ones who owned and operated the Park Hotel. *So they really didn't come into strange country completely?* No, no! They did not, at least they had some relatives and friends here. *What about your schooling? Where did you start your school here?* Oh I started to school, I believe I went to the convent the first year, I went to the --inaudible-- I believe it was called the red schoolhouse then. I had a brother, Oliver, sixteen months younger than I, and I did go the first year a little bit by myself, and then after Oliver started (----) subject at school, and then I went to the upper school and I came out here to the School of Mines. I went two years to high school at Driscoll Hall. *It's quite a change, isn't it?* Oh yes, nothing like it back then. *Do you remember any of your professors?* I had a Professor Smith. That was the first one that I went to. *What did you study, dear?* Well ninth grade was what they called it then, it was just high school. It was just high school, that was all. I went the second year to the same high school too. I

went out to (inaudible) to specialize, and I went to the state normal school in Silver City, New Mexico, then I went to the state normal university in Las Vegas, New Mexico. In the days of normal school. I went over to ---ology at (Loyola?) University. Both of those normal schools. Well Maybe I went to the university, but that was night time because I started out teaching when I was sixteen. *Where did you teach?* Well, my first year was at Lemitar, and I believe I had only eight months, and there was another teacher, a Mr. Chavez, and he was the one who, well actually, you might call him the Principal of the school. Then the next year I went down to Luis Lopez five months south. How did you get to school? Well at Lemitar I had a little apartment over at Antonio Gonzalez at a store in this little apartment in his home. I believe he was running the school board. I think it's still there. I used to go back and forth. Mr. Chavez used to drive me back and forth. I used to walk quite often down to the railroad track to one of those hand cars, I guess. And I used to ask them if them I could have a ride. *But then when you got down to Socorro, then you walked home, huh?* Yes, I didn't have any trouble walking to my house. *And how about when you went down south to teach? Did you have the same---?* No I wasn't busy by that time, and that was the way I ----. *And did you go out every day?* Every day, yes. *How long did it take you?* I would drive five miles. *Down to Luis Lopez?* Uh-huh. Oh I took about thirty minutes, not much more than that. *Did you go to the other side of the river?* Oh no! the road was always on this side of the river so far as I know. *Do we have one on the other side of the river now?* We went to Luis Lopez straight from Socorro. *On this side of the river?* Yes. The main highway was east of the road. The main highway. *You mean it is now?* Well no, it's west of the river now, but in the old days it was east of the river. Well I don't know. I'll say this. We took the one that was easiest for us as far as we knew, the best road. You know, it was in my case the best road. Did you have any trouble getting through? A few times. Once or twice when we had snow. I knew, there was some friends of mine down there that lived close to the school - a Mr. and Mrs. Fisher. They used to be here and Mr. Fisher had a meat market, and uh she was always trying to keep track of things for me. She said to me that she knew one of the doctors in Socorro had gone down and he was making tracks if I could just wait a little while till? he came back she was sure I could follow his tracks home, and that's what I did. And under cover of the runaways (?) *Are the horses running away?* Oh no, well I had a very good, what do you call it? a (lantern). Well the only trouble I had was with the children once in a while. *What did you teach down there?* I taught grades - grade school, and I had some boys, quite a bit older than I, and I had a little difficulty with them, but I talked with my mother about it and she called the county health physician and he came down and looked my school over and talked to some of these young men and (said?) it was time they went out and had jobs. I think it was herding sheep, and I didn't ask him to (?) those big boys any more. *We had less trouble. Well, after that where did you go?* Then I went home. *Didn't you teach in Socorro proper?* Oh yes, I did and all told I taught approximately twelve years a good bit of the time in Socorro. Of course that was during the war and when we had flu and that sort of thing so that made some difference but I taught (---) at the Morris school. I taught down there and the little red school. I think I taught there three years and I taught fourth grade up here and that was where (---?). *What do you mean by that?* The school was I believe at (Athia?) that's right across from the Court House. I think it was the Junior High. Well I imagine it is and I taught there several years. I taught fourth grade and well I went to

school there at the high school in the high school days too, quite a bit, and I substituted and at that time a good many times. I taught a good many of these pupils - Holm Bursum - Senior, I guess we would call him. No, he would be Holm Bursum the Second because it was (his dad?) Holm Bursum, and this young man went to school to me there in that school. One Baldwin boy. I think they call him now, Bobby Baldwin, who was a real estate man and a realtor. *Let me see. Who has the meat market down here?* Ben Zimmerly went to school to me. And let's see, who else? Well I had a pretty good size school and many of them have moved away and a few of them have passed away. Let's see, who else now? -----I was thinking the other day quite a few of them have come to school to me. *When did you become Mrs. Watson?* Well after I moved to California, I became Mrs. Watson. *You moved to California and you left teaching here. Did you teach in California?* No I never have. I have always been a newspaper worker out there or an editor. First of all I met Mr. Watson and then very soon came here (---) after '32, and well everything was so shaken up I really didn't know. I really thought I'd come back to Socorro because Long Beach was kind of sad at that time, but I had started in his office and I was looking after insurance and I had learned some of my insurance business here from Mr. Joe Smith who had an insurance business here and he'd go to California and I was teaching and I used to take care of his work for him and he would go out there for the winter. Then I went to Mr. Watson. He had written an ad in the Long Beach paper and I read it, and I thought that man knows English quite well and I'll go down and talk to him anyway, so I went and talked to him and he asked me how soon I wanted to come, and I said well I didn't have any specific time. Any time it would be agreeable with him I thought I could work it out. I had this Rosemary, my daughter, my mother had passed in '27 and I went out in '29 - my brother Harry - I don't think you've met him but he and his wife lived out there. He was an engineer and he had come to school. I don't think he ever had graduated from here, but he had taken specialized work and all that sort of thing for his line of work that he wanted to follow. And I came back to Socorro. *You come to Socorro regularly, don't you?* Well I can't say exactly regularly, but I have come here as we have interests here. *You come almost every year, don't you?* Not exactly, but I come a good many times and of course if there is anything here that had to be taken care of, I always came. *Tell us about the Socorro you knew and the Socorro it is now.* Well it is altogether different, I don't know. What is the population here now? Six or seven thousand. Well I'm sure it wasn't more than half that when I first taught along here, and I don't know if it was even that. No, I don't think it was. It was a very small place; however the area was nice, but as far as the population was concerned, it was not. *What are the big differences you noticed?* Well it's in chiles almost entirely I'll say that much for it. Were you here when the (smelter?) was going? No, I was not. But yes, I was born here. I don't remember it as far as I'm concerned, I knew where the smelter was, but I never knew nothing about it, It was not too far from where we lived, but I never knew enough about it. I was too much of a (----). My brother, Oliver and I used to ride a burro, but we never went near the smelter. My mother told us where to ride, so she could keep track of us. I got pretty well acquainted around the town here by just going around on that burro and talking to people. *How's your Spanish?* Well I haven't been using it too much the last few years and as a result of it, I don't talk quite as well as I used to. *But as a child, you were bilingual, weren't you?* Quite so. I could talk quite a bit in Spanish, and I could make most any of them

understand, and they knew who we were, you know, and some of them used to come up to the home and they tried to do a little. My mother knew where we were, and we always used to visit with Mrs. C. T. Brown. She knew us quite well, and the Stapleton family, young men who were - I believe they worked for the Chambon estate at that time. They'd take us riding in their wagon that they had to deliver groceries. Any time we could fasten our burro and they'd give us a ride, bring us back to our burro, and we'd come home. Nobody rode the same burro. If I remember there were two children, right? Oh yes, my goodness, I tell you they were babies almost and we used to talk to the men up and down on the Magdalena branch of the Santa Fe. They knew all of us and they used to kid us and talk to us and tell me (----) and so did all of us. We knew Billy Martin who was here for years and Billy Newcomb. Of course many of them knew him. Well this sister Deemy? of mine went first of all for Mr. Fitch at the lawyers office. And later on she worked at the Court House and I had a little job right in the Court House between twelve and thirteen I think. Well we had an election, and they need someone that would sit down and stick stickers on what I guess we'd call 'em posters and that was what I did then. *How much did you get paid?* Twenty cents an hour. But I worked, but you know they would take others in there, but some of 'em wouldn't work. They would play, they didn't want to work. I was always willing to work, and they used to kid me about my working, but I (-----). For several times, even after I was teaching, I used to work at Court House work, and during the war time there was boys who filled out draft forms. I worked on more draft forms than anybody else in Socorro county, but I was always willing to have my draft forms home and when the boys came there, I helped them. Otherwise they came o the Court House, but in some cases they could get up here after hours if they couldn't come to the Court House. And that was one reason why I did (-----). *How do you have this memory of (---) in Socorro?* Well my home life was very happy. There was a good many (---) went to the School of Mines (---) went to the School of Mines and I went to the School of Mines. My mother let us have all of the food we wanted to. The School of Mines boys could come any time until late at night and have something to eat. After I grew up I went on (---tour?) once in a while. My mother got a piano. We had two pianos and we always had company. I consider it a very happy life, perhaps it was quite a simple life in a way. But to my way of thinking we always had to mind, to do what we were told to do. My mother remodeled the home. I was trying to think just what years it was --I would say ---when did the war start, world war one? We didn't get into it until '18 (sic). Well then I think it was probably in between 1914 and 1918 when she remodeled her home and made quite a home out of it. She made it much larger and much nicer for us. *Are you related to the Harris clan out at Lemitar now?* I don't know them. My dad came? the English. I believe there was four brothers came over - that was the original clan that he came from. They all came the English, and one brother passed away at sea, and he was not buried at sea because - whatever you might term it - they didn't want to bury them at sea and so for that reason they consented. Well, back to Socorro and the schools and the story ---, *Do remember about the Plaza?* Well the first time I remember the Plaza it was for a flower holiday on Memorial Day and they took all the little girls and we had little baskets of flowers, and they took us all out to the cemetery and we went all over to the old soldiers' graves. I don't believe I was more than five years old. They told me I couldn't go because I was too young so miss (---) took me back to the hotel, and she said to mother - I don't know what her name was - she was a

Mrs. Ogala? And that I was too small and Mrs. (--) said we'll take her over there and tell her that I said for her to take flowers. And after that for a good many years I used to get little girls ready and I would help them fix their baskets to go out to the Memorial Day at the cemetery. *And you were only five years old?* I think that's what I was, about five or six years old. My birthday's in October and these soldiers - I think it would be -- Indian war? --Civil War - Civil War soldiers. There were a good many people from the south that lived here. There's Mrs.

(----) and I think they came from Arkansas. There were quite a few southern born. *So you had quite a good size cemetery here to decorate?* Well, fairly so. *What else do you remember about that?* Like the cemetery? No. But I do remember some of the talks they gave and I remember two of them got drunk on Memorial Day and they had quite a time sending them home. I don't know that I could tell exactly who they were I do remember that some of--. It was quite a day for celebration. *About the land grant time.* The land grant time? As I understand it, it was a land grant from Washington D.C. and I don't know just exactly, but I am told that in early days they would give a certain number of - like 500 acres. But that didn't mean literally. But it was interpreted by many as literally 500 acres and then it came a time when there was a question about the exact amount how it could be measured or should be measured. *Was this a land deed to the family?* Well my dad had it surveyed and deeds were made - my mother got those. My father passed away in 1906 and left my mother with five children. I think we were all kind of busy. *Your father - was he a stockman or?* Well I would say he was in the real estate business primarily and he was studying to be an attorney and stock - well now I was told by Lee Baldwin, a man who was later President of the bank here that my dad brought in the first books that were brought in from (---) island. And he said they were the most wonderful animals that he had ever seen and that type of animal was a goat. My dad came here as I understand it from Mark? riding a horse Mr. Norris? He was called - and my dad passed and my mother was afraid of the horse - I believe Victor Sais? Was his name. *From Vermont?* Yes, but he wasn't afraid. Of course I was only a little thing in a way, but I still remember he told about - that he had been told by some to carry a gun and he was told by some not to. And so he did not carry a gun and he once saw someone coming - I won't say who - but anyway there was a doubt in his mind and if he had his gun he probably would have used it. So he was very glad he didn't use it because there was no hard feelings and there was no reason for having a gun. Well we don't recall many stories on TV - westerns, without guns, do we? I don't know, but my father's family did not believe much. It was one sister that was an invalid most of her life and my sister Deedee as we called her was named for her. I think Papa was burning leaves and things and she ran into the burning leaves, I suppose not realizing and that was what started it. and later on she met with an accident when she went to Montreal to go to the tournament and so for that reason she was an invalid primarily all of her days . Back to this land grant. Well, I don't know just how my father obtained that, but he did obtain it. There was evidently four brothers. I think one went south and there was a Harris family in the south that claimed relationship to my father's family. That is almost as much as I know of - it's just quite general, you might say and anyway I met some schoolteachers later on that had quite a history, and I was supposed to have gotten a book from them, but I never did. However Aunt Dehlia? Wrote a beautiful hand and she wrote quite a few letters and I would say there was a good many sheets that she had --(---)- volume. *What*

happened to her letters? I really don't know. My sister Dehlia? she met Mr. (---) and she always took those things and she claimed that she wasn't able to find them. They were taken from her or she had lost them. I don't remember which. Whatever happened to the land grant? We still own the home and some portions and we sold some of them at a fairly recent date, and of course my dad - some of the property he sold off to some of the people who lived here and I believe they claim the Indian or I call 'em Spanish whether that's correct or not. They may have come into Mexico and some of them may have lived up there - the Gonzalez family, and I believe there is a (---) Gonzalez. That was one generation, of course Jose Gonzalez was another generation and in his family and some of that family went to school to me. And they're still up there as far as I know on the hill. One of Jose Gonzalez' sons was here in the Court House I believe he worked in the tax office. And I think he collected taxes as assessor I guess - tax collector up in the hills there. Let me see if I can give you any bearing of the house. It related to the new Junior high school. I don't know exactly where that is but it's out on (highway) 60 west of here - the road to Magdalena and that would be north of where our family was. *We might go to the old flour mill.* Well then, that comes along right by the tracks and we were south of that. Oh, I see. I had it placed pretty well. The old farm house is still here. And other people in the family I knew quite well later John Greenwald married to Terry? I believe and she lived across the street from our home. This is the son. *And they owned the flour mill.* No I mean (--) Terry married and there was the Torres family that lived up in there and I was just trying to think what street that was. Colorado or in there. I don't have any maps. Do any of you know where the Hilton home is out in there - a two story? Well (---) home was built around the same time that my mother remodeled her home. And by the same builder. I don't know where we got the plans from and I don't know where he got his plans for my mother's home, but he was Scotch (--). Two brothers came in. Cannon? Was the one took the lead in building and Duncan Cannon was the builder. *Do you have any memories of the opera house?* Oh yes, the old opera house was quite wonderful, we used to go there to hear singing, and the School of Mines brought in as far as the programs that were down there -- and some of them were very wonderful. I heard a Dr. Giddings, I believe the name is from - I think he was the President from the University of Michigan to talk there one night. That was a very wonderful talk. And I heard a good many others from other schools. They came down to the opera house. At that time I think it was the only building that was large enough to seat any audience of any size. I was in hopes they would begin and utilize that building. *The opera house?* Yes, we tried to get it on a federal list so we could get some money to do something with. It should be done. Well yes, we all know that (end of side). The state doesn't have any money, but the federal government does. If we can get it on the federal list and get everything cleared it can be restored, and I think a lot of things could happen there. Well it just needs a lot of grit? to stay with it and I think primarily that is what we need. More courage to keep on saying we need it, and I think we should get it. *Do you get the (---) at all here?* Yes I did. I went to two sisters. Sister Mary? was the first one and for years when I went up to Santa Fe as a school teacher she was the teacher I always used to go to see both the sisters but they told me since late years when I was up there with (--) was six, I went over to the convent and one of the sisters took me around and showed me some of the things they had and how wonderful they had all been and then they told me that sister Mary? had passed on and Mary (--) had too. Judy Brown and Ann Olsen were

here the other day and they were both regretting that the convent had been torn down. It was a crime. I'm telling you . Well I don't care. When any of them used to ask me and I was to (---). One or two of them would go tell my mother (---) she'd agree with me. They built a new one which is probably in much better condition than the old one. That's all right. The old one had the historical content with it. *There is something about one of those old old convents that nothing else can quite match. Have you been in one?* There is one in Santa Fe - they will take you through there but you have to know some of things, you know. That is the one with the hidden staircase, isn't it? Yes, that's the one with the hidden staircase and they have some other--well it's religiously inclined, and that's what they take you in and show you It's quite wonderful. *Any other tidbits you'd like to give us before we --* No, I'm just trying to think.. Of course, we were reared by our mother and I was old enough to realize my daddy passed on. There was Mr. and Mrs. Leeson, everybody called him Bad Leeson and there was the (---) boy and the Lincoln family southern born - and the Bush family -some of those families were just wonderful in their ways -doing for people and understanding. There were some of the ministers here that were quite wonderful. I believe there was the Bishop (Kennedy?) was in the Episcopal Church and let's see there was the minister who used to walk. I think he walked to all his churches. His last name was Lewis. On his way he used to knit baby bonnets for the ladies that were here. He walked along and knitted or crocheted, I don't know which but anyway he made baby bonnets. *Were there Indians up in the mountains? Well I have to ask you this question - I ask it of everyone. Do you remember the gypsies?* The gypsies? Well I should say I do, we had plenty of them. We had a Joe Baca here who was - came from the Baca family - there was Joe Baca and he had a brother who was over in the Court House, and I believe at one time he was sheriff - I think maybe he was a jailer and we always used to let him know that the Gypsies was camped out there and they'd come out and move 'em on - move 'em out over the city boundary lines because they just came and helped themselves and they took anything they could get their hands on so when they came, we stayed home. *You didn't go burro riding, huh?* Not too much. As I grew up we had horses, and I had a horse and buggy. *Did you ever hear a story of a baby being taken by the gypsies here?* Well, I think they told some stories, but I think they were rather questionable. I think all the people have looked into that and I don't think they have gotten anywhere at all. *What about the Spanish and the Anglo people coming (paraphrased) ?* At least the older ones came up - they seemed to have time and they'd come out and talk and there was interpreting done. And the (--) people (--) each other? Yes, I think so - and the mean ones - once in a while we were kids and they used to be after us to get off the grounds and that sort of thing and we'd talk back to them. *No sense of racial pressure of any kind?* Very little. I don't think little children do anyway, you know we had no idea of fear *How were Indians --?* We didn't like 'em, we were scared of them. *Did they come around?* Well I don't remember anything that really happened that was very serious. I think the children all got home and stayed there. Did you go up to Magdalena? Yes, when I was about five years old my sister Delia - or maybe I was the one that was five- anyway she took us out and Mr. (--) a friend of the Long family drove us out there in a buggy - a little wagon or something like that - and just to get out of the city It was quite a ride in a buggy, I'll bet. Well it was just about sixteen miles. Wasn't it 22? Well it might have been - where we lived you know. I remember we met quite a few people out there that were living along

there - anyway we visited with them. There was the Kelly family and the Blanchards out in there. And some of those girls they could sing and we used to sing for miles with beautiful voices, and I think the Kelly family- there was one or two of those girls who learned to sing later on in life. Are any of the Kelly family living here now? One of them married one of the Terry's that was a brother of that Mrs. (---) I don't think that any of those are living and I don't know about their descendents. I don't know what became of them. Probably gone with the town of Kelly. All that's standing there is a little church. They've even taken out the railroad. Is that true? Yes, the little church is out there and that's all. It was quite a good size place. *Anything else? Think hard! Anyway we do appreciate you coming out here.* *The Hilton family* - I really didn't know Conrad Hilton as well as I knew the dad - and he was quite a - interested in highways and there was a (----) Cook (--). They had no family. Mrs. Cook was a sister of Johnny Griffith who was an attorney here. The highway committee would have luncheons down here when they met and they discussed these things about highways in here and working on roads. George Keith and George Cook. Mr. Brown. I don't think he got into that quite so much - I don't believe he had time to discuss that with a big group - as large as we had. All those men took a great interest in Socorro. Mr. Brown used to ride the buses - if there was any water in the Rio Grande ran over it, and they couldn't get in here - they had to go to Lemitar to bring in people, and I think that's where they got their mail and all that sort of thing too. He would ride those buses with long boots on clear up to here. --- There was plenty of water here. *Down south of here it was completely destroyed.* San Marcial. Oh yes, that went under about '28 that went under. *Have they ever dug that out yet?* It's not there any more. They had a very good bank down there. There's a name on the highway, but that's about all it is. When I was teaching there used to be a deputy? called, oh I don't what he was called maybe he was a United States marshal. He was looking for those who hid themselves, not citizens of the country, and hid themselves in boxcars and that sort of thing and I remember he came to my school on several times, just coming in and talking because he was interested in teachers for San Marcial. He looked our schools over and looked the teachers over too, then I presume he did. *Were any of your students at Lemitar Spanish?* Yes - primarily, in fact at Luis Lopez the same thing with one exception, the Fisher boy was not. At that time I think he started up here. I've forgotten what Mr. Fisher's name was. At any rate, he and his family had moved from here and moved down to Luis Lopez. *Did they already speak Spanish in school?* No, they were quite interested in speaking English and of course they talked to each other in Spanish. That was quite natural. *Well we appreciate your coming.* Well I was happy to. *Thank you Mary.*