

Socorro County Historical Society, Oral History Tapes

David R. Jones, Sr. interviewed by Gladys Long

Mr. Jones, when did you come here? I came from Missouri in 1935. How did you happen to come out here to Socorro? I was working in Kansas city and in 1933-4 they were having dust storms and they kept cutting wages, so I just thought I'd do like Horace Greeley said, "Go west." So I went to California and then back to Lordsburg, and then I got a chance to come to Socorro. There was a hospital, and I got a chef's job as head of the food ---. You're talking about the TB hospital? The TB San, they called it. They didn't pay me what I thought I should have so I tried to work in Socorro, I worked for a (---) outfit, a service station, a Standard station until the war came along in 1942, and then I bought the old Conoco station and ran it for nine years. I am interested in the State San, because when I came out here in 1948 it was to visit a patient in the San. Well, how many patients did you have there? There was between a hundred and a hundred and fifty when I was there - the worst part of it, really was the kitchen was right by the serving windows, the hallway that the real sick people, the people that weren't expected to live too long, were right in that area. And I just couldn't hardly take it, you know not being a doctor or nurse or anything like that. What I wanted to say here, if you don't mind - after I lost the Conoco station then I bought out the old Socorro Café in 1949 and ran it until the highway came through and put us out of business, and then I bought Shirley's Café. That was a landmark for a long time. Yes, that's a busy place - we did well there, and then I had a chance to buy the old (---) which we called Davy Jones Locker. Which there happens to be 14 of them over the country, I understand. Are you connected with all of them? No, no I just happened to have that name, Davy Jones Locker which most people are familiar with. Davy Jones Locker is at the bottom of the sea where all the bad sailors go. And then we stayed there until we sold out in 1971. I've been to your place a number of times. Yes, you have. I was interested in your conversation - I want to go back a little bit and hear what you had to say about the state San because when I came herein 1962 to do public health we still had something like 57 people on our active case load who were a holdover, most of the, from the state San here in Socorro, and there were others who had recovered and were still on our rolls and were raising families who are very healthy nowadays because right now our case load of really active patients runs about 7 people and the rest of us does more controlling and screening. How long ago did they close the hospital here. I don't recall the exact date - it's been about ten or fifteen years (since 1974). You say you came here in '62. I came to New Mexico in '48, but I did not start doing public health care until '62. I would say approximately 10 years ago. A group of us went up to Albuquerque and met with a group of people who had charge of moving it, and they wouldn't even talk to us - they had already decided on moving it to Ft. Stanton - so we didn't have a chance - but anyway we tried. Now it has moved down to Silver City to Ft. Bayard and down there they just have one ward for TB patients because our methods of taking care of people are so vastly improved over what they were --. Incidentally, I had a chance to go over to Ft. Bayard for about a year. To the government hospital? Yes, that's a beautiful place - good drinking water - and there were quite a few patients there then. I want to get back to you, David. Were you married when you came here? No. When did you get married? I married (--) in '84, a school

teacher. When we married we didn't realize there were these children coming along, five of them so I had to go to work. *How many children do you have?* I have five, three girls and two boys. *Every once in a while, somebody will talk about the little red schoolhouse. Did any of your children go there?* Howard went there and it wasn't long before he moved out of there and went to Torres school. That's an old landmark there. *Was that the only school for grade school children or was that just one of them?* No there was the other one which I believe was (---). *And where would that have been?* The was just west of the now Torres school. That building still stands. *Is that the one that called the WPA Building?* No. I don't believe so. Your regular main WPA building is over by the Court House, isn't it? *Well, it was built by the WPA too, but there is a WPA building as I remember and then there is a third new building on the campus of the Torres school. It used to known as Garfield. What was Socorro like when you came here?* Well, could I say that in '35 the population was about 3500 and Albuquerque was 35,000 just to give you an idea how the two cities are growing. I've heard that Socorro is the oldest city in New Mexico being incorporated in 1882 and I've seen the papers up in City Hall when I was there. Socorro was just a small place, but real nice. We didn't have a lot of things that we have now like modern conveniences, like city gas. The water system? There's an old story about that. Before we got on City Council that is before Bursum - he was mayor about 20 years - the old administration could have bought Sedillo Springs and when we got on, all we were allowed to buy was 50% - half of it. Therefore we had to build some wells. But it's good water. *Did they test it at that time?* Oh yes, the County Health Nurse took care of that. The best water in New Mexico is (Mini?) and Socorro is second. *We're just a little bit low on fluorine, not very much and you always gt a nice seet look on their faces when you talk to the environmentalist about Socorro water. I was going to ask you too, how about the Sewage system. Did they have cesspool or did they have indoor bathrooms or when did they start putting in --.* There were very few indoor bathrooms, and it's an old, old septic tank down below the present post office and about three blocks toward the railroad out towards the river, and of course when we got in we got a new plant -- modern and that would take care of a population of 25,000. *But before this system was put in - what year was that?* About 1948. *Up until then a cesspool took care of all of the waste?* Yes, there only about 3,000 people, but the thing overflowed all the time. *There were drilled wells plus the water from Socorro Springs?* We get half of the flow that comes out of the mountains - the spring water - we get - in the summertime I'd say about half of the water supply comes from wells. *Have we experienced a water shortage such that we had to be careful or has Socorro always managed to hold on?* We haven't experienced since - I'd say, the Bursum group got in, prior to that it was very low pressure. You couldn't water your garden or grass. *You were telling me before that you've been on the City Council for 18 years, can you give me some idea of when you started on the City Council, who the members were, and what the problems were like.* I think I first went on in '48 and that was the time that they had the new administration and began to do things - paved streets - a new sewer system - street lights - and we bought out from (--) Downs? Which was butane gas and converted to natural gas. That was about '50. *Who are the men that were on the City Council when you first became a member?* Some of the key ones were Dr. Ben Aiken, Harold Olsen, Frank Bushman from the Tech, let me see (--) Harriet?. There were eight council members. *This is the same constituency that you have now?* Yes it is.----- Also flood

control. *Yes, that came in in '62. How did that come to pass?* Our mayor talked to the Corps of Engineers and they said if we put up so much money which was I believe about \$300,000 they would take care of the rest. And the attorney for the Corps of Engineers came to the Council meeting one time and asked are you people able to put up the money, he didn't think we has it. Mr. Bursum had got the Boetcher Co.? up in Denver where we had good credit. So this attorney sat there with his portfolio and everything and said, "Do you have the money?" And the mayor said, "Yes we do." And so the mayor with some papers, down at the bottom, with a check turned upside down took out the check and showed it to him. He was really surprised because he didn't thin we had the money. So we went ahead with our flood control. *You were talking about credit. Was it because there was very little employment here or was it because the incomes were all low because of the way people made their living, or what was it?* I don't want to say that's wrong, but it's ---- -, I'll say that. You have to manage the affairs of Socorro the same as you would for a business - on a business basis. *Now I was just wondering when we have very little industry when I first came here in 1962 we were just getting Eagle-Picher to come in Stallion Site and all of this brought more employment. How about Tech? How big was new Mexico Tech when you came here?* Well, I'll tell you there weren't very many buildings - just a few of the old ones. It's a long story how the Tech started and all which I shouldn't go into. Some of the things I may not know exactly --. *In a nutshell, what prompted the state fathers to move the school down here?* Well the people who owned this property down here gave it to the state to build a School of Mines as it was called then - for that only. Any time the school was moved out of here, then the property would go back to the heirs. *Do you know the names of any of the families?* I'm not sure whether it was Baca or Torres. *This was flood area at that time, too, wasn't it where the Tech is? I know my house is right up on the street, and my house is adobe and the (---) rock in the foundation so the house wouldn't wash away when the floods came* Like one time the floods were so bad here that you had to take a boat from the Depot - the passengers coming in on the train had to take a boat to come up to the Val Verde Hotel. *You were also Vice President for the first five years of the Socorro Electric Cooperative. Can you tell us something about that?* Well, the old New Mexico Public Service Company owned an electric facility here in Socorro and we bought them out. We made a price with the help of the REA and so we got along. It seemed like the government at that time gave us the money. I went to the first National Bank in Albuquerque one time to get \$20,000 - I told the Board I was going to be up there - and they said why don't you go ahead and get the 20,000 - so I went up there and said are we good for \$20,000? I gave them my credentials for the Socorro Electric Coop (number) twenty. They said oh yeah, you still have four million dollars credit if you want to use it. That shows you that REA helped. *Well, what was the purpose of REA?* Well it's Rural Electric Administration . It started under Roosevelt. It was to get electricity out to the rural areas. They would loan the money and then you had years to pay off. A lot of the towns, especially over in Texas when they got into this deal have already paid off. But they don't want you to pay off. That would put everybody out of business. *As long as we can get our electricity reasonably we are satisfied.* I believe electricity is cheaper now - kilowatts are cheaper than they were prior to our technical --*You were a very civic minded person all you life - I understand you were a Shriner also. Can you tell us something about the Shriners in New Mexico, specifically for Socorro?* Well, we had - first to be a Shriner you had to

belong to the Blue Lodge, they call it, at Socorro number nine over here on Leroy. And then to be a Shriner you either had to go the Ark Rite or the Scottish Rite. I chose the Scottish Rite. At Blue Lodge, I think we had about 10 members. And my number in the Shrine was 9009. That was years ago. That was just New Mexico. And I belonged to the Knights of Pythias which was founded, I think, by a Mason. Speaking of civic minded, I have been Vice President of the Chamber of Commerce. I worked for Rotarians for 27 years as Past President and Past Master at Socorro Masonic Lodge. *Can you remember the names of some of the people that were members of Shriners here in Socorro when you first joined?* Yes, there was Charlie Fowler, George Cook,----there was so many of them it's hard right off to say who they are -- Bobby Baldwin and (-- Birch there's Jaramillo Jr. and Sr. -- I would say in the neighborhood of 50 or 60. *How many of you are still living? You were 35 or 36?* Bobby Baldwin and Charlie Fowler. ---- *How about the Knights of Pythias? Were they more or less the same membership?* Maybe 50% of the members of Knight of Pythias were Masons. The Knights of Pythias, you can be asked to belong to that. In the Masons we don't ask anybody - it's based on the Bible mostly. You read it, you knocked on the door, but we don't go around knocking on the door for you. *Now you're a church member too. Can you tell us something about the Methodist Church in Socorro?* Well, when I came here we were meeting at various places and finally we picked up enough nerve to build our own church. So we built St. Paul and then that's just about paid off now. *Approximately what year was the St. Paul Church built?* In 1940, and that's when we started the new bank. I had several trips to see the bank (---) in Santa Fe, a fellow by the name of Sellers, he's been replaced since. To get the bank started - I took quite a few shares of stock but I sold mine to Frank Aufill. *You surely have been busy in many of the activities in the community.* We (-- the bank in Belen and Albuquerque, so I was very glad to get a bank for Socorro. The old one went under in about the time San Marcial was flooded. *There are two Methodist churches here and this a relatively small community, how do you explain that we should have two churches?* Well originally it was Harwood - Spanish church so they built a new church in a new building and it's all paid off. *They still have Spanish services there, don't they?* Oh yes. *I understand that when one of the Guitierrez' was married they were married by the Spanish ---.* Yes. Usually the minister in the Spanish church speaks in Spanish which is Plainer, and I can understand better than a lot of the local people can. *We've all become quite ecumenical in the past several years - more than I ever thought we would, haven't we?* It's really an encouraging sign that we are all appreciating and all worship God in our own way and have respect for another's religion. *Is there anything I have not mentioned that you feel people should know about?* --- I don't know - there's lots of things I haven't though much about it or made any notes. *I remember years ago my uncle was explaining the four gospel, Matthew Mark, Luke, and John and he said each one is a little different and each one is correct, but it would be as if you were looking at four sides of a building, and each person sees one side, and when you get them all together you have a composite that really makes sense . I appreciate talking to you ---.* Well thank you.