

7-12-1968

## Interview no. 42

Kate Porcher

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### Recommended Citation

Interview with Kate Porcher by Leon C. Metz, 1968, "Interview no. 42," Institute of Oral History, University of Texas at El Paso.

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UNIVERSITY OF TEXAS AT EL PASO  
INSTITUTE OF ORAL HISTORY

INTERVIEWEE: Kate Porcher  
INTERVIEWER: Leon C. Metz  
PROJECT: El Paso area history; New Mexico history  
DATE OF INTERVIEW: July 12, 1968  
TERMS OF USE: Unrestricted  
  
TAPE NO.: \_\_\_\_\_  
TRANSCRIPT NO.: 42  
TRANSCRIBER: \_\_\_\_\_  
DATE TRANSCRIBED: \_\_\_\_\_

BIOGRAPHICAL SYNOPSIS OF INTERVIEWEE:

SUMMARY OF INTERVIEW:

Life in Roswell and Las Cruces, New Mexico during the early part of the 20th Century; early El Paso, especially the Logan family and Capt. Greet.

Transcript; 12 pages.

Mrs. Kate Porcher

Interviewed by Leon Metz and Mary Cleveland

July 12, 1968

Where did you come from originally?

I came from Pennsylvania. My father had a farm and a mill up in a little town in the Allegheny Mountains, near Vermont.

How did you come to El Paso?

I was visiting in California as a young girl and I met my first husband there. His name was Francis Porcher. I went back home but I never could forget him. After seven years I went back to California to take some training in New Hospital for over two years. I met him in Albuquerque for the day and that was it. He was in the Forestry Service so we lived in the mountains in New Mexico and Arizona. Then we decided to get out of the Forestry Service and we bought a ranch in La Mesa. He was in the Forestry Service in 1915 through 1917. We were in a little Mexican town called Rowe, between Las Vegas and Pecos, New Mexico. There was nothing there but an old store and we lived in an old saloon. During Prohibition, we had a two-story house with a trap door to go upstairs. We had some Montgomery Ward furniture and an oil stove. Our bread was thrown off the train as it went through; the store didn't have bread. I had two Bostons (dogs) and I took care of them.

The windows wouldn't open and the doors wouldn't lock. But I had the dogs. I usually went with my husband but sometimes it got a little rough and he wouldn't let me go. He was a ranger and a supervisor. We were taken into Albuquerque for the winter. Then we went to Flagstaff, at the foot of the San Francisco. We would go on horse back rides. My Bostons loved it; they would chase coyote and deer.

Did you experience any big fires?

No, I didn't, the only fire that he went to for any length of time was up on Mt. Graham. He was an easterner but he knew a lot about the woods. He was not a well man. My father wanted him to quit the service and go to Monterey and live in a house that we had inherited from my aunt but he couldn't do that; he had to be doing something. So, we bought this ranch; we moved there in November, 1917 and he died in June, 1918. I was left with the ranch. I didn't know a thing about farming and I couldn't speak a word of Spanish and those Mexicans didn't use English much. They didn't like me too much either. I was much younger and they didn't like being told what to do by a girl who didn't know what she was doing. They tried to accuse me of shooting their pig with a 30-30. I didn't know the difference between a stab wound and a shot. The Mexicans would not take up for me for anything in the world. They found the pig in the drainage ditch. A man came the next morning and told me that the pig had been stabbed instead of shot. I didn't even own a 30-30; I had a 25-35. That

particular man gave me a lot of trouble. His name was José. Some of the Anglos worked it out for me. Evidently, he was letting his pigs and cows into my corn field and my Bostons chased that pig into the water and he drowned. When José found him, he stabbed him but he was dead before he was stabbed. So after a little bit of that I went to a lawyer in Las Cruces. His name was Lewellyn. They said he would do anything you paid him for, if you wanted him to go down and black Jose's eyes he'd do it; as long as he got paid, he'd do it. He was a fine-looking man; he and his father were old timers there. The Mexicans left me like flies in a hurry when the flu came. I had to learn to milk cows in a hurry. My foreman came down with the epidemic first and all the hands left. I didn't have any water because my pump wouldn't work. Nobody would come near me for that. I got the horses and the cows out to the canal and then I couldn't get them back. That was the only time I cried. That was too much. All they did was stand around the fence. All I had to do was leave the gate open and they would have come on back, but I was stupid. Finally an old cowpuncher came along and got them back for me. I finally turned the ranch back after three years when I didn't have a penny. I came down to El Paso to go to business college.

You mentioned Las Cruces and this lawyer named Lewellyn. Was that Major Lewellyn?

I think that was his father. The last thing José tried to do was collect money from me for my sow that he had penned up. He said that

she had rooted up his garden. She had some piglets but they were weaned, which he didn't know. He wanted me to pay the damage or he would hold my pig. That is when I went to see Mr. Lewellyn.

What kind of a town was Las Cruces back then?

I don't remember the population but it was all Mexicans; and they all wore badges. They were all officers. My husband's nephew came out to live with me at that time. We went to Las Cruces one night to the movie. We only had one light on the car. This is just a sample of how they operated. We didn't get into town before we were stopped. My nephew was driving and the officer told us to park right there and it would be all right and he would not give us a ticket. But when we came back, we had a ticket. He was supposed to appear the next day. The ticket had his name on it. I wouldn't let him go. It was my car and I wanted him to stay and irrigate anyway. Naturally, I was very hot-tempered in those days. I met a man I knew in Las Cruces and he wanted to know why I was out so early and so I told him. He wanted to go with me. He said that the Justice of the Peace would fine me everything I had if I went in there with that temper. I didn't want him to go but he insisted. I was very independent. When we got in, the JP was talking to a farmer and his son. Mr. Hess said, "See, that's what happens when you argue with the JP." Finally the JP looked at the clock and he said, "What is it, Mr. Hess?" My friend said that I had a summons at 10:00. He said, "Well, I'm looking for a boy driving without

lights; the lady may go." So the lady left and the boy never appeared. That's the way they operated. They were very mixed-up.

How about the streets in Las Cruces?

I don't remember if they were paved or not. I remember when we came to El Paso it was very bumpy, from paved roads to gravel roads.

So, you drove into town? How far was it?

It was 32 miles from La Mesa to El Paso and about 15 to Las Cruces. It was easier to come to El Paso to buy a load of bread than to go to Las Cruces.

What were your first impressions of El Paso?

It was very interesting. I came here to go to business school, the International Business College. It was run by Robert Mullins' uncle. After I got out, I went to work for \$7.50 a week at the Two Republics Life Insurance Company. It was in the Two Republics Building. I was a stenographer. I was sent to Robert W. Page's advertising agency. I learned to write ads. I got into the old Anderson Investment Company where the Cortez Hotel is now. It had board sidewalks then. I married my husband's nephew, so I've been a Porcher twice.

Were any of the revolutions still going on in México when you came

here?

No, I think it was 1911 when there was a border revolution. When I was in California, I heard of trouble down here, but whether it was a revolution or not, I don't know. I was over at Presidio (fort) San Francisco. They were having a dance and here we sat in all our finery when all the men were called down to México with General Pershing to chase Villa. So we never got our dance. My first husband was living down here in El Paso then. He had had a breakdown with TB. He was staying with his cousins. They had quite a revolution out here then. They had the Charleston Light Dragoons out here even, so it must have been a big one.

What outfit was your husband with?

He was not with an outfit; he was here recovering from TB. He had a breakdown in California. He had been in a sanitarium after I met him. He wrote me about the revolution. There was a very interesting article. Nat Lucero was manager of the gas company in Juárez at that time and Villa was coming to take Juárez. Lucero took his assistant, and they came up to this adobe house, he told the man why he had come. And the man said, "So you want to turn off my gas, huh?" "Yes, Villa is coming to take Juárez and we have to turn off everybody's gas," he said. "So, I am VILLA." Nat said, "I turned around and my helper was long gone, he had recognized him immediately." He was nowhere to be found. The way Nat told it, it was really



comical. So, I don't know if he turned off the gas or not.

Did you ever do any travelling down in México?

I don't know México; all I know is Juárez.

What was Juárez like when you first came here?

Well, it had some gambling, but I don't remember too much. It was all adobe houses. They were very good at charging you for things you didn't do, just like now.

Did you ever gamble over there?

Not very much; I was a loser.

Did you know Harry Mitchell?

No, but didn't he have the Mint? I do remember the Mint. Then there was Frank Dispensa, he owned an Italian restaurant, the Capri. He bought some lots down in the valley when I was working for the real estate company. Then there were the Logan sisters. I had a chance to go over to the insurance part of the company, but Mr. Henderson wouldn't let me because he said that I was the only one who could get along with the Logans. They had inherited Logan Heights from their father. He had been a colonel here in the old

days. Commander McKinney thinks his name was George and I think it was Tom. All the streets were named for the family out there. They all had Saint before their names. Saint Grace, etc. There were three unmarried sisters, Evelyn, Grace and Mabel. One kept care of the house, one kept track of the bookkeeping; there was a salesman at our office that fought her all the way. I just did my job and that's how come we got along. The first thing she did was find out which Porcher I was. One day the manager said to her, "You and Mrs. Porcher get along fine, don't you?" She said, "Of course we do, we know the same people". That was the way of the Logan sisters.

What were the Logan sisters like?

They weren't girls; they were grown women. They were Theopartists. (?) They didn't eat meat. They were the only ones that I knew of here. Surely there were more though. They were originally Episcopalian. I knew three more in Monterey. They were Australians. My husband and I ate at their house. They served us lamb chops, but they didn't eat any. Logan Heights was nothing then. There was a bonus paid to the first man who built a house out there. I didn't think I'd ever forget that man's name; he hasn't been dead very long. They built the first permanent house out there. He was an Army man. A lot of service men bought out there. I remember some of the people who lived out there. One day, a woman came in and said that she had to make the payment herself because her husband had gone AWOL and he was in the stockade.

You said the Logan women ran the family?

Yes, the brothers didn't have any say. I guess the sons of Army officers had a rough time if they didn't go on into the Army. They had no standing whatsoever.

Do you remember how much the lots at Logan Heights cost?

No, I just remember that it was five dollars down and five dollars a month. It was fortunate that that was all I had to know, because I didn't know any bookkeeping.

How far was Logan Heights from the base?

The base was in the same place it is now.

Do you recall any prominent Army people?

No. There was a general who took my riding horse after I left the ranch and he was going to try to sell him for me. I don't remember his name, but he was a very prominent Virginian.

Was there a man shortage here then?

No, but not everyone wore a uniform; that was the prestige. A lot of the society girls married the officers out there. Fort Bliss was the center of the social life. I was not socially inclined here because I was always working.

Was the bulk of the enlisted men made up of Negro soldiers?

I never did see any Negroes out there, except in World War II. During that war, the soldiers had a lot of trouble with the town/because it/ was geared for officers and they would have nothing to do with the enlisted men. The people from my church would take them home for Sunday dinner. I only took enlisted men to my house; I wouldn't take any officers. I never tried to introduce them to girls because I didn't know anything about their backgrounds. Some of them were very nice boys. I would take them to the valley to the Porcher's ranchero. They loved to go. You know the Community Center? That was part of the Porcher ranch; they donated that land.

Were they the ones that had the vineyards?

That might have been in the early days. They always had orchards. Riverside was part of their ranch.

Did you know about the Tenderloin district?

I don't know about that.

Did you know Captain Greet?

Everybody knew him. Besides, his wife's sister married one of the Porchers. She's 88 now. Her daughter teaches at UTEP now, Eleanor

Cotton Hall.

What kind of a man was Captain Greet?

He was a gentleman from a old southern family. I think he was captain of the Police Department. He was an alcoholic, but I never saw anything but the best side of him. The first ranch that the Porchers had was where Tigua is now. Carolina Drive is named for the family. They sold it later. They wanted to name it for a daughter-in-law who had died, but the family would not stand for that.

Do you recall any of the politicians in El Paso?

I don't remember.

Was there a lot of ring and anti-ring trouble?

I don't know.

Did you say there was another set of Porchers in the valley?

Yes, John Stoney Porcher. John for Army people and Stoney for school.

Did you mention the Cadwalladers a minute ago?

Yes.

Are there any of them left around here?

His daughter and granddaughter are still down there. Channing Brown is the name. I don't believe she would talk to anybody. She was a very pretty girl but very unhappy. She's quite a recluse. The Cadwalladers had a place adjoining the Porcher ranch at Tigua. I'm sorry that I couldn't tell you anything interesting. I knew some of those people but I don't remember anything about them.