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## Interview no. 79

Aileen H. Hague

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UNIVERSITY OF TEXAS AT EL PASO

INSTITUTE OF ORAL HISTORY

INTERVIEWEE: Aileen Hague Hill  
INTERVIEWER: Jo Ann Hovious  
PROJECT: El Paso History  
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BIOGRAPHICAL SYNOPSIS OF INTERVIEWEE:

Daughter of James P. Hague, El Paso's first  
District Attorney.

SUMMARY OF INTERVIEW:

Biography; early social customs, leading families in  
El Paso; the Mexican Revolution; career of her father.

1 hour ( 3 3/4 tape speed); 18 pages.

Aileen Hague Hill  
by Jo Ann Hovious  
April 10, 1973

JH: Now let's begin. I'd like to ask you just a little background material, when and where you were born.

AH: Well, my father was born, I think, someplace in Missouri, I don't remember exactly. I should know, and I think it is in that Out of the Desert book that Owen White wrote. He has quite a history of my father in there, as he has many old timers. He was a self-made man in that, as a boy his mother was married again and he and his stepfather were not too friendly, so he ran away from home. But he wanted to be educated. He lived with his older sister. He came out to El Paso very young, before he was twenty-one. And before he came, he fell in love with my mother, who was Flora Brinck of Jefferson, Texas. She was convent educated. She went into this school expecting to be a nun. Of course, in that early day public schools weren't too good. To get an education they had to more or less go to private school. Well, they fell in love. She was 16 and he was not quite 21 when they married.

They came to El Paso over land, of course, because there was no railroads. He wanted to be a lawyer. He was a great reader and read everything he could get ahold of. He really educated himself, but through Jefferson Davis, who was then Governor of Texas, he got...well he didn't exactly go to college but he recognized that he had a very brilliant young man and he helped him all he could. So my father then came on to El Paso over land-- a very hard, dreadful trip. They lived a few months about where Kress' is now in a little adobe house. The town was mostly Mexicans. Then they moved to what is the Civic Center today. It was the home of Don Luis Cardiz--they bought it from him--a very beautiful old Spanish home similar to the Magoffin home today. [It was] built around a patio. That was considered at that time, South Santa Fe Street, a very nice place to live. They lived there

many years and raised part of their family, although I was the second one born in what later was the brick house built on the same property. It was the first brick house in El Paso. It was very small compared to the other one.

JH: Was it a two story house, Mrs. Hill, the brick house?

AH: No, it was just a one story. Later the property was sold and the family moved. But at that time, the family was mostly raised there. My father's career was cut in the bud, so to speak, because he developed tuberculosis. They called it consumption. He died at 42 years old. Well, before he died, he became very prominent in El Paso. He was considered a very fine lawyer and he was El Paso's first city attorney and district attorney. He had his own law practice first with Judge Falby, an old-timer of El Paso. Later, they took in Judge Coldwell, who had married my mother's youngest sister. Judge Coldwell was with the firm until he died. He lived many years later, Coldwell did. My father was offered, just before he died, a big firm in San Francisco. He was supposed to take charge, and of course he never could. He practiced his law in El Paso, the little he could, well, from 21 to forty-two.

He was a very careful dresser. In that day and time, people didn't care too much how they looked or anything. You could always see him coming down the street with his gold cane and a silk handkerchief in his pocket, and very well-groomed. Well, he raised a large family. There were eight of us--two boys and six girls. When my youngest sister was just two is when he died, and my mother was a widow all those years. She lived to be 56. We lived down on 105 South Santa Fe Street, which is now the Civic Center.

JH: In what year were you born, Mrs. Hill?

AH: Well, I'm 85, so...1888, March 16th. I have two younger sisters. They are both living. One lives in Florida and the other one in San Bernadino, California. I still have one brother living, five years older than I. He lives in San Bernadino. The rest of us are, you know, all gone. My oldest sister married in the Army. Her husband died as a retired general. And my second sister married in the Army. Her husband died very young as a captain in the Army. My sister Clara never married, but she lived in El Paso all her life. Then I married in the Army and, of course, my husband died as a retired colonel. My second younger sister married a newspaperman of Jacksonville, Florida. She is living but he is not. She has one daughter living. Then my youngest sister married a businessman from México. He's been dead many years. So that is the family as it is today.

JH: What year was it then that your father died? Do you remember that?

AH: No, I don't. I wish I did. I have a book written about him by Owen White. That gives the date of his birth and his death and of my mother.

JH: Do you remember your father very well?

AH: Very slightly, because I was not quite seven when he died. I would be seven in March and he died in December.

JH: It must have been around 1895 then?

AH: Yes, I was not quite seven years old. I remember him looking like...we used to think of him as a dandy.

JH: Was he rather short?

AH: Well, he wasn't tall. He was about average, I think, but slender.

JH: What was his temperament and his personality like? Was he quiet or...?

AH: No, no. He was kind of on the hot-headed side.

JH: Did he lose his temper?

AH: Well, I think he did. As I say, in the home he didn't. But he was a criminal lawyer and he had so many difficult cases that when he got on the stand he was pretty hot-headed. Now, that is more or less hearsay, because I never saw him.

JH: You weren't there. Do you remember anything much being said in the family about his...you know he was quite active in the city government. He was an alderman several times. Do you remember any stories? He used to have a great many conflicts with Allan Blacker. Now, do you ever remember hearing about Blacker? I know the two of them seemed to always disagree on things.

AH: Well, of course, Blacker was one of the early lawyers. I don't think he and my father agreed on too many things, but it would be more or less what I heard in the family. I was too young to really know. But I remember talking about a case that he tried in Juárez about stealing money. I think that's all in detail in Out of the Desert by Owen White. Like all lawyers have, especially criminal lawyers, I imagine he had a great many enemies.

JH: Do you think his life might not have been in danger, sometimes? He dabbled in politics so much, too.

AH: Yes, it was. They wanted him to run for Governor of Texas at one time, but he didn't feel that he could take it so he didn't accept.

JH: Do you think he knew a great many people who were in state politics?

AH: Yes, he did. And right now, today in Austin, they have placards of the old lawyers. He's one of them that has been written up. He was really a brilliant man and a brilliant speaker. He held his court spellbound when he got up to talk. I did hear that many times. But he, like all those people, he had enemies.

JH: Do you remember many of the families that lived around you all down there

on South Santa Fe?

AH: Well, no. We were one of the exclusive, I would say, families. We had living near us Dr. Alexander, who was our doctor. My mother had a great many friends in Juárez at that time, the Mexican women, and she used to go over there to the balls and things of that kind. She was considered quite a beauty. She'd made quite a hit over there with the Mexican population. Most of our friends lived around Magoffin. They were the old friends that lived there. The Magoffins were one of them. Then there were the Sejas, who lived in México, and Alexanders. Then Dr. Reese later in life was my mother's doctor. She died of cancer. He was her doctor for many years. Then El Paso kind of moved. In the early day it was around Santa Fe Street and Chihuahua, and along in there. It later moved on Magoffin and in that part of town, and still later North Mesa.

JH: When you all finally did move from that area was it after your father died?

AH: No. My mother lived and died on South Santa Fe. The house was sold after she died. Then the family moved up into Sunset Heights.

JH: Who took care of all of you after your mother died?

AH: Well, you see, coming from a big family like we did, there was my sister, Clara, who was old enough to take over, so to speak. And my other two sisters, Mrs. Cochran and Mrs. Lovar, both married in the Army and were gone. The youngest ones were at home--Jim, my brother, who was five years older than I and then my two younger sisters. We were still in school and we had to be taken care of. So my sister Clara was unmarried and she took over the management of the house. Later, she went to the Philippine Islands, which we insisted that she do with my sister, Kate. She was stationed in the Philippines and we thought Clara ought to get away. So, we were in high

school, the two older sisters, and my brother Jim was working for a real estate firm here. So, we took over ourselves, so to speak.

JH: Didn't the Coldwells live down near you?

AH: No. You see, my mother was the oldest of the Brinck Family and my Aunt Stella, who was later Mrs. Coldwell, was the youngest. She came out here to visit my sister and Judge Coldwell came out here as a very young man. My father taught him law. [Judge Coldwell] lived at my mother's house for seven years as a bachelor. His family didn't live here but then part of his family came out later, as one of them was Collector of Customs. Judge Coldwell was educated by my father and he came into his law firm. And when my father died, he more or less took over.

JH: Didn't the rest of the Brincks move to El Paso?

AH: Not all of them. My grandmother moved out here. And this is the first home we had, the one built around the patio; my mother let her have it and she took in roomers. She lived part of the time with my Aunt Stella, Mrs. Coldwell, but not very long because she and the judge didn't get along too well. So she moved into this place of her own until she died.

JH: Do you remember Judge Coldwell? What was he like?

AH: Why, certainly. He lived to be 72 years old. Yes, I remember him well. In fact, his daughter Rena and I grew up together. We were the same age and great pals. Judge Coldwell was an old crank if I ever met one. (Laughter) He was just born that way. He raised a big family here. There are still a lot of Coldwells around. Well, Julie Collins, the oldest of the family, she and I still talk on the telephone about every day. She's a decrepit person. She's blind and can hardly walk. She's older than I. She has two sons here: Bill Collins, who is a lawyer, and then Hamilton with the



insurance business.

JH: Can you think of anything in particular that you can remember about Judge Coldwell? Any funny little incidents that might have happened? Now, did he and your father agree politically? Do you know?

AH: Well, I can't think of anything in particular. The person to talk to would be Mrs. Collins.

JH: I'll have to see about talking to her. How about the Sweeneys?

AH: Judge Sweeney was more or less a contemporary of my father. He was a little younger like Judge Coldwell was. They still lived in the same time and later on he and Coldwell formed a partnership. That was after my father died. Mrs. Sweeney and I were great friends until she died. I never did understand how that firm ran. They were both hot-headed. Well, I'll tell you, in that day and time I think they more or less had to fight their way. Things today are kind of laid out and they are not as hard as they were in the early days. Then they had here the Mexican population to deal with, which we still have. I understand that Hervey's going to have a hard time with Bencomo. I haven't heard any results, but I'd like to see Hervey in. He was in before and he made a very good mayor and he got us out of debt.

JH: Well, politics in El Paso have always been pretty rough sometimes. I'm interested in that early period because it's kind of hard to figure out what was going on. Everyone that I have talked to feels that the divisions within the community were really quite great at some time over politics, and this really affected the lives of not just the men who were involved, but the children, too.

AH: Yes, yes. You talk to the old-timers and they are still bitter. It's almost like Civil War people. There is a bitter feeling there that is never

going to change, I don't think.

JH: It's very interesting.

AH: Yes, it is. Now, I belong to the Pan-American Round Table, and I have for many, many years. In fact, many years back they wanted me to be a Director but I couldn't afford to be. But the feeling between Juárez and El Paso is pleasant. It was, in mother's day, very pleasant. They used to go over there for all the dances. Their big dances were held at the Customhouse. But now, you know, there's a division.

JH: Do you think it might have been the Revolution that caused all this trouble? Do you remember when Pancho Villa was running around here?

AH: Yes, I remember it very well. I was teaching school down at Aoy. I taught the first grade before I married. Pancho Villa crossed over. As a matter of fact, my husband was then a 2nd Lieutenant stationed at Columbus, New Mexico with the 13th Cavalry. I think it was Colonel Hatfield was the commanding officer. He later went into México with the Punitive Expedition with General Pershing. They were all along the border at that time. In fact, many of my old friends married Army officers that were stationed here along the border. A whole bunch of us married in the Army. And so General Pershing took the 13th Cavalry and other regiments down there. And they were stationed at Colonia Dublán right along the border, which was a Mormon town. They were entertained by Mormons. The Mormon women would all wait on the tables, all the different wives. In fact, my husband wrote a paper that's up there at the college now, The Punitive Expedition into México, by James R. Hill. Major McMasters, over here, writes a good deal on the early days of Fort Bliss. He's a good deal younger. He's a retired Major and he's written for the Historical Society.

My father was a great Episcopalian and an intimate friend of Parson Tays. In fact, it was through his influence, partly, that he came to El Paso. And of course, the Episcopalians celebrate that event. And they had a dinner not too many years ago in which they invited me to attend as a special guest because I was the daughter of James P. Hague. It was out at the El Paso Country Club. I'm a Catholic.

JH: Well, your mother was a Catholic, wasn't she?

AH: Yes, she was raised in a convent. Sitting at the table near me was Father Buchanan of St. Joseph's. They had a great many old-timers that were here in the early days. Judge Fountain's daughter was there. My father and Judge Fountain were great friends. And it was a tragedy when he was lost with his little son.

JH: Yes, a terrible, terrible tragedy. Did you attend the Catholic Church when you were growing up?

AH: Yes, we were raised Catholic. We all went to the Immaculate Conception. Father Rory, who was the Father there, married me when I was married. My husband was not a Catholic. He was raised a Methodist, but he got a dispensation. My husband, at that time, was commandant of cadets at Texas A & M. He made a \$100 a month extra pay, and we could use it. He came here for Christmas in 1914, and we decided on Monday and married the following Thursday so I could go back to College Station with him. And my going back was quite interesting. In some way the cadets heard that we was getting in at three o'clock in the morning at College Station. They had the band meet us at the train. They serenaded us all the rest of the night and took pictures. So that was our entrance to A & M.

JH: I'd like to talk some more about the Revolution. How did people in El Paso

feel about it?

AH: Well, as I say, I was young, I was teaching school. We were right there on the border. So, Mrs. Corbett, an old El Paso teacher, was principal. They didn't dismiss school but they let us all out to look. The shots were coming over the border because Villa got gay and shot into El Paso. Many people got up on the rooftops to look at this Revolution going on. Then of course, the troops came down from Columbus and that's when the 13th Cavalry came down and later went into México with General Pershing. Pershing was at our house many, many times. He and my sister, Mrs. Cochran, were great friends. They used to have, in those days, what you would call teas, but they served mostly coffee. But it was not a drinking party. It wasn't like our cocktail party of today. The men would come all dressed in their fancy uniforms. I can't tell you how many times Pershing was at our house and also many of the officers that were stationed at Fort Bliss.

JH: Was this in the evening?

AH: No, this was in the late afternoon, about five o'clock. And someone especially interesting at that time was a Mrs. Weber. Mr. Weber was the German Consul to México. His wife led a colorful life. You maybe have heard of Mrs. Max Weber. Well, she was a great friend of the family's. She used to cross the border and come over here. She was a very handsome woman with a beautiful figure. She was always there. Well, you heard of the Neff family? Well, Mrs. Neff, her maiden name was Beall, she was there. And Nanny Beall, who was later Mrs. J.S. Williams, he was a banker, and Mrs. U.S. Stewart and Zue Haper. One of her daughters was married to Max Taylor of the Army, who was Chief of Staff of the Army.

JH: There must have been a great deal of entertaining at that time, or really

since you were a child?

AH: Well, yes. My family almost had an open house. People would come all the time. At that time, my father had a good deal of money. He at one time owned the entire Rim Road. Now, we don't own a piece of it.

JH: He bought some property over around Van Horn. He evidently didn't limit his investments to the El Paso area.

AH: Well, he kind of helped people around for one thing. You know, he brought the railroads into El Paso. That was the Southern Pacific in 1880. Father's firm got the land. He later lost the land through Judge Coldwell's mismanagement.

JH: Oh, so that's how it happened. I ran across some property, in an 1889 paper, on South Santa Fe Street that was lost through non-payment of taxes.

AH: That was it.

JH: Tell me about it.

AH: Well, Jay Gould, who was a millionaire, wanted to buy the railroad property for the Southern Pacific and bring it into El Paso, which he did. He did all of his business through my father. Well, in order to bring it in, my father donated land right through the center of town. He donated that land as a special gift with the understanding that if it stopped being used as railroad property it would revert back to the heirs. That's when Judge Coldwell lost it. The railroad fought it. They wanted to keep it because it was very valuable land. I guess it's worth millions today.

Coldwell wasn't an especially good businessman and he lost it. It was sad and we always felt that it was bad because we didn't have any more land.

JH: At the time that your father died was the family fairly secure financially?

AH: When my father died we were. My uncle had a way that when taxes would

come along, he would sell another piece of property to pay those taxes. That way we lost a lot of property. At one time, I guess, my father was the richest man in town.

JH: Yes, he was. I've seen the tax rolls. He had a great deal of money about the middle 1880s. But toward the end of the decade he had lost...I didn't know whether it was the homestead?

AH: Well, we didn't lost the homestead. It was on South Santa Fe Street. It didn't occupy the whole block, they tore it down and built this brick house. That was his mistake and a very sad one. But anyway, it was done. Well, that left the corner property still ours, but it was for sale. A big grocery store moved there--Warrant's. You see, later that became business property. Stevens, the realtor Stevens, bought it.

JH: Now, this is where the house had been located and they just tore it down? Do you have any idea why it was torn down?

AH: Well, they thought a brick house was better than an adobe house. It was really mismanagement.

JH: Well, do you think your father was a good businessman?

AH: No, I don't think he was a particular good businessman.

JH: Was he at all moody?

AH: Well, my memory is not that good. I remember that he was very strict. We as children always had many servants and we never ate at the big table with the family. The children had to eat separately, we had our own table. I guess because of our table manners or something.

JH: Well, Mrs. Hill, did your mother and father come from cultured backgrounds?

AH: Oh, yes. My mother was a brilliant pianist and my sister, Mrs. Cochran, is as good a pianist as my sister Mrs. Elliot in Jacksonville. Mrs. Elliot

has written an entire mass. It was played this last Easter and they invited her to come in a wheelchair to listen to the mass. It was in the biggest Catholic Church in Jacksonville. Her daughter, in turn, is a brilliant pianist who plays for the Detroit Symphony many times as a soloist. My family are musical.

JH: In your father's family or your mother's family, were any of them college educated or anything like that?

AH: I doubt it. I don't think in that day and time they did too much of that.

JH: You don't know much about either one of the families?

AH: Well, you see, my father ran away from home, he did not like his stepfather. I understand that his father was a brilliant man, too. He was a minister. They were Episcopalians. My maternal grandfather was a musician in Norway. My grandparents were born in Norway. He was the leader of an orchestra. My grandmother was uneducated.

JH: Wasn't there a Brinck that was a grocer in El Paso?

AH: Yes, for a very short time. That was my mother's brother. His name was Phillip. He was a wholesale grocer. That man was very interesting. He made three complete fortunes and lost them. At one time he was a mining engineer and lost everything there, and then he was a grocer and lost everything. He has his grocery on South Overland. Well, he never married. Let me tell you something funny about that. He was a staid old bachelor but he was engaged to marry a very devout Catholic. He met her here or something when she said she wanted to go to confession. She went to confession and was in the confessional so long that he thought if she had that many sins, he wasn't interested and he walked away. (Laughter) He never married. He was always the one we called on to help. Then when oil was

discovered, he invested in oil and lost there.

JH: Well, back to your father. We were talking about the property there at the corner when the old house was torn down. You said the real estate man, Horace Stevens, bought it from the estate.

AH: Yes, then he had a grocery store there. He didn't run it, he rented it to a man by the name of Lawrence. It was successful and of course it lowered the value of our property as homes. Then, across the street, there was the Longwell stables. All of that lowered our value. So the family sold that property when my mother died, and moved up to the Sunset Heights area. We moved to East Nevada Street. My sister, Mrs. Cochran, when her husband died, came home to live there. She had two daughters, one of them is Mrs. Harron, who now lives in Washington, the wife of a Lieutenant General in the Army. She has two colonel sons.

JH: You were saying that you remember eating away from the main table. Did your parents entertain?

AH: Yes, lavishly. They were considered a very fine host and hostess. They had many parties there. The house was furnished very nicely. They brought much of their furniture overland, before there were railroads. My mother had the first piano in El Paso. It was a Weber Grand. There was another one similar to it in the Magoffin home. This was furniture that my parents got in St. Louis after they were married. She was a very cultured woman and he was, too--a dandy.

JH: Do you think, since he was like this, that there might have been people that didn't like him for that reason?

AH: Oh, yes, he had a lot of enemies.

JH: He was almost out of place here.



AH: He definitely was out of place, in education and looks, dress. I remember this much about him as a little girl. When he left in the morning he always had a clean white silk handkerchief in his pocket and his goldheaded cane. If his shoes would get the least bit of dirt on them, he would stoop down and clean them off with his silk handkerchief.

JH: Do you have any idea why he would choose El Paso to come to?

AH: Adventure. I don't think he knew anything about it. I think he was just an adventurous youth. He was not quite 21 when he was made County Attorney.

JH: Do you have any idea how he happened to get down here?

AH: Well, when he ran away from home, he lived with his sister. She was an educated woman. She probably helped him along. He went to a very small college called McKenzie College. It's no longer in existence. And with that and his own efforts, he got a law degree.

JH: Was that college in Texas?

AH: Yes. Then El Paso was wild and woolly and no railroad and I guess it just fascinated him as a young man. It was something different.

JH: Well, I wonder if he liked it?

AH: He evidently did. He loved it.

JH: Do you think his law practice was fairly lucrative?

AH: Yes, I'm sure it was. He just decided that he was going to invest in real estate and he did. That's where the money was made. He should have kept it but he didn't. He lost a lot of it by not paying taxes. I think, too, the family after my father died lost it by mismanagement through Judge Coldwell, after he died. Coldwell was no businessman and why he chose him I do not know.

JH: Coldwell was a Democrat and your father was a Republican?

AH: Yes, that's one reason why he was defeated for Governor of Texas--because he ran on a Republican ticket. It was just his views. He decided that's what he thought. He was a man you couldn't change easily.

JH: I have gathered that, too. I am interested at some of the stormy scenes that took place at the city council meetings.

AH: Oh, yes.

JH: He really sounds like he was an extremely domineering type person, that he was very strong and possible too strong.

AH: Yes, he was. He made enemies, lots of enemies.

JH: Well, perhaps he and Coldwell just came together because at one time they were practically the only attorneys here in El Paso.

AH: Well, not only that but the fact that my father supported him so many years when he lived in the house with him. Seven years is quite a long time. In the developing years he depended on my father. He didn't pay board.

JH: I wonder how your mother felt about her brother-in-law?

AH: Well, in the early days, the houses were more or less open to everybody. You didn't shut people out, you helped them. It wasn't exclusive like it is today. At that day and time, they came in--travelers and all that. They were accepted and they were treated as part of the family. Of course, he was a stranger, a young fellow that wanted to study law. I know years later, on Christmas, I can't tell you how many Mexicans came to our house that my mother gave baskets to at Christmas with food.

JH: Do you remember your mother going from the house to help people or anything like that?

AH: Yes, we had what they called a Victoria that you rode around in. You had the coachman and the driver sitting up on the high seat and you sat below.

We used to go to church and my mother would stop on the way back and go deliver packages and things like that.

JH: That sounds like a pretty fancy carriage for El Paso.

AH: It was, for that day and time. We used to have the old streetcar come around. It used to pass in front of our house with the man driving the mule. The old Mexican driver used to be tired by the time he got to our house and he wanted to rest under the shade. We had Chinaberry trees. So, one day, my sister, Mrs. Elliot, she's two years younger than I, said, "Come on, let's take the car over to Juárez." She was a tomboy. So, she got up and drove the mule and I collected the fare. We rode all the way over to Juárez and back. When we returned that old man was awake and boy was he mad! He chased us with his long whip that he used on the mule clear down the street, trying to hit our legs. But we didn't keep the fare, we left it for him. We just made the trip. We did things like that.

Then, they used to deliver our wood. We had a fireplace in every room. There was no such thing as a furnace. They used to deliver the wood on the little donkeys and we'd take the donkeys and go riding. Well, that would make them mad, too. Then they would come over from Juárez with the tamales-- the tamale man. He had a rope around his neck and on either side there were a bucket of hot tamales and "melcocha", that was a Mexican candy. We used to have a big time with all those salesmen that would come across the river. We had some good times, but in a very different way from today. We were mischievous, but we weren't what you call bad. We didn't hurt anything taking that trip across the river. We gave the streetcar driver the fare he would've lost because he was asleep. But we had lots of fun.

JH: Did you go over to Juárez very much?

AH: Yes. Then later, of course, we went over on the streetcar. We had a great many friends living in Juárez. We would watch some of the older women hide the stuff that they would buy. They used to put a bustle around it. They would carry over silk and gloves and all of that kind of stuff.

JH: That was quite a favorite pastime, I guess, smuggling the stuff over?

AH: Yes, it was. But you know, at that day and time, people didn't bother too much about bringing whiskey and stuff like they do now.