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Interview no. 30.2

George A. Feather

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UNIVERSITY OF TEXAS AT EL PASO

INSTITUTE OF ORAL HISTORY

INTERVIEWEE: George A. Feather
INTERVIEWER: S. H. Newman
PROJECT: _____
DATE OF INTERVIEW: September 15, 1972
TERMS OF USE: Unrestricted
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BIOGRAPHICAL SYNOPSIS OF INTERVIEWEE:

Southwest historian and professor.

SUMMARY OF INTERVIEW:

Martin Amador.

1 hour (15/16 tape speed); 14 pages.

G. Adlai Feather of Mesilla Park, New Mexico
Interviewed by Bud Newman
September 15, 1972

F: What did you want to know about Amador?

N: Well, I just want to know a little more about him. The story is this: I sent out about a year or a year-and-a-half ago letters to most of your New Mexico libraries inviting people to write in and be guest editor in this column of mine, "Southwest Archives" in Password. Mrs. Barrett, Assistant Librarian at NMSU, wrote a very nice paper. Actually the paper had been given as a speech to the Doña Ana County Historical Society several years back--I believe that's what she said--but, anyway, she describes the Amador Collection. It's a very nice description but she doesn't give me any idea who Amador was. He was a contemporary of my grandfather. I don't think it's publishable the way it is. I thought I would rewrite it and keep her name on it.

F: Have you seen the collection?

N: I've seen parts of it.

F: It's all in two rooms now up at the Citizen's National Bank.

N: But nobody over there seems to know who Martín Amador was. I want to know who he was and which of his descendants gave the collection to NMSU.

F: It was bought with the building and the building was sold necessarily. It belonged to Martín [Campbell]. He sold it and retired and went to Mexico. He was in very bad health. Now I don't know whether Martín is alive or not. He was a member of the Rotary and he dropped out about three years ago and went to the hospital.

N: You're not talking about the first Martín, are you?

F: No, his grandson, Martín Campbell. I was a good friend of his as long as we used to attend every Wednesday at the Rotary.

N: Campbell, now he's the one who sold the hotel?

F: Well, he sold it to a group up here who didn't pay that much down on it; and they went ahead and did a lot of reconstruction. Then, when the contractor came around to get the money, they threw him out. They refused to pay until Martín had to take it back. In the meantime, the money he had received (he had already gone to México and lived for a year down there), he couldn't afford to pay off the bank. So the thing was sold for the mortgage plus the amount due to the contractor and other debts they'd run around town. They were in debt to the liquor companys for, oh, I understand they had to pay for the liquor that they used for five or six months. They took it over and sold it to the Citizens Bank. The Citizens Bank made bank out of it. The best part of that collection /the Bank/ saved /since/ the furniture and everything went with /the sale/.

N: Who was responsible for selling it to the bank?

F: Well, Martín Campbell. When they threw it back to him, he had the mortgage that they'd taken out on it--he had that to pay plus all their debts. He didn't have the money, so it was sold. I don't know who arranged it, but people were worried here about what might happen to it. Then the Bank took it. They rebuilt the whole inside for a bank but they kept the outside /the same/. Then the furniture, a lot of it was just junk, they took it up here to the old convent. One of the three or four people who are directors of the recently-formed bank, they just bought a new bank, was the man that bought the convent up there and they sold off a lot of the things. I went up there pretty well arranged with the check-book 'cause there were some things that I wanted to bid on, /but/ I found out that those weren't up for sale. Most of the stuff they had for sale

was bedroom furniture and old _____, and they sold all that off. They didn't sell anything valuable, the bank kept /those items/. They have two rooms upstairs in the bank that aren't changed, they used those for the museum. Next door to it, on the corner they have another room that's reserved for the historical society. We now have all our light stuff papers and everything else stored up in that....

N: This is now the Citizens Bank. Now what year did all this happen more or less?

F: About five years ago.

N: Really, that recent? They've only had the Amador Collection about five years?

F: Oh, it was there in the hotel all the time. It was scattered all through the hotel--pictures and furniture. The hotel was built with the long rooms on both sides. Then upstairs is a long hall about 120 feet, and they had some of these on exhibit. It was quite an attraction of the hotel. But when they bought it, they took all of the best things that they had of historical or artistic value and put them in the two rooms and sold all the rest of the furniture. The furniture they sold was no loss to the museum or to history. I bought a little of it, but was quite disappointed because...well, I wasn't disappointed, I was glad that they--that things that were really valuable were kept by the bank. Emmerich on this side bought this place up here, this development and Simpson on this side _____ down the road, they were two of the original organizers of the bank.

N: Do you remember where Martín Amador was from?

F: I don't know. Only by tradition--and I think it's sound--that he was a

freighter that freighted for Fort Fillmore. Then he married a girl named Ruiz in Juárez who probably had plenty of cash. He doesn't appear very much in the newspapers and records at all until he began to blossom out about the middle of the '70s. He and another man had a store, and he evidently did a lot of freightin'. He had a lot of horses. He had a corral and leased horses. That was up there. His old house was knocked down about five or six years ago. He built that first. He had a store in Silver City and one down here. Whether he ever went to Kansas City as tradition says and ran a freight line, I don't know.

N: Was this possibly during the '50s or the '60s?

F: No, this was during the '70s. He was engaged in that business but he really didn't appear very important until the middle of the '70s. Apparently he had been doing that because he was a teamster when he first came, and I think he was interested in horses and freighting all the time. But I don't know, he doesn't appear in the records and there is nothing except a few references earlier into his life regarding horses. He had that corral. Now, I don't know whether this is true, but the record, the repetition is, but it's only orally, that when they were at Fort Fillmore, they had American horses that were no good out in this country but were wanted very much in Mexico for coach horses [because they were] bigger. And they had a rule that if you owned your own horse, you could go over to Santo Tomás, which was where all the soldiers kept their mistresses, or to Mesilla, which was a rowdy place where they had bailes, or if you wanted to be respectable, you could go to Las Cruces. But if you had an American horse, you had to put it in the stable--you couldn't just tie it out and have it stolen.

Now, that, I have never found out, never seen it actually written. And

Martín Amador didn't do any writing himself. Then, in '74, I know he had

a store here--well, not here but he had one in Silver City with a partner and he did some freighting there. But he never appeared....I never.... actually heard about Martín Amador's train. All the other trains they kept track of, Varela, _____, and everything else, but they never mentioned Martín Amador in any of the reports. And he didn't own any land. Of course, there was no newspaper at that time except in Mesilla and it was about '74 or '75 that he really began blossoming out as a first rate citizen. /I/ mean _____ first rate, but leading citizen in Las Cruces. He built this house across the road that was raised about 1876 or '77. That was quite well publicized because the editor of the Las Cruces paper, the /Río Grande / Republican, boarded there--he had an apartment in that house. He gave a good deal of the story of Martín Amador. He boarded at the Amador residence not the hotel.

N: What year was that now?

F: That was in the '80s, but he /the editor/ went backwards to... He gave a lot of reports about things that happened backwards.

N: Oh, I see. So this is the Río Grande Republican?

F: Río Grande Republican. I didn't find Martín Amador mentioned in the Mesilla papers at all, which of course are not complete. He apparently was more in Silver City and freighting. I knew he had a freight to Chihuahua, and this descendent said he used to run a freight line to Kansas City, but I'm real doubtful about that.

N: Did he start the hotel?

F: Yes. He had a hotel in his house. Before that time he lived on a house at the corner of Amador and Main--that's his old house. It was torn down recently. He used that as a boarding house for a while. Now he never had

a license; of course, hotels didn't need a license. He never had a liquor license or anything else...doesn't appear in the records at all. He was a heavy Republican, a Republican leader. He built that house across the road where the hotel is, and then across from there, Celso Amador owned what was then a vacant lot, until recently.

N: Was that his son?

F: I don't know what the relation of Celso was. [He was Martín's nephew.] He wasn't Amador's son. He was either a brother or a cousin or something, but he was about the same age as Martín. They had this, as you probably read, this transfer of the courthouse from Mesilla to..... They pulled a fast one on Mesilla-- Falamon (?) and Southwick and Barela and those people. Lawyer Newcomb was elected state senator in 1878. And they promised that, They had to build a courthouse and everybody in Las Cruces said, "Oh, yes, Mesilla is the proper place. It's a bigger town," and so forth. Everybody rested quietly until about the first of January. The legislature met on the 4th. About the 1st of January Rynerson and Newcomb and various other people just disappeared on various errands. Oh, one of them was going to Dallas, "Oh I'm going this way," and other places. There's no mention of Santa Fe. On the night of the fifth, first day, Newcomb, of course, knew his way around and Rynerson had been a senator before -- they knew their way around, they had their bulging hip pockets. News came down that on the second day the county seat had been transferred to Las Cruces.

N: The Santa Fe Ring hit again.

F: Well, in 1882 they put up a bond issue, and the bond issue passed. But Bristol was president here and they had a lot of potent politicians in

Mesilla--they threw out three... As usual, they threw out three of the precincts for irregularities. So they took the case to Bristol. They protested that the election wasn't legal because three precincts had not been allowed to vote on the bond issue. And Bristol said, "That's right, the bond issue is no good." So they had to put it off until late in 1884. But in the meantime, the people in Las Cruces were hot about getting that courthouse over there because there was all those people coming down from Tularosa. The United States Marshal was a nephew of General Sherman (and though he finally left the state owing about \$10,000 to everybody) and he got the good idea.... They just passed this law regarding the Mormons--that you couldn't have more than one wife and if you had one wife you had to be married to her. So he went over to Tularosa and arrested practically the whole town. Nobody over there had been married. Protestants like to say, "Oh the priests charged such... fees," fees that they couldn't afford it. Well, that wasn't the reason. It was [a] type of infamy to be married and not give a fiesta. The fiesta is what cost money. It was much better to just go live together as the, _____ could afford it. So he had them all arrested and brought over here. Well, they had to stay here two or three weeks... a couple of weeks, because they were all summoned on the first day of court. The court lasted a couple of weeks, and Las Cruces wanted that. So they went over one time and the courthouse had been legally moved. They took all the records and stored them over at Ascarate's house, which was torned down before the... Then they had to have a courthouse so they got Martín to take a.... it was apparently just a little corral with an outside wall. Now that was in 1883. This hotel does not go back later than that. The newspaper was watching Martín; they

had a notice about Martín Amador's progressiveness and his republican spirit. They needed to raise some money to help pay for the hotel so they could have an 1883 court there. He did, and it cost him \$2,000. But you know, the enthusiasm is hard to convert into cash, and they could only collect \$200. I forget whether it cost \$2,000 or \$4,000. But he got it back, because next door to him La Point had the saloon.

N: Lawrence La Point?

F: Yes. He built the house on Church Street and traded it to Lawrence La Point for the saloon. In those days, when the court came in, at least four or five people from out of town would come in and set up saloons because that was the principal recreation. Three or four organizations would come over to help maintain the lawyers and the various other people. He had the saloon right next to the courtroom. If you were in a hurry or if you had been a witness on the hearing, you could just walk across-- there was a courtyard on the other side. He had it painted in white, then had it painted as though it were made of stone, but the joints were just painted on. A picture appeared in the paper in 1883 sometime, and the court was held there. They didn't get the courthouse built 'til 1884, /the/ next year.

N: About what year do you recall Martín Amador died?

F: Well, it was after 1900.

/PAUSE/

N: (reading): Río Grande Republican, September 3, 1892. "Jacinto Armijo and Martín Amador were two candidates for Probate Judge in 1875. The Las Cruces Band was present and rendered some excellent music. The occasion of the meeting was helped out by the frequent firing of anvils. Amador,

- of course, had the best of the discussion. The most pleasant feature of the evening was the music furnished by the band." /Laughter/.
- F: Armijo was one of the early settlers here. He was a Republican politician. No, he was a Democrat. No, Amador was the Democrat at that time.
- N: They sure did switch back and forth. (Reading): Río Grande Republican, June 13, 1885. "Amador is planning to make a first class hotel adding a second story. There will be about forty rooms."
- F: Yes. It was only one story then and they held the courthouse there. Then afterwards he put on a second story and made a hotel of it. It was used first as a private...he leased suites in there.
- N: It says here in the Río Grande Republican: "The new courthouse ready for district court March 24, 1884." (Reading): Río Grande Republican, April 8, 1882. "Don Martín has put on a hack between Las Cruces and Mesilla for /a/ fare of 20 cents. This is a great improvement of 50 cents one way or 75 cents round trip, which was exorbitant for a three-mile trip."
- F: Yes, you see the court was still over there /in Mesilla/. He put on the hack so that people could get back and forth instead of having to stay in Mesilla. As a matter of fact, most of them stayed in Las Cruces anyway-- Mesilla was no place for a decent lawyer.
- N: (Reading again): Río Grande Republican, June 5, 1886. "Martín Amador purchased the residence of Lawrence La Point which adjoined his hotel property. He is also arranging to pump water with a large tank arranged on the upper floor of his hotel by horsepower to supply the establishment and serve as fire protection."
- F: That was the first water system and fire protection they had in Las Cruces. He used a horse on a treadmill.

N: January 8, 1887, Río Grande Republican. "The Amador Hotel is the largest building in town--70 feet on Second Street and 140 feet on Water Street."
Río Grande Republican, November 20, 1889. "Martín Amador received appointment as Deputy Marshal for the Church district. February 18, 1881 he was elected president of a public school association."

F: He was the one who organized this.

N: Yes, I remember reading about it. They have pictures of the Amador hotel. August 23, 1890--He was Deputy United States Marshal, according to the Río Grande Republican.

F: He was never sheriff.

N: Never sheriff. He was about the only one up here who wasn't.

F: He was Treasurer and probably a judge, but never a sheriff. He didn't have the establishment--you had to be a merchant. He died after 1910.

N: Did he start all this collection, I mean, with any purpose or just...

F: Oh, they were gathered here and there. Some of them I, if you found two or three articles, I'd take a pencil and label them Amador; otherwise, it just appears if somebody else was the most important points of event.

N: You say his brother Celso....

F: I don't know what Celso was.

N:took over the hotel after his death?

F: No, no. He kept it up. And then there was this fellow named Campbell who died here only eight or ten years ago, he came in as a clerk. He was sort of a traveling businessman and he was head clerk at the hotel. He married Amador's daughter.

N: Now he was named Campbell and his first name was Martín, too?

F: No, Martín is the son.

N: Martín Campbell was the son of the first Frank Campbell who married Amador's daughter?

F: Yes. Now what was his name? I knew him very well, he was sort of a character. Campbell had... His wife was very artistic and she gathered a lot of things together. That was Martín Amador's daughter. Of course they were the leading citizens. And a couple of the pictures were painted in the '80s. The one I particularly wanted, I knew it was painted in the '80s because the only buildings West of the... were the new hotel, the railroad station which was built in '81, and the old courthouse which was built in 1884.

N: What was her name, do you recall that?

F: It began with a "A". Actually, it was Corina. Feather is thinking of Adelina. Somewhere in there I have the names and lists of all of his children... They had two children. One of them was a dancer. She taught my oldest daughter ballet--that must have been in the thirties. Then she fell in love with a lumberman. He decided she wasn't well enough educated to get around in his society so he sent her to school two years. I don't know whether it was a university or a finishing school. Then she died in Spain. Campbell had to go there--something about her estate. Apparently she had inherited a tremendous amount of jewelry from her husband. I think Martín went over too. He was over there a year and a half trying to get that estate settled. She died in Mallorca... Her wedding was quite an event, it was during prohibition. And the Mennonites Dunkards had sent two men down with the idea of buying for a colony the Heder Ranch, just above Toluco, which has 600 acres. They stayed at the Amador Hotel. Well, they had ginger ale and gin to celebrate the wedding. I wasn't there, but

Sir Austin told me about it. They had the gin in ginger ale bottles. That's the way it came from the still. They sometimes /got/ mixed /up/. When they /thought/ they had a mixture of ginger ale and gin, they'd have two....really mixing two gins. The uproar was at its height, everybody was enjoying themselves, when these two bearded people appeared looking over the rail, horrified, absolutely horrified. And they didn't even spend the rest of the night /there/. They managed to get out of town that night; they didn't want to come to this country, and Heder did not sell his ranch to them.

But any accident going in where it happened stopped at the Amador Hotel. It deserved the reputation. Sir Austin was there. He was a feed buyer from a Connecticut firm. He came home one night and he smelled smoke--somebody in one of the second floor rooms had gone to bed smoking a cigarette and his mattress was smouldering--so he called the night clerk. He got in, and when the smoke got thinner, they took the burning mattress and threw it out of the second story window. Well, there was awning on the first story windows, it was the one that faced the canal, and inside was a lady who was staying here because she had a nervous disorder. She suddenly woke up and saw this fire just outside her window, and she went into hysterics, so they rushed in to aid her. The canal was an open canal then. They took the mattress and all this other stuff burning and threw it in the canal, which was full of water. /Since the canal/ was full of water, /the mattress/ floated down until it got to the bridge that's on the side of the courthouse--a wooden bridge covered with tar--there it lodged and set the bridge on fire. /Laughter/

But he was good. He had a lot of horses. In 1884, when the river

submerged the tracks (there's a good article written on that by Mrs. McFee who was then 40 years old and her father was a very prominent lawyer here and a trustee of the college), the railroad cars went off the tracks. Well, they sent a rescue train with an engine and two or three cars to rescue it, and it went off the tracks, too. They didn't have any more engines. They only had two engines. This was a branch line running through El Paso; the main line runs up around Silver City. An engine cost \$10,000, so they wanted their engine back and it was stuck in the quicksand. They finally found it, located it with rods on the other side of the river and about 16 or 18 feet deep. Martín Amador took the job of raising it. He had some long poles cut there about 12 by 16 and 20 feet long and used those _____ poles and he had plenty of horses to pull. They raised the engine up. That \$10,000-engine was slightly damaged, but they paid him \$1,000. That was when he built, fixed, that patio. They have a wide gate. The hotel used at least one of those beams and made _____ to put above the doorway. They're still there. Every once in a while somebody will find...a plow will...unearth some dirt and they'll find a freight car under there. They want to know where that freight car came from. Well, you know the railroad was so removed, way up the district. They didn't bother about taking out the flat cars--they weren't worth \$1,000, but... They still appear. He was a leader in most everything.

But you know, when a foreigner died in this country, and he had no heirs in this country, every Republic official was called to the feast. Amador was Probate Judge when this Frenchman, who owned those two brick buildings on the corner of the Plaza, died quite wealthy. They had some land, from this estate--they sold the rest of the stuff off, and he

appointed his son bookkeeper for the land (it was only....thirty or forty acres) at a salary of \$60 a month--just for keeping the books all month. That was protested, and the district court ruled that it wasn't valid, that it was excessive, \$10 would have been plenty. But afterwards, they took it to a higher court. And then probably, I think that people thought that well, Amador deserved that much, so they restored it. He collected, it was all the land was worth after a year. But that happens, that was common practice.