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Aurelia Phillips

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UNIVERSITY OF TEXAS AT EL PASO
INSTITUTE OF ORAL HISTORY

INTERVIEWEE: Aurelia Phillips
INTERVIEWER: Oscar J. Martínez
PROJECT: Bicentennial
DATE OF INTERVIEW: September 16, 1975
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BIOGRAPHICAL SYNOPSIS OF INTERVIEWEE:

Lifelong resident of El Paso, Texas; born on August 29, 1901;
granddaughter of El Paso's first mayor.

SUMMARY OF INTERVIEW:

Biography; educational experiences; Anglo/Mexican relations in El Paso; attitudes toward Chicanos; Díaz-Taft meeting; Mexican Revolution, including Madero, Villa, and refugiados; Depression; Prohibition; impressions of El Paso today.

Aurelia Phillips
September 16, 1975
By Oscar Martinez

M: This is an oral history interview with Miss Aurelia Phillips of 911 E. Nevada St., El Paso, Texas on September 16, 1975. Well, first of all, Miss Phillips, can you tell me when and where you were born?

P: I was born in El Paso, August 29, 1901.

M: 1901, right after the beginning of the century.

P: That's right.

M: Could you tell me a little bit about your parents' background?

P: Well, my father was one of four sons. He worked as a cigar maker with Kohlberg, a cigar factory. And then he worked in the courthouse, state courthouse, as assistant county auditor and also as deputy district clerk in the county courthouse. Then he was elected to the federal court in which he was deputy district clerk for about thirty-five years. And my mother Aurelia Rameroz Phillips was from Mexico, from Aldama, Chihuahua, Mexico. And she was born on March 26, 1874. My father was born on March 13, 1877. And we never left El Paso. We've been here ever since. And, well, Grandpa Dowell came here in 1850 and the family just stayed here from then on. We've been here all the time. One right after the other.

M: Your mother being Mexican, did you grow up speaking Spanish as a child?

P: Yes, Yes. I learned Spanish before I did English. I went to school, and I learned my English when I went to school. Of course, my father being an interpreter and translator, he spoke to us and corrected our English, also our Spanish. He couldn't stand anyone asking him, "What is this word?" without saying, "Bring me the dictionary and we'll find the word

and find the meaning for it." And we were raised that way.

M: Did your mother speak English?

P: My mother spoke English, yes. Not as well as I, but she spoke fluently.

Yes.

M: Where did you go to elementary school?

P: I went to Vilas.

M: And when you first went there, you didn't speak English.

P: Yes.

M: Oh, you did?

P: Oh, when I first started to school I went to Franklin School which was on Durango Street. I think it has been demolished or built over again, a very pretty building. And we started school at Franklin School and then when I was in about the second grade I went to St. Joseph's Academy.

M: But you went to school already knowing English, then?

P: Already knowing English, yes. My father taught us English so that we could speak English in school and understand what the teacher was saying. And of course at that time Franklin School was more of the Mexican people and they were fine people, they were nice people. They were not these riotous people, not these awful people that you have today. (Laughs) And from there I went to St. Joseph's Academy and then went to Vilas School. When I was in the fifth grade I went to Vilas School. From Vilas School I went to El Paso High School.

M: That school on Durango Street, is that in South El Paso?

P: No, that's not in South El Paso. It's in the west part of El Paso, out by Union Depot, out that way. It's close to the Union Depot, that's what you would know about.

M: And most of the students there were Mexican?

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P: Yes. Most of the students were Mexican.

M: What do you remember about your experiences at that school?

P: Well, we never had any trouble. Everyone played nicely. We...I don't remember anyone being out of line. The teachers spanked you if you didn't do what you were told and so everyone did the best they could to keep from being punished. The punishment wasn't much except that you knew that you had to do what the teacher said. And, of course, in the sister school you had more discipline and they taught you manners and you learned your religion. And in Vilas School we had the same discipline and respect for the teachers and everyone played nicely, boys and girls together. I loved to play baseball and I was put at bat and I was a good pitcher and I was a good catcher. (Laughs)

So I was always chosen first. And, well, having been brought up with brothers only I played all the boys' games. And finally I took up tennis, but I was 25 when I took up tennis. And I took it up because my brother Bob, who was 15 then, took up tennis. The clubhouse, El Paso Tennis Club was right there in front of my house, when the First Christian Church is now.

M: It was a natural for you.

P: Yes. In fact I have some articles and a picture taken of me sitting out on the porch and the article reads, "Chela Phillips"--I was called Chela Phillips and everyone knows me better as Chela Phillips than Aurelia Phillips--and the article reads, "Chela Phillips doesn't have to look for a player. She just sits on the front porch and someone comes and asks her to play." And we had a marvelous club. Everyone played. There was no prejudice in any way at all.

M: Do you recall the Anglo kids and the Mexican kids mixing in school?

P: Yes, in Villas School they were equally the same, just about the same number. Now, Sunset and Mundy Heights at that time were the Coronado of today. It was the best part of El Paso. The people that had money had their residences over there, which still exist, especially on Hawthorne and West Yandell.

M: Were there many kids at that time with mixed ethnic background, such as yourself?

P: Well, yes. There was quite a number of them that were...their father or mother, mostly their mothers were Mexican and their fathers were Anglos. At that time we didn't call them Anglos. Everybody was Mexican and Anglos were called whites. We didn't have that distinction of today that you have to say Anglo. And at that time you never said Mexican-American. You were either American or you were Mexican.

M: Were Mexicans called Americans also?

P: Yes, certainly. We didn't know them any other way. They were born here. In fact, they were here before we came, before the Anglos came. And they were old families that had stayed here since the year One.

M: At that early age, did you think of yourself as an Anglo or as a Mexican, do you recall?

P: I always called myself American, as I do today. I find that the Mexican people at times have ... there's been this prejudice, or maybe this segregation or whatever you might call it has been because the Mexican people for some reason or another, whether they were born here and never been to Mexico, call themselves Mexican-American. And they don't know a thing about Mexico, just something that is in the air for them. And I think that is why they've been segregated. They just keep to themselves. I don't remember anyone saying the Americans were more than the Mexicans

or that the Mexicans weren't as good as the Americans when I was young. I didn't know the difference. And in fact, as far as the Negroes are concerned, we just knew that they were black. And, of course, they were segregated, but we didn't mind that. They were nice people here. We had all the Pullman conductors were Negroes and at that time they lived here in El Paso and they were wonderful people.

M: You don't recall any ethnic troubles in those days?

P: No, none at all. The Negroes kept to themselves. Unless you spoke to them, they'd come forward and speak with you or whatever, but they kept to themselves. The streetcars, they had a place for them in the back. They never came and took seats in the front. They just went back there. If you wanted to you could go sit back there with them and speak to them and they were perfectly satisfied with the condition which they received. So I simply can't understand this turmoil of today.

M: And you think there were many families that intermarried from both ethnic groups here at that time?

P: Yes, there were. And not having anything about passports and what-have-you, the people from Juarez would come here and mingle with the people from El Paso and go back and forth. Everything was together.

M: Do you recall going to Chihuahuita in those days to the Mexican neighborhood down there?

P: Well, that Chihuahuita came later on. I think it came after the revolution. The 1910 revolution in Mexico. I don't remember that existing before because... I just don't remember that at all.

M: When was the first time that you remember being aware of Chihuahuita?

P: After I was maybe 10, 12 years old. Then they talked about Chihuahuita and some of the people that were not the best were living down there. But

as far as the Mexican people and the American people getting along in El Paso it was terrific. Now the people in Juarez today are not Juarez people anymore. And you find in border towns, you have the riffraff of both countries. They come to the border. Well, they cause trouble. Well, of course, you can see that although I'm prejudiced against certain groups of Mexicans that try to call themselves something else, I don't like that one bit because the better Mexicans will never call themselves anything else but American Mexicans or Mexican Americans. You ask them what they are and some of them will say, "Well, I'm an American of Mexican descent." Now that's the way it ought to be. It should not be Mexican American. You are either one or the other. Once you take out your citizenship, you're either an American or you're not an American. Whatever it is, French, German or whatever. But as far as I'm concerned, if they ask me and try to get my Mexican descent from me, I would never say that I'm American Mexican or Mexican American. I have never considered myself that way. I've always said I'm an American. Yes. And that was true of my family. I think that the Mexicans of today and the Mexicans that really count, the better Mexicans, what I call Mexicans, I think they should call themselves Americans of Mexican descent. That is the true way, is it not?

M: That describes it.

P: That describes it entirely. There's no such thing as Mexican American. NO. Its Mexican descent, or German descent or ... Now there's one thing about the Mexican people that's been troubling me for a long time. I'm prejudiced against anyone that doesn't do the right thing, that causes trouble or dissent or whatever. But the Mexicans from Juarez of course, they call themselves Mexicans. The people here were Americans, they

weren't anything else. They bring this thing of gringos. You hear that in Mexico City. And when I go over there because I have relatives over there and I hear that, I jump on them and I say, "I'm an American. Don't call me a gringo. I'm an American." "But you call us ..." "I don't call you anything. I don't even call you Mexican. I call you Carmen or Julio or whatever."

M: These are just divisive terms more than anything else.

P: They have asked me millions of times. They say, "What do you think of the Chicanos?" I hate to tell you. I hate to tell you. Because the Chicano came from the lowest kind of Mexican here that were promoting trouble among themselves and they wanted to ... They were the ones that were segregated because they themselves did it. They wouldn't mingle with the other people. They just kept to themselves.

M: When is the first time that you heard the word Chicano?

P: Well, I heard it when it started in Colorado, someplace out there. You know they used to have the pachucos too. And the calijas. You know. And then all of a sudden, here they come with the Chicanos. I think that Chavez was the one that really put it on the map, Chavez from California, you know, trying to make themselves a different race, which they are not. If the Chicanos today, if any of these so-called patriotic Chicanos went to Mexico today, they'd get kicked in the mouth. They don't want them over there because they are not Mexicans and over here they are not Americans. They want to be themselves only. They have segregated themselves like, I hate to say it, the Negroes were some time ago. Because the Negroes were trying to make themselves come forward and be equals which they should have been all the time. That's when the Chicanos started. They got together with the Negroes. What kind of

something is that? The Negro is a different race altogether. Even their bone structure is different. The Negro is black. They don't mix. The Japanese and Chinese don't mix either. You marry a Chinese. You have Chinese children. You marry a Negro and you have Negro children. But the Mexicans. They're not a brown race. They are whites. You go to Mexico City and you'll never see so many blue-eyed blondes, not even here in El Paso. Over there they don't like to be sun-burned and tan and all that. They like to look the color of their skin.

M: Just the natural.

P: That's right. And the very dark ones are Indians.

M: Was the word Chicano around when you were a child?

P: No, no. That came just a few years ago, ten years ago or so. Let's see. My father died in '53 and Chicano wasn't on there then. No, not at all. But they are taking that to the extreme and it's not to their good. The other day they had in the paper and the TV about the bombing of the Popular that happened about two or three weeks ago. There was two or three Chicanos there of the membership of the Chicanos and another man. All right. They took them to the court and they had to put up a bond to let them out, \$10,000 bond and they got out. Where did they get that money? If it wasn't from the community of the Chicanos? They called Crystal City, Texas. They call it their capital. Why do they have one, in the United States? I'd like to see these Chicanos go to Mexico and do what they are doing here and demanding here of the schools and the government, I'd like to see everyone of those Chicanos go to Mexico and try to do it over there. See what would happen to them. They're so Mexican, you know. They want to stress what they are. Then another thing. They're not ready for jobs what they are looking for. Why should

they try to tell us what to teach. We have our own system. We teach the American way and we have that. Now it's all right to have more Mexican history in there but not to the extent that these Chicanos want it. No, I don't think so. I don't think they could do it anywhere in the world except the United States and we're doing everything they ask for because we are afraid of them because they are violent and they claim not to be. But they are. That bombing over there at the Popular tells you so and many others. Now they go there with their beards, their ? , their long hair, they don't look clean. What are they trying to look like? That's not a Mexican. A Mexican is one who's well-groomed and always has been and a nice person because the Mexican people are very nice. They are compassionate. They are all out for you. You go to their home, they open up their home for you. They are lovely people. And when I went to Mexico City...we went up there in 1954, Mother and I, right after my father had passed on...and I found myself looking at the beauty in Mexico which is not to be compared. You don't go visit places and compare them, but just to see as it is and live as they live. That's the only way to know a place. You go there and you find the people on the street are speaking English, French, German, Spanish -- a lot of French and a lot of German, too. And I found myself listening to the Spanish. They speak the most beautiful Spanish and I learned a lot from them. The Spanish language is a beautiful language. There's many expressions in Spanish which you just simply can't translate. You can not because it doesn't turn out the same. Not in English. But it's just a pitiful thing that this thing of the Chicanos has come up because it can ruin the image of the real Mexican people. It has. There's a lot of people that think that Mexicans are Chicanos.

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M: That's one of the things that characterizes our times in the United States, I guess.

P: But by whom? By those who call themselves other than Americans? I called KROD or whatever, anyway I called them because they have that program in Spanish. It's atrocious. The way they express themselves, they don't even know what they're saying. They can't speak Spanish and their English is horrible. And their image, the way they come there, they look like tramps. Why don't they dress up and look like people. If they want to be the image of something good, dress nicely, be respectful, have discipline. And I think anything else just brings trouble, it spells trouble.

M: I wonder if we can change the subject just a little bit and backtrack to something you were telling me before we began the interview relating to the meeting between the president of Mexico and the president of the U.S. What do you recall about that?

P: Oh, it was beautiful. It was just absolutely... Of course, I was quite young 'cause that was in 1908, if I remember correctly. But I remember they roped off the Chamber of Commerce to the street so that there was a large, spacious place for them to come in. The Chamber of Commerce had those double doors and they just opened into a big John, my brother, and I went up there to see the President. We were so small that our heads were below the rope. 'Course the rope was about here, above all the people, above their waist. So we just stood there and the people would push us over towards the space there for the presidents to come in. The first thing I remember was the Mexican army all dressed up. They had some all in white and they had plumes on their heads. And the others, as I remember, they were in blue. And they had these big plumes, and they

just looked beautiful. And the first thing I noticed was President Diaz coming up the stairs. He just walked right up. He was shorter than Taft. Had a great big mustache. He was dark tan, you know. And he came up and he took off his They played the Mexican national anthem first and then the Star Spangled Banner. President Taft came up in his street clothes and he had on his silk hat which he took off and was waving around to all the people around there. President Taft happened to be on our side which was the left-hand side as they were going into the Chamber of Commerce. And John and I were standing there and I was a real blonde, I mean a yellow haired blonde and had great, big, long braids and as I say we were under the ropes. And the people were pushing us and they pushed us just as the president was coming up there. They all wanted to see him. They pushed us that way. And President Taft put his hands on my head and on John's head, patted us. (Laughs) And he went right on. And what I remember saying, "Oh, President Taft was the biggest thing I ever saw." Not only big around, but he was tall. And President Diaz was slender and was all military, you know, full of. It was just beautiful. And there was Mexican and American flags all over the place. They were all cheering. Everybody was having a marvelous time. No incidents whatever. Nothing at all. No.

M: I recall reading in a magazine around that time that in order to avoid embarrassment, the city officials constructed a fence around the Mexican community or parts of the Mexican community where there were shacks and things that didn't look too good. Do you recall anything about that?

P: I don't recall that. I don't even remember hearing of it. I don't El Paso had that much money to go out there and cover up. The Chamber of Commerce was here and the people was just about four blocks straight out

and he didn't go out that way. He came over towards town.

M: Shortly thereafter, the Mexican revolution began. What do you remember about that?

P: Well, in the Mexican revolution, that was very vivid. We lived over there close to the depot. Our house was up above the street. Later on they paved the street and our house was eleven feet down below. We moved here. At the time we had some relatives in Mexico, in Juarez, which I still have and we had a small house. Didn't have a large house at all. Twenty-one of them came over to stay at our house!

M: Relatives?

P: Relatives. They didn't have anywhere else to go. Their houses were being burnt. My great uncle's house, someone poured some coal oil or something on his door and set fire to it and they all had to leave because the government forces were waiting for Madero to come in and fight on the street, from one house to another. So they didn't go out to meet them. And Madero was right out there by the smelter. They called it the Dam, la presa. And right above the hills...there's a hill that's this way and the rest of them are over that way but there's just one hill here. Well, they built a little adobe house there which they...I guess the President, Madero slept there and all the rest of them outside. Well, all the forces were there. And the government forces didn't even try to attack them there. They waited for them to come into Juarez and fight. And they did and, of course, the Madero forces came down to the river and the government forces were all shooting this way. And there was quite a number of people here, well, not quite a number. There were a few that were wounded and some were killed and there was quite a number of tourists that came from elsewhere just to see this. And they would stand

up on the two or three story houses, up on the roof, and they could see the fighting. They could just see them fight.

M: Do you recall seeing any fighting yourself?

P: No, I didn't see any fighting myself because we were kept home. We went there immediately after Madero took the place because my family, my Mexican relatives in Juarez, were all Maderistas. They were all against the..., you know. And so we went over there and we saw the destruction and oh, everything that was done. They had some cannon. They took one cannon that we had here at the City Hall. The City Hall used to be in a triangle between San Antonio and Myrtle. You know where they have the Aztec calendar now. That was the City Hall right there. And right where the calendar is, they had a cannon and they had a boy with a boot there. It was a little cannon with two wheels and I guess it had a cannon, must have been about 8 or 10 feet long. It was a small one. Well, the Maderistas came over and took it. There was Villa there with him. Then they had that song that they sing now, [Spanish song]. (Laughter) And nobody stopped them. It was quite something. Nobody objected to it. Everybody was giving... . All the Americans here were for Madero and while they were stationed up there at the dam, they built a bridge, one of those floating bridges, and we went over there. I went over there with my grandmother, and I shook hands with Madero and I shook hands with Orozco and I shook hands with I don't know who else. (Laughs) I was very small then. I was always too small for my age anyway and they were taking them food. All kinds of things over there. And when they took Juarez, all the people here were taking them all kinds of things over there. Later on the Federals took Juarez again, there was another big to do. Oh, it was a carnival here! And then Villa came. When Villa came

into Juarez! Villa would tell them, "I'm going to be there on such and such a date at a certain time" and as sure as you knew that date, he would come in. And he also stationed himself there, and I went over and shook hands with him. Well, he went into Juarez and fought from house to house with all the rest and then they established a hospital between Second and Third on Campbell Street, across from the Lydia Patterson Institute. Right across Third, right there, that was a hospital. And all the people here were taking cots and things. The Popular Dry Goods Company gave them bedding and all kinds of things. They were helping Villa. Well, then, after a while, I don't know why it was, Pershing got after Villa and Villa started out of Juarez. He went into the Hippodrome and Pershing bombed that poor place up and didn't do anything to Villa and he never caught Villa.

M: How did people in El Paso feel about Villa?

P: They loved him. They loved him. They knew he was a bandit and all that but he was liked. Like I say, everybody was going out there to give him something.

M: In 1916 there was an incident that occurred here. I wonder if you have any recollections about that. In regard to Villa, or Villa's men who killed 17 engineers in Chihuahua and their bodies were shipped to El Paso and some of them were from here and as a result of that people here didn't feel too good about that. Do you recall what happened at that time?

P: No. I don't recall except the feelings that the people felt like he was a bandit and why did those people stay over there anyway? They knew that he was killing everybody yet they stayed there. But still there wasn't an awful feeling against him. I imagine that some did, but generally

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everywhere you went they liked him, even in Juarez they liked him. They referred to him as a bandido, but still he was a sort of sympatico.

M: Un bandido sympatico. (Chuckles)

P: Yes, un bandido sympatico.

M: Do you have other recollections about the revolution?

P: Well, no ... not anything. That's a long time ago.

M: It sure is. (Laughter)

P: That's a long time ago.

M: That goes back 60 years.

P: Yes.

M: More than 60 years.

P: Yes, that's how long we've been in this house. We've lived here since 1916.

M: Let me ask you some questions about your experiences at El Paso High School. What do you remember about El Paso High School?

P: Oh, I was a very sickly child. I had had polio when I was young. A little brother of mine died from infantile paralysis which was polio at the time and it was the infectious kind and I caught it. He was sleeping with me. He wasn't quite two years old and I had migraine headaches something horrible all the time, even when I was going to Vilas School. When I was going to high school, oh I loved all the sports they had there. And as I said, Mexican and Americans were there. And there was one or two of the American girls that I played with that were prejudiced. In fact, one time when I went out on a tennis tournament, one of the girls found out that my mother was Mexican. And she had been very friendly with me and we never thought anything of it and as we were going over to Mexico to play a tournament. The Arizona state tournament was

played in Sonora, Mexico. This was in 1928. There was 26 of us and I was the top player at the time. And someone made a remark about my being a good player and glad that I was going, you know. And she said, "Well, it's too bad that she's a Mexican." Well, that was the end of that girl for me. (Laughter)

M: Did she say it in front of you?

P: No. She didn't say it in front of me, but I heard it. She was talking to another girl. 'Course the other girl defended me.

M: Did you subsequently say anything to her?

P: No. I never did, but I never befriended her like I used to and she wanted to come with me and I just ignored her and that was the worst thing that could have happened to her. She was one of 26; all the rest never thought anything. In fact, almost all the boys and girls I went to school with and my neighbors here and all the players on the tennis court used to call my father and mother Papa and Mama. And my grandmother, my mother's mother didn't speak English very well. She could understand almost everything, but they called her Mamasita. Not too long ago someone asked me, "What happened to Mamasita?" Well, she passed on when she was 96 years old. Both grandmothers were 96 years old when they passed on. My mother was 90. My father was 75. So I have a long lived family. I hope I don't last that long. (Laughs) Unless I can do everything. If I can take care of myself, my needs and all that, all right. I can live that long. If mother had not hurt herself...she broke her hip and became an invalid because it was late in life when she broke it. She was over 80 and never recovered and was bed-ridden. She did everything when she was 80 something. You would never have thought she was in her 80s.

M: One question I would like to ask you, when we were talking about the

revolution and didn't, concerns the refugees that came here from Chihuahua and other parts of Mexico.

P: Well, at the time I'll tell you, they were building the Austin Terrace. Austin Terrace was a place where only the people of means could live because they were building homes at the time the home had to be \$20,000 at least and that was \$100,000 today. Most of the moneyed people were moving out of Sunset Heights and going over to Austin Terrace and Manhattan Heights and most of the refugees that came here, the Suagas, the Maderos, the Terrazas, the Gameros, moneyed people, the Prietos, they all went to Sunset Heights and they established themselves there. They were well received. They mingled with the society and everyone here. They founded the Casino Mexicano then. That's where they all went. That was like a country club.

M: Do you ever go there?

P: Yes, I went there.

M: Did you get to know some of those people?

P: Oh, yes. Well, I knew some of them that came over. The Creels, Enrique Creel, the Lowenys. They had a lot of foreign names. They were Mexicans. They had been there for one or two generations and they considered themselves Mexicans but you look at them and they look more like Americans than some of our Americans here look. Very European looking, yes. Now, Vilas School was made up mostly of refugees. And Sunset Heights School where Tech is now on Rio Grande, between Yandell,... on Oregon Street where they are going to have the community college on now...That was Sunset Heights School. So Sunset Heights and Vilas and Mundy Heights. And when they [the refugees] got through there they all came over to El Paso High. And most of the refugees went back to

Chihuahua and they sent their children back here to graduate at El Paso High.

M: So you knew some of the kids at El Paso High. You went to school with them. Were they good students?

P: Good students, yes. They were ahead of us in lots of ways except for their language, they were kept back because they didn't speak English.

M: Most of those refugees did go back to Mexico after the revolution?

P: Oh, yes. But it was a lovely time then. Just beautiful.

M: After graduating from El Paso High School, what did you do?

P: I didn't graduate.

M: Can you tell me why?

P: I became very ill. And that was for some time. I didn't start playing until 1926, and in 1926 I started to play tennis because of my brother, to help him. He was young and didn't have anyone to play with. And I'd go to school maybe one or two weeks and that headache would hit me and that was it. I couldn't continue.

M: So you started playing tennis after you overcame your illness?

P: I started playing tennis and I overcame my illness then. With tennis. But exactly one year after I started to play -- I started to play right here on the porch. Bob taught me how to keep score and how to hit with a paddle and all that. And one of the players there, Dr. O. J. Shappard, gave Bob a racquet that weighed 16 ounces, that was one pound, with a 5 inch handle which is very large. I always used a 4 and a half size handle. That's what I started to play with. He taught me how to hit and one year exactly one year after I started playing, I won the city tournament.

M: Isn't that something? (Laughter)

P: And then I continued playing and I won the Southwestern Tennis Tournament with Mrs. Mont, Ruth Rawlings Mont, who is one of the billionnaires of the country today. One of the top stockholders in General Motors. She was Dr. Rawlings' daughter and she was teaching at El Paso High as a P.E. teacher. We played together and we just had a marvelous time. Tennis was my life saver.

M: I want to ask you some questions regarding the depression in El Paso. What do you remember about the depression?

P: Oh, I still have some of the stamps that we had to have to buy things with. We had... well, I'm telling you about the First World War. Well, it was really bad, but El Paso has never had the depression that the rest of the United States has had because of Juarez. If we wanted more meat, if we wanted sugar, if we wanted coffee or anything like that, just go across and bring it. What year was it?

M: It was '28 and '29.

P: Oh, that was the big crash.

M: Yes.

P: El Paso didn't feel it as much as the rest of the country. No.

M: Did people ever have trouble when they went to Juarez to buy provisions? No trouble at the bridge?

P: No. No trouble at the bridge. Never. At that time there was no such thing. I'll tell you, at that time what they were bringing over and that was mostly Chinese illegal aliens. They'd bring the Chinese, except nobody would say, "Oh, there's a new Chinaman. Where did he come from?" They'd catch 'em right away. And they were bringing opium over. But they didn't consider the people going over to buy groceries, the general public, that would be smuggling. No. No.

Phillips

M: In the 20s, during prohibition, there was an effort at some times to close the bridge. Do you remember?

P: They did close it. The Baptist Church had it closed. Well, you know Austin and San Antonio are under the Blue Law and every other block you find a Baptist Church and they are just governed by them. And that's all right. If they think that's the way to have that pull and power to have it made into law that you don't drink and you don't this and that, I think that was the worst thing that could ever happen. Then everybody starting drinking on the sly because it was prohibited. That's when the youngsters started drinking. And at that time too they had a lot of opium dens here down on South Oregon Street. We had a big population of Chinamen here. They with the long braids and the satin clothes and wooden shoes shuffling. We were scared to death of them. [Laughs]

M: Why were you scared?

P: Because the Chinese stories of Fu Manchu; lord have mercy. That was terrible. [Laughs] We were scared to death of Chinamen. And they used to sell firecrackers and all of that. We had beautiful Fourth of Julys here, celebrated in Juarez and here. Oh, it was just magnificent.

M: Do you ever have any trouble crossing the bridge when they closed it?

P: Well, when they started with the passports - not passports but you had to declare your citizenship, one day we were coming back from Juarez and it was about 12 o'clock, we had been over at a party at a relative's home. Our father was not with us at the time and they stuck their hand in there and "Citizenship?" Just like they do today and we all said, "American." And then they looked at Mother and said, "You, American?" And my mother said, "Yes. I'm an American." And he said, "Have you any proof?" "I'm telling you I'm an American, that's proof enough." [Laughs] At that time

my father was working at the federal office. He had his office where Kress's is now, on the corner of Mills and Oregon, right across from -- well, the Sheldon Hotel used to be there. What do they call it? The Plaza Hotel. Right there was a great big hill and right on top was a federal building. And he was the deputy clerk then and Mr. A. J. W. Schmidt was the U.S. Commissioner there. I worked there to help him catch up with his work. I wrote all the minutes in the big books -- about that big -- 2 by 3 feet -- and so that man said, "Oh, that's not proof enough." And then somebody came over and said, "That's proof enough." And later on that man came over to the office and my father was there and I was there and I told my father, "He's the one that told Mother that she had to have proof that she was an American." [Laughs] Well, of course, it was right. But she was an American and Americans didn't have to have that proof, you know.

And my mother came here in 1886 and she stayed here ever since when El Paso just had about 500 inhabitants and there was only El Paso Street.

M: I want to ask you a final question about how El Paso has changed over all the years that you've lived here. What do you think of El Paso now?

P: Well, El Paso has grown to a huge, beautiful city, one that my great-grandfather never dreamed of, but his dreams were that way. But I think El Paso is a very fine city. I think it's very friendly, willing to help, all tourists coming in. I just love El Paso. I'm just prejudiced that way. I'm from El Paso and always will be. It's just my city. That's just right.

M: Most native El Pasoans are very proud of this city.

P: Well, yes. I have never in my life said like some of them have said, "What is there here in El Paso. There's nothing. It's just a big

desert." Go to work and come back home and all that. But it's a peaceful city. We've never had riots in school; we've never had any bad dealings with the Negroes which other places have. The integration of Negroes into our schools was without event. Nothing. It's just a natural thing for those Negroes to come into school, which was right. But some people were prejudiced and they came from a part of the country, from the South, which was in them. They were born that way. They had to work that out. El Paso is a beautiful city to be proud of and I, as a resident, think it's just great, just great.

M: Well, Miss Phillips, I want to thank you very much for granting me the time and this interview. It's been very, very interesting.

P: Well, it's been my pleasure. A pleasure meeting you. So proud that you would want to write something about El Paso.

M: Thank you.

End of interview