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Interview no. 1625

John Hick Johnstone

Lady Ruth Johnstone

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THE UNIVERSITY OF TEXAS AT EL PASO INSTITUTE OF ORAL HISTORY

Interviewee: John Hick Johnstone and Lady Ruth Johnstone

Interviewer: Barbara Dent

Project: El Paso Medical History

Location: Socorro, Texas

Date of Interview: February 16, 2000

Terms of Use: Unrestricted

Transcript No.: 1625

Transcriber / Summary: Pamela Krch

In this interview, conducted primarily with Dr. John Hick Johnstone (b. 1909), he discusses his World War II experiences as a physician traveling with the Advance Command Corps; in addition, he speaks at length on El Paso's mid-twentieth-century medical scene, including the state of the hospitals and the practices of the medical community. At the start of the interview, both John Hick and Lady Ruth share memories of their early years and courtship in Eldorado, Illinois. On their 1940 honeymoon the couple passed through El Paso where they encountered some trouble at the international border due to the narcotics in Johnstone's medical bag. Not surprisingly, El Paso did not leave a good first impression; Johnstone thought at the time that it was the "hell hole of all creation." Ten months later, as a member of the United States Army Reserves, Johnstone was called to active duty before official U.S. involvement and sent to El Paso's William Beaumont Army Medical Center. Just as the couple began to enjoy the area, the Army transferred Johnstone to Britain, where he served in the high-security Advance Command Corps. Johnstone speaks at length about his duties within the command, including his memories of having treated General Eisenhower and his recollections of D-Day. After his discharge from the military, Johnstone and his wife relocated first to Silver City, New Mexico, but soon returned to the El Paso area. Settling in Ysleta, Johnstone assumed a practice, concentrating primarily on obstetrics. Johnstone speaks at some length on early medical practices, including the nascent use of sulfa antibiotics and penicillin. As well, he remembers El Paso's mid-century hospitals. In an addendum added by the interviewer, Dent mentions that Johnstone also described his experience of the Great Depression, but his voice is not included here. After a break in the tape, Johnstone returns and the interview concludes as Johnstone shares his memories of segregation and desegregation, both in the Army and in El Paso.

Length of interview 99 minutes

Length of Transcript n/a