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Interview no. 35

Eleanor Greet

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UNIVERSITY OF TEXAS AT EL PASO
INSTITUTE OF ORAL HISTORY

INTERVIEWEE: Eleanor Greet
INTERVIEWER: Wilma Cleveland
PROJECT: El Paso History
DATE OF INTERVIEW: July 26, 1968
TERMS OF USE: Unrestricted

TAPE NO.: _____
TRANSCRIPT NO.: 35
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BIOGRAPHICAL SYNOPSIS OF INTERVIEWEE:

Wife of Capt. W. D. Greet.

SUMMARY OF INTERVIEW:

Career of Capt. Greet; importance of El Paso as a living place for tuberculosis patients at the turn of the century; leading families of early El Paso.

Mrs. Eleanor Greet

July 26, 1968

Interviewed by Wilma Cleveland

When did you come to El Paso?

I came to El Paso in 1892; I was born in 1879. I came from a very large family from a rectory in Nashville, Tennessee. My brother developed TB after a trip to Europe. He went to San Antonio first. Bishop Johnson was head of the church there and he asked my brother to come to El Paso. This was in the early part of 1882. He asked him to take a church out here. He had been rector of a small church in Nashville. He had to go back to Nashville and settle up with the other church. In the meantime, his sister had developed tuberculosis also, so he brought her with him. They opened a little rectory that had not been used for anything but a library or something like that. He brought her out here and a little later on, another sister developed TB; two months later she came out here with her husband. They were both very young and she died within a week. Her brother had to go back to Nashville to take the body and her husband, and on the way to the cemetery, I was sitting behind my brother in the hack and he asked me if I wanted to come to El Paso. I said yes. I was just about twelve years old. The next day we started for El Paso on the old train between New Orleans and Nashville. I think that old train up at UTEP was the one that brought me to El Paso. It had not rained here for over a year and there were cattle on both sides of the road dead from lack of water. I got out here and all three of

us lived at the little rectory. This was Saint Clement's Church on Mesa Avenue.

Did you develop tuberculosis also?

Not then; I did later on. I lived here a year from June 1893 and there was a lot going on. The people just coming into El Paso would come to my brother to ask him questions. The Porchers, that was the first Porchers here, inquired as to the farm rights. My brother would get the church united when they would all get mad at each other. He was prominent everywhere. The sick people would come to him and ask him to get them rooms. El Paso then had very few rooms. There wasn't anything downtown. That whole block of Texas Street between Mesa and Stanton Streets had three houses on it. My best friend lived in one of those houses. The Court House had a big yard and we used to play in that yard and we would go up into the steeple of the Court House. When I was twelve I used to pick up cigarette butts out of the yard and go up into the steeple to smoke. I was a very bad little girl; I was in to everything. Where the Popular is now, there was a plumbing shop and they had bathtubs in the front yard. Across from the rectory there was a blacksmith shop. And on up to the corner there wasn't anything but Mrs. Taylor's Dining Room. That is where Hixson's later was. We had to go downstairs there. Edgar, her son, was a plumber and he used to fix our bathrooms. There weren't too many who had bathrooms. I used to walk to the Plaza. There was a hotel and it was called the Don

Pon. That's where we ate dinner every night. My sister was sick and I was just a little girl. We didn't have any help so Brother took us up there every night for dinner. It was kind of like all country hotels. It had a porch over the street. There weren't sidewalks, just boards. We would meet a lot of strangers. I remember when Mrs. DeGroff came to El Paso, there was great excitement because she was going to buy that hotel. She bought it for her sons by a previous marriage. One of them was Richard Orndorff and that was the big beginning of that hotel. It's the Cortez now. Across the street going back to where I lived there was a row of adobe houses. They went on Texas Street on down Mesa Avenue. They were one-room houses. Those were owned by a Negro woman named Mary Woods and we called her Aunt Mary. Her husband was John Woods; he was a policeman. She would come out to hang out her clothes and we would hang over our side fence and talk to her. The church was toward the front; it was green and the Sunday school was in the back. We didn't have a bathroom; we had a water closet. It was a long time before we got a bathroom. My brother put it in.

Was your mother living then?

My mother had died when I was four years old. There were eleven children. I was the seventh daughter; there were eight girls and three boys.

And your brother was a minister?

Yes, his name was Cabell Martin. The minister before him at St. Clements was Dr. Higgins; he was a doctor and a minister, too. He was a practicing doctor. Let me tell you about the beginning of the Popular; it was originally Calisher's Store, below San Antonio on El Paso Street. It was right across from the Del Norte Hotel. It was the only dry goods store. There was one bank; that was the State National. Later they bought the corner at San Antonio and Mesa and built the Popular. It was just a small store then. At the far corner going up San Antonio Street was the Post Office. But the corner behind the bank by the Popular was the Methodist Church. Our church was a little frame building with the yard fenced in. I had not been there long before I got diphtheria; all the Higgins children had it and two of their boys died. It is a terrible disease. His daughter was my friend and she had it too. They lived on Myrtle Avenue. Mrs. Zack White's family and the U.S. Stewart family (he was vice-president of First National Bank) all lived out there. Mrs. White gave a dinner party one night. I stayed at their house that night. His daughter is still alive, Leigh Osborne. She's five years younger than I. She's Owen White's sister. Owen White was very famous as a writer in New York. He was my sweetheart. Do you want me to tell you who my sweethearts were? Owen White, Maury Kemp, James Marr, and there were more. I was dating when I came here. One night, I came in from a party and told my sister that I had been kissed twenty times. She told me no more kissing games; I was too old. We used to play "Sweet beans and barley grows", that was a kissing game, and so was "Little Sally

Walker". But my sister stopped the kissing games; she thought that when I got twenty kisses that was too many. But I loved those boys. I have a book that Owen wrote. He married in New York. Steven Barlow was one of my boyfriends, too. He was the son of an Army officer. He didn't live in El Paso long, but he has been back here. He was an officer, too. Rebecca Payne was my friend. Her family was very prominent here, too. The Paynes were brothers of Mrs. White. When I got off the train at the little yellow station, I was taken to Mrs. White's house first of all. My sister was staying there. The first thing that struck me was the way everybody rolled their "R's". Dr. White was a very respected man and he was a wonderful doctor. He was the one who kept me alive when I had diphtheria. His wife came and sat up with me nights. There was only one hospital and that was Hotel Dieu. People, then, didn't go to the hospital like they do now. A lot of people came here for tuberculosis because it was high and dry. My brother would take these people to get rooms and the landlords wouldn't want to rent to them because they had TB. My sister died with it. The year after we got here, she wanted to go home. She was not well and she took me with her. I went to a seminary that does not exist now. It was over a hundred years old when I went there. It later consolidated with Belmont. Before she died, she heard me playing the organ and she told me I was really an organist. I have played all my life. I played forty years for the Jewish temple. I played for nearly every church in El Paso. That was after I came back the second time. Everything was so small and the people were so friendly. The

prominent families were the Kemps, the Whites, the Paynes, the Haggarts, the Magoffins, and the Irvins. Dr. Irvin had Irvin High School named for him. He was a very prominent doctor. Brother had a buggy and a horse named Little John, and when we drove out to the smelter, it was like going to the country. We'd go out there to see the Episcopal families. I didn't have anything else to do so I would go with him. Sister taught me my lessons and we would play croquet. I would play on top of the rectory. I loved to climb when I was young. I always to the top of anything I could see. When I was mentioning prominent families I forgot to mention the B.T. Hammetts; he was mayor before Charles Davis. When I came back the second time it was in 1899. I was nearly 20. I had just finished going to Ward-Belmont School; it was an all girls school. I had lots of sweethearts there too. I got sick out there. They sent me back here because I had caught tuberculosis from my brother and sister. I came back here and got well right away. So, in 1900, my sweetheart came out here from Alabama and we were married. W.D. Greet was his name and we were married in April. We were married only 37 years before he died. There was a great deal more going on the second time I came back. We bought this house over forty years ago. Everything in it is antique.

Tell me about your husband.

He didn't know a soul here when he came. We put him in the Guest House downtown near the Plaza. It was near where the library is now. Providence Hospital was started by a cousin of mine, Dr. J. Sheldon

Horseley; you never hear of him. His wife was a cousin of mine. They lived on Oregon Street. I knew his head nurse, Jeannie Monico. She was a cousin of the Porcher family. She was a wonderful nurse. That was right across from where it is now. It was near the Upson Avenue Drug Store. No one ever mentions that. My husband died in Providence Hospital and my baby was born there. That was 44 years ago. I have a son and a daughter. My son is head of the English department at Barnard in New York. The first baby was born in the rectory; Dr. Rawlings was my doctor for that baby. Dr. White had died and they said that when he died that the Mexican people from both sides of the border walked all the way to the cemetery. They loved him.

How did Captain Greet die?

He fell down an elevator in the Sheldon Hotel. He was working at the Police Station and a Mexican boy got caught in the elevator on the third floor. He asked if the slack had been taken up and they said yes. He pulled that boy up; but he had no business doing that because when he pulled the boy's legs up, the rope broke and they fell three floors. It damaged his liver. We went to California and everything. He stayed in Hotel Dieu for months but his liver was never good after that. Then later on when the Pierson Hotel was where the Times is now, a crazy man stuck him with a knife. He was crazy and he had gotten off the train that afternoon. They took my husband to Hotel Dieu and the yard there was just filled with the people that loved him.