

## [Volney Potter]

[Marie] Carter

Anthony, N. M.

OLD TIMERS STORIES

Volney Potter (Wife; Clara Mundy Potter

Interview; June 10, 1937

When I called on Volney Potter at La Mesa he told me some interesting facts about his family and the old house in which they live.

"La Mesa, like the adjoining town of San Miguel," he said, "has not undergone any great change since I was a boy. With the exception of a few modern houses and stores it looks about the same. My parents moved here from Weir, Kansas. I shall never forget the day our family of five got off the train at Anthony. My cousin, R.C. Bailey, met us, and the kindly station agent, Royal Jackman, was amused because I stuck so close to my dad. He never dreamed that beneath my jacket my heart was racing madly with expectation. I am sure that sister Ana, who is now Mrs. Charley Davis of Anthony, guessed what was passing through my youthful mind, for she smiled as she gave my hand a reassuring squeeze.

"My father, who was a great reader, had told me many a thrilling story about the Southwest, hence the moment I landed I was prepared keyed up and waiting for the startling events he had narrated to start popping around me with the snap of a cap pistol. Every moment I expected yet feared to see the cruel face of an Indian slowly rise above some of the mesquite bushes at the side of the road, suddenly brandish a tomahawk, send

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forth a wild yell and leap upon us. To this day I am unable to define my feelings when the expected Indian failed to materialize. But on a whole I believe I was both disappointed and relieved. C. 18 - N. Mex

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"Then unexpectedly I received a genuine thrill. The Rio Grande as I remember it got pretty rough in the old days. It was wider than it is now and the current was strong and swift. But, then, that was prior to the building of the Elephant Butte Dam. On this particular day--the day we arrived in Anthony[md;]I overheard the station agent remark that the river was unusually high. When we entered R.C. Bailey's skiff it began to rock from side to side, and when he took the oars and began to tow us across my sensation of fear was almost unbearable. No one, not even Anna, guessed that it was all I could do to keep from leaping overboard.

"We first went to Chamberino where we remained for awhile and then moved to La Mesa. I was real happy when father bought a ranch for I was at the age when boys have visions of themselves costumed as cowboys with nothing to do but ride horses, but my boyish dreams were quickly shattered for my first experience with horses was limited to the work team hitched to the plow which I followed. We all worked hard that first year, but father had been a mining man all his life and knew very little about farming. At the end of the year we were in debt and forced to turn over everything we had raised to Charley Millery at Anthony, and yet, we lacked eight hundred dollars of having made a living.

"This old house is one of the show places of the valley. It is two hundred years old. I bought it from Holiaro Moreno, whose father was one of our early day sheriffs. Holiaro was over eighty when he sold me this house. His father and grandfather live here before him, died and were buried in the back yard. Incidentally the largest and most beautiful roses we possess are the ones growing above their graves."

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"We have tried to preserve every bit of the architecture in its original form. Look at [these?] doors and these window frames the joints 3 are connected with wooden pegs--not a nail anywhere. The doors are heavy oak and hand carved. For a long time there were only three buildings in La Mesa, of course that was before my time, the Catholic Mission down the street, the Dusseler house on the other side of town and this one.

"[Note?] the ceiling in this house; they are rare and seldom found in the so called ['p neer?] homes." Most of the old Spanish and Indian houses have--the brush ceilings but very few have the genuine La Tillas like this one. They are made from trees a bout three inches in diameter, peeled and hand polished. Then they are fitted close together in a herring-bone design. The large beams crossing the la tilias are vigas.

"There was no lack of timber in the early days. The fact of the matter is this whole valley was bosque or woodland. Perhaps that accounts for the building of a fire-place in every room. They are small but must have been built by an expert for they draw perfectly. I have been told that some of our furniture, which is over a hundred years old, was made in Zacatecas and brought through Mesilla by ox team over the Santa Fe Chihuahua Trail. We have preserved the original water spouts on the roof of this house and quite a number of vigas on the roof of the shed in the patio. That old ox yoke above the gate was given to my wife's father by Geronimo the Apache Chief.

"La Mesa was once a favorite camping place for the roving [tribes?] of Indians. That is the reason the old timers built such substantial houses. These walls, as you can see, are three times the thickness of an ordinary adobe wall. In the early days the front part of this house didn't have any doors or windows and the only entrance was a trap door on the roof. Hence it made an excellent fort for protection against the Indians.

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"Holiaro's grandfather Moreno was a man who believed in being prepared; so he had portholes made in his private fort and stocked it with plenty of food, firearms and

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ammunition. The rope ladder leading to the roof could be used by the inmates of the house then pulled up and concealed. After getting the members of his household safely inside the [cuning?] old Spaniard would follow them and lock the trap door, which was a clever arrangement running the full length of the roof, defying detection by the keenest eyed Indian on the warpath.

"One evening, it was just about sunset, so Holiaro told me. Moreno was warned that the Indians were going to make a raid on his place. Moreno immediately [sum ons?] his family and servants, telling them to make haste and enter the fort for the Indians would soon be upon them. Finally the moon came up. Some of the servants stationed at the portholes reported that they saw shadowy forms skulking behind the trees across the road. Presently another outlook reported that the skulking forms were Indians, of that he was quite positive, for they had built a fire and as was their custom formed a circle around it. He then reported that they seemed to be holding a council.

"The council held by the Indians must have been of short duration for following the [servant's?] report the Indians sent forth a blood-curdling whoop and charged Moreno's fort. Six rifles in the hands of six Spaniards exploded through the portholes, and six braves hit the dust. The remaining Indians looked at their [ead?] dead brothers in amazement and returned to the fire. Moreno figured that their next move would be the hurdling of fire bands to set the house on fire and burn the inmates. And all the time more Indians kept coming and increasing the circle around the fire, Moreno knew that the Indians were so superstitious that the least thing with a supernatural trend would have more power to drive them away than a thousand armed men.

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"Along about midnight the Indians piled more mesquite on the fire and started to dance around it singing the weird uncanny notes of the death song working themselves into that frenzy which I have been told preceeded the massacre. Suddenly some of them slowed down in the dance to stare at something in the roof of the fort, others followed suit, then

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pandemonium broke loose. With screams of terror they fled in a body, and not wonder. The cause of their fright was a ghost so tall that it seemed to meet the sky, with eyes as black as coal and as big as saucers. After the Indians left old Moreno, who had been lying on the flat of his back juggling a ten foot viga wrapped in a sheet, let it fall to the roof of the fort with a thud."