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[Interview with Jose Garcia y Trujillo]

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Accession no. W1089

Date received 10/10/40

Consignment no. 1

Shipped from Wash. off.

Label

Amount 8 p.

WPA L. C. Project Writers' UNIT

Form-3 Folklore Collection (or Type)

Title Interview with Jose Garcia Trujillo

Place of origin New Mex. Date 9/26/36

Project worker Jane Smith

Projector editor

Remarks L CC W1089 [300088?]

OCT 30 1938 [?]

Subject: INTERVIEW WITH JOSE GARCIA Y TRUJILLO -

Library of Congress

S-240- Folk-Ways -

Submitted By: Janet Smith

Original Copy, Not Rewritten

Wordage: 1,800

Date: August 26, 1936

Approved: Ina Sizer Cassidy, State Director

1089 300088

S-240- Folk-Ways

Smith, Janet

8/26/36 - cl-1,800

INTERVIEW WITH JOSE GARCIA Y TRUJILLO

Jose Garcia y Trujillo doesn't believe that Billy The Kid was ever shot. He feels sure he got away to South America. He wouldn't be surprised if he is alive somewhere today, an old man with many memories and a quick mind, like himself. When I showed him a book by the man who killed Billy The Kid, he was unconvinced.

“No senora”, and he shook his forefinger back and forth before his face. “You think Billy The Keed let himself be shot in the dark like that? No Senora - Billy The Keed - never. I see Billy The Keed with these eyes. Many times, with these eyes. That Billy, tenia un' agilesa en su mente - en su menta aqui.” He pointed to his forehead.

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Mr. Garcia could speak but little English, and I knew almost no Spanish, but I understood that he meant that Billy The Kid had an extraordinary quickness of mind.

Again he pointed to his forehead and then with a quick motion to the sky. "Una funcion electrica", he said. Something that worked like lightning.

When I stopped to see Mr. Garcia he was sitting on the ground under the cottonwood tree that shades the cracked adobe walls of his long narrow house. His hat was pulled down over his eyes and he seemed to be sleeping. As I stopped the motor of my car, however, he raised his head and pushed back his hat with one motion. He squinted at me, and then pulled himself to his feet. 1st. par.?

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"Como le va, Senora." Mr. Garcia placed the one chair in the shade for me. He found a box behind a heap of wagon wheels and car fenders and sat down beside me. He squinted his long blue eyes and asked in Spanish, "What's new?"

I patted the black kitten stretched on a bench at my elbow. Beside it perched a cock and two hens. Two little brown dogs nosed at my shoes, and a big shaggy fellow laid his head against my arm. The flies buzzed.

A thin dark old woman stepped over the little goat sleeping just inside the doorway of the house, its head resting on the doorstep. She gathered up some green chili from a table in the yard, giving me an intent look as she stood there, and went back into the house without saying a word.

Mr. Garcia asked me again, "What's new? You bring me those history books of Billy The Keed?"

I showed him the picture of Pat Garrett who shot Billy The Kid. "I don't want to dispute against you Senora, but in my mind which is the picture of my soul, I know it is not true.

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Maybe Pat Garrett, he give Billy The Keed money to go to South America and write that story for the looks. Maybe he kill somebody else in Billy's place. Everybody like Billy The Keed - su vista penetraba el corazon de toda la gentel " - his face went to everybody's heart."

Mrs. Garcia came out again and sat on a bench beside her husband. Her skin looked dark and deeply wrinkled under the white towel she had wrapped about her head. She rolled a brown paper cigarette from some 3 loose tobacco in a tin box. As her husband talked she listened intently, puffing on her cigarette. From time to time she would nod her head at me, her eyes dark and sombre.

"What did Billy The Kid look like?" I asked.

"Chopito - a short man, but wide in shoulders and strong. His forehead was big. His eyes were blue. He wore Indian shoes with beads on his feet. His clothes - muy desareglado - "

"Desareglado?" I asked.

"Like yours," he said, pointing to my blue denim skirt and shirt. "Any old way."

"Muy generoso hombre, Billy The Keed - a very generous man. All the Mexican people, they like him. He give money, horses, drinks - what he have. To whom was good to Billy The Keed, he was good to them. Siempre muy caballero, muy senor - always very polite, very much of a gentleman."

"Once lots of mens, they go together after Billy The Keed to shoot him. They pay us - we go - sure. But we don't want to shoot Billy. We always glad he too smart for us."

In broken English, mixed with Spanish phrases, Mr. Garcia told me how he went in a posse of thirty-five or more men to capture Billy The Kid. He didn't know the Sheriff's name, but the description sounded like Pat Garrett himself. "Muy, muy alto" - very, very tall, and Pat Garrett was six feet, four and a half. Jose Garcia was working at the 4

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time as sheepherder on the ranch of Jacobo Yrissari, about ninety miles southeast of Albuquerque. The tall sheriff came by one day with a band of men, and offered him five dollars a day and food for himself and his horse to join the posse in search of Billy The Kid. He said he didn't think there was any danger of their getting Billy, and five dollars was a lot of money. The plan was to surround the Maxwell Ranch on the Pecos River, where Billy the Kid was known to spend much time.

This ranch belonged to Lucien Maxwell. "Un hombre muy grande, un millionario", said Jose Garcia. Lucien Maxwell was indeed one of the most striking figures of the early mountain frontier. Every trader and plainsman in the Rocky Mountain Region knew him. He came to New Mexico from Illinois when the country was still a part of Old Mexico. There he married Luz Beaubien, daughter of a French Canadian, Charles Hipolyte Trotier, Sieur de Beaubien, and a Spanish woman. With Guadalupe Miranda, Beaubien had received from the Mexican Government during the Administration of Governor Manuel Armijo a huge grant of land as a reward for pioneer services. Beaubien bought Miranda's share, and at Beaubien's death, Lucien Maxwell, his son-in-law, purchased all the land from the heirs and became sole owner of more than a million acres. He made huge sums of money selling sheep, cattle and grain to the Government, and built a great house at Cimarron. There he lived in as much magnificence as the times and the country could afford. His guests included cattle kings, Governors, Army Officers, and later when he moved to the ranch near Fort Sumner, Billy The Kid. Nearly every day his table was set for more than two dozen, and it is reputed that they ate on plates of silver and drank from goblets of gold. Jose Garcia said he didn't know anything about that for he had never been inside of the house, but he thought it quite likely. He had been by the place at Cimarron several times when he was working for some people by the name of Martinez who had a ranch north of Las Vegas. The Maxwell house was "una grande mansion." But it was to the Maxwell House on the Pecos near Fort Sumner that he went in search of Billy The Kid. Maxwell retired to his place at Fort Sumner after losing much of his wealth. His son Pete later became the richest sheep man in that part of the country. (From - Leading

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Facts of New Mexico History, R. E. Twitchell, Vol. 2, page 415, note 341.) It was Pete who was a friend of Billy The Kid. Jose Garcia said he and the other men surrounded the house for two weeks but they never got so much as a glimpse of Billy The Kid.

Mr. Garcia said he knew a good friend of Billy The Kid, Jose Chavez y Chavez. When he was herding sheep on the Yrissari Ranch, which was not far from Santa Rosa on the Pecos River, Jose Chavez y Chavez was sheep herder on a nearby ranch. One day the two of them were sitting under a tree smoking when a pack train on the way to Arizona came along on the other side of the Pecos. Just opposite the tree where the two sheepherders were sitting they tried to ford the stream. But the water was swift and the horses floundered. Jose Garcia and Jose Chavez pulled off their clothes, jumped in and guided the horses to the bank. After the pack train went on, Jose Chavez showed Mr. Garcia the twenty-one bullet scars on his body. "He had an innocent face - didn't look as though he could break a dish, but he was bad with a gun. Que hombre!

"Did they try to get Jose Chavez to go with the posse after Billy?" I asked.

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"Jose Chavez y Chavez", he corrected me. "No, senora, he had left the country at that time."

According to Walter Noble Burns it was this Jose Chavez y Chavez who was responsible for the friendship between Billy The Kid and the wealthy Maxwells. Billy The Kid had ridden over to Fort Sumner from Lincoln with several of his men, among whom was Jose Chavez y Chavez. The fiance of one of the Maxwell girls was drunk and met Jose Chavez y Chavez on the street back of the Maxwell House. The two men quarreled and Jose Chavez pulled his gun. Mrs. Maxwell ran out of the house and tried to pull her future son-in-law away, begging Chavez not to shoot him as he was drunk and didn't know what he was doing. Chavez replied that drunk or sober he was going to kill him, and he was going to do it immediately. Just then a young man walked rapidly across the road, touched his

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sombrero to Mrs. Maxwell, said something in Spanish to Chavez and led him away. It was the Kid. From that time until his death, he made Fort Sumner his headquarters, and was a frequent visitor at the Maxwell home. It was in Pete Maxwell's room that Pat Garrett shot him.

Mr. Garcia asked me if there were any books in Spanish about Billy The Kid. "My wife," he said, "she taught me to read. I didn't know the letters when I married her. She didn't know the words but she knew the letters and she taught me. I taught myself how the words went, but I never could teach her to read, ni con carinoes ni alebanzes - neither by coaxing nor praising - she never could learn anything more than the letters."

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Mrs. Garcia shook her head. "Nunca, nunca, nunca," she said. Never had she been able to learn more than the letters.

I promised to look for a Spanish book about Billy The Kid. I sat for a minute longer watching some pigeons perched on a water barrel. They pecked at the water. The ripples reflected on their green and lavender breasts. The little goat came out of the house and sniffed the dirt around my chair.

As I rose to go, Mr. Garcia stood up and took off his hat. "Muchas felicidades y buena salud, Senora," he said, with a little bow. Much happiness and good health to you.

Mrs. Garcia put out her hand. Her dark eyes were always sombre. "Adios", she said, "Que Dios vaya con usted." Goodbye, I can only say God be with you.

"Vuelva", they called after me as I drove away. "Come back."