

**NEW MEXICO  
FARM & RANCH  
HERITAGE  
MUSEUM**

CONSULTANT: Audrey Alpers

DATE OF BIRTH: June 21, 1915 Gender: Female

DATE(S) OF INTERVIEW: February 14 & 15, 1996, September 2 & 3, 1996

LOCATION OF INTERVIEW: Alpers' residence, Cimarron, N.M. and Raton, N.M.

INTERVIEWER: Jane O'Cain

SOURCE OF INTERVIEW: NMF&RHM  OTHER

TRANSCRIBED: Yes: May 19, 1998

NUMBER OF TAPES: Seven

ABTRACTOR: O'Cain

DATE ABSTRATED: May 16, 2001

QUALITY OF RECORDING (SPECIFY): Good. At times there is some noise from the external microphone.

SCOPE AND CONTENT NOTE: Alpers and Rupert family history. Regional and Cimarron history. Subjects include: Chase family history, the Maxwell Land Grant, Colfax County War, the coming of the railroad to Cimarron, the 1908 fire in Cimarron, the 1922 fire at the Springer mansion on the Chase Ranch, balls and parties held at the Springer mansion. Additional family history, the race track at Raton, the history of Gladys England Smith and Marjery England Sutcliffe. A discussion and description of artifacts donated by Audrey Alpers to the New Mexico Farm and Ranch Heritage Museum.

DATE RANGE: 1850s – 1990s

## **ABSTRACT (IMPORTANT TOPICS IN ORDER OF APPEARANCE):**

### **TAPE ONE, SIDE A:**

Alpers was born in 1915, at the home where she presently resides. Dr. Bass attended her birth. Bass lived a couple of houses down from the Alpers, consequently they would hear him start his Stanley Steamer when he went out to make house calls.

Her father, Frank Alpers, was born in 1884 in Brooklyn, New York. Her mother was Gertrude Rupert. Her mother's brother Tommy married one of the daughters of Stanley Chase of the Chase Ranch, and was the stepfather of Gretchen Sammis, present owner of the Chase Ranch. Tommy Rupert was featured in a 1937 *New Mexico Magazine* article on polo. Gertrude was born in 1889 in Missouri.

Frank Alpers moved to New Mexico in 1903 to convalesce after having typhoid fever. Her mother's family came to Cimarron in 1907, after Mr. Rupert had found work on the Katy Line, a railroad then being built in the area. Prior to her coming to New Mexico, Gertrude Rupert had been employed in Oklahoma as a bookkeeper. Gertrude's father didn't stay in Cimarron long, but soon after arriving he began pursuing an interest in copper mining. Gertrude's mother opened a small confectionery shop in Cimarron. It became a meeting place for local people, and it was in the shop that Alpers's grandmother first became acquainted with Manly Chase. Her grandfather got to know the Chases through a mutual interest in hunting.

Her father, who also worked for the railroad in Cimarron, opened a small dray business "on the side." With his team, Blue and Bett, he hauled freight from the railroad station to people's homes and businesses. Frank Alpers had arrived in Cimarron in 1906. By 1910, her father had given up the dray business and had gone to work for George Webster, owner of the Uracca Ranch (now the Philmont Boy Scouts Ranch). Webster put in the Cimarron Water Company in 1910, and it was for that company that her father went to work.

The New Town in Cimarron was established in 1906 through the organization of the Cimarron Townsite Company. They paid the Maxwell Land Grant \$98,000 for the land on the north side of the river. She discusses some of the stipulations of the contract (when houses must be built and a "liquor clause"). Her parents married in 1911, and they built the house in which the consultant presently resides in 1912.

### **TAPE ONE, SIDE B:**

A kitchen and back porch were added to the house in the 1920s. Money for the addition was borrowed from Dr. Bass. The original kitchen was made into another bedroom to accommodate her brother and herself. Her father always slept on the screened front porch, believing that it was important to sleep in the fresh air.

Alpers describes the public schools she attended in Cimarron. She comments that the Chase family hired their own teacher and had their own "little schoolhouse." Eventually the Chase children attended boarding schools. When her uncle, Tommy Rupert, lived at the Chase Ranch he would ride into Cimarron horseback to attend school.

Discusses again her maternal grandmother's friendship with Manly Chase. Her grandmother also worked as a seamstress, and lived for a period of time at Chase Ranch and did sewing for them. While she lived there, she had her two youngest children, Tommy and Katherine, with her. Her older sons were already working and living independently. When Mrs. Rupert decided to return to Oklahoma she left Tommy at

the Chase Ranch. Tommy eventually married Manly Chase's granddaughter, Margaret Chase, who was a daughter of Stanley Chase.

Audrey discusses her mother's love of history, which was sparked by her interest in the Maxwell house built in Cimarron in the late 1850s. Although the house was inhabited until 1911, it was "in poor shape." Gertrude wanted to purchase the Maxwell house, but her father wanted a newly built house. Gertrude became interested in researching the original owners of the Maxwell Land Grant, and its subsequent history. She published an article in the *New Mexico Magazine*.

Both Audrey and her brother Frank attended college. Audrey did not finish college but went to work for the National Youth Administration in the 1930s. The young men in the NYA in Las Vegas made furniture, and tinwork items, such as chandeliers. Her brother spent six years at the University of New Mexico and graduated in 1938 with a major in "anthropology and archaeology." He had a lifelong interest in the American Indians of the area, and wrote some articles based on his research.

Audrey Alpers graduated from high school in 1933. She worked two years as a secretary before starting college in 1936 at the University of New Mexico. She left college to work for the NYA, and just before World War II she left the NYA and went to work for the Maxwell Land Grant Company. It was during the time she spent working there that she became very interested in the history of the land grant.

She is questioned in more detail about her work at the district NYA office in Raton. In addition to woodworking for the boys, there was a large sewing room for the girls and they were also being taught colcha embroidery.

A discussion begins of the Depression-era years in Cimarron.

### **TAPE TWO, SIDE A:**

Discussion of the Depression years. Alpers's father was the superintendent of the water company in Cimarron during these years and earned a steady salary.

In approximately 1940, after she left the NYA, Alpers worked for a short period of time interviewing farmwomen about their day-to-day activities. She believes she met with resistance from some of them because they thought she was "checking up on" their draft-age sons. She doesn't recall what New Deal program she was working for or what her salary was, but she might be able to find this information as her father always kept track of her earnings. She could have stayed on in this position, but decided she didn't like "country work." She went to work for the Maxwell Land Grant Company. Soon after that the New Deal employment programs were disbanded, as World War II increased the demand for labor.

At this point the interview focuses on regional history and the history of Cimarron. The Jicarillo Apaches and the Utes were located in the Cimarron area. There are some old buildings still standing at the Chase Ranch that were part of an Indian agency there. Both Kit Carson and Lucien Maxwell were Indian agents at one time.

Chase family history discussed including Manly Chase's move to Colorado and his eventual purchase of the land where the present day Chase Ranch is situated. Establishment and history of the Maxwell Land Grant is focused on, including the clash between the people who had settled on the grant and the owners of the grant who had purchased it from Maxwell. The Chases were not part of this struggle because they held a clear title to their land.

### **TAPE TWO, SIDE B:**

Discussion continues over the conflict between the settlers on the grant and the owners. (As an aside Alpers states that she worked for Victor J. Van Lint, who was sent from Holland to administer the grant in the 1940s. At that time the grant owners were still leasing some land and prospecting for gold. Van Lint was responsible for closing the town of Baldy. Eventually the grant offices were moved to Raton, and then the First National Bank there took over the remaining business affairs of the grant.) Much of this conflict occurred in the 1880s and 1890s. After the settlers were evicted from the grant, the W.S. Ranch, owned by Lord Wilson of Scotland and Montague Stevens became the Chase's closest neighbors. Captain French was their ranch manager. Both Stevens and French wrote books about their experiences in New Mexico.

### **TAPE THREE, SIDE A:**

The interview continues on February 15, 1996. Margaret Laumbach of Springer, New Mexico, is also present at the interview.

The interview continues with a description of some of the early citizens of Cimarron, including Lucien Maxwell and Henry Lambert, owner of the Saint James Hotel. Some of the early buildings (Aztec Mill and the Maxwell House) are discussed. The Whitman's were another family that settled in Cimarron in 1857. Discussed again the sale of the land grant by Maxwell in 1870 to a consortium of English investors. By 1875 the original consortium was bankrupt. They had hired Frank Springer as their legal council in 1873. At the sheriff's auction of the grant in 1880, a group of Dutch investors bought the grant. When they purchased the grant, 2500 people were living on the grant without title to the property.

Follows a discussion of the railroad coming to Cimarron in 1906, and information about the English people who settled in Cimarron. The Chases obtained some of the furnishings from the Maxwell house from one of the managers of the grant, Frank Sherwin. Frank Sherwin's daughter, May Belle, was staying at the Chase Ranch when she fell down the stairs and broke her neck (this is detailed in the book *The Chases of Cimarron*).

### **TAPE THREE, SIDE B:**

Alpers describes a fire that her mother witnessed in 1908 that burned many businesses in Old Town. The Saint James Hotel was saved by soaking blankets in water and hanging them from the balcony. Her mother recalled seeing the steam rising from these blankets.

The population of Cimarron grew when the railroad came to town. The railroad discontinued coming into Cimarron just before World War II. Now, there is a noticeable increase in tourism in Cimarron during the summer months due to the proximity of the Philmont Boy Scout camp.

A discussion follows of rodeos in the area, and polo. By the 1930s, large ranches such as the CS Ranch and the Philmont fielded their own polo teams. People from Cimarron went out to watch the matches, but polo did not supplant rodeos.

Alpers discusses the fire at the Chase Ranch in 1922 that burned the Charles Springer mansion to the ground. Audrey caught a ride with a man from Cimarron and went to the ranch to watch the fire. Although the Springers were traveling when the fire occurred, many household furnishings were saved by the townspeople. The fire started in the third floor ballroom, most likely due to faulty electrical wiring that had just been installed. (Later the large garage belonging to the Springers burned to the ground when someone was attempting to steal gasoline from the Rolls Royce that was parked there.) At the same time

the Springer mansion was burning, someone set fire to the Maxwell house in Cimarron. Alpers believes that the Maxwell fire was set in order to draw people away from the Springer mansion because they wanted to steal the liquor stored there.

Discussion of the gala parties that were held at the Springer mansion (the house was built in about 1901 and stood until the fire in 1922). They had a player piano to entertain their guests. The piano was pumped by a "little" African American boy who also served as their golf caddy on the course that was built at the ranch. Many of these parties were held for the nieces of Charles and Mary Springer, Gladys and Marjery England, however Charles Springer was also active in politics and entertained a great deal for that reason.

#### **TAPE FOUR, SIDE A:**

This interview session was held on September 2, 1996, at the Casa de Sol in Raton. The primary focus of the interview on September 2 and 3, 1996, was to obtain information about a very large donation of artifacts, documents, books, and photographs that Audrey Alpers made to the Museum in August 1996.

The interview commences with additional details of Audrey Alpers's personal history beginning with her managing her father's insurance agency. Her father founded the insurance agency some time prior to his retirement from the water company in 1959 (he worked there for forty-nine years, 1910 – 1959). In 1948, Alpers started working weekends at the racetrack in Raton (she believes she terminated her employment with the Maxwell Land Grant Company in 1946). In 1969, Alpers and her parents moved from Cimarron to Raton. At the track she worked in the "calculating room" where she "mostly . . . figured the win pool." Races were held two days a week and later three days per week. The track closed in 1992, and Audrey worked there all but the first two years of its existence. Alpers states, ". . . the economy had a lot to do with . . ." the closing of the track.

Her mother died in 1975, her father in 1976, and her brother in 1990. She moved back to her home in Cimarron in 1993.

Alpers, as nearly as she can remember, started working for the Maxwell Land Grant Company in 1939 or 1940 (and worked for them until 1946). She discusses her mother's love of history, and her brother's research interests.

Both her father and brother had the nickname "Bunny." Her father was given the nickname by the gang that hung out at the Oxford Hotel when he first arrived in Cimarron in 1906 because "he was typically Easterner." This nickname was then passed on to his son, Audrey's brother.

An extended discussion follows on the history of Gladys and Marjery England, daughters of Ida Chase and Hugh England. Many of the artifacts donated to the Museum by Audrey Alpers originally belonged to Gladys England Smith.

#### **TAPE FOUR, SIDE B:**

History of Gladys and Marjery England continues. They were sent to a finishing school near Philadelphia. During World War I their aunt and foster mother, Mary Springer, insisted that the girls contribute to the war effort, so they joined the Red Cross and rolled bandages with a group of women in Cimarron.

Gladys married a dentist, Troy Smith, and lived in Raton. They had no children. Troy originally came to the Springer mansion as a musician and Gladys met and fell "madly in love" with him. Gladys died in

1987. Gladys shared a great deal of the Chase family history with Alpers, and with Ruth Armstrong, who wrote *The Chases of Cimarron*.

Marjery married Tommy Sutcliffe, Mary Springer's chauffeur, even though, according to Alpers, "she really was very much in love with" Captain French's oldest son. Marjery and Tommy continued to live in the carriage house at the Springers after their marriage. "She felt she had to stay," to take care of her aunt, Mary Springer. Alpers states, "And that was her life."

After the second fire at the Chase Ranch, when the Springer's garage burned down, the Springers finally purchased a home in Raton. Charles Springer remained very active in politics and also was prominent in the establishment of New Mexico's highways.

A brief discussion of the daughters of Stan and Zeta Chase, Ida (Midge), Audrey, and Margaret (married to Tommy Rupert, uncle of Audrey Alpers).

At this time a discussion of the artifacts donated to the Museum begins. In discussing the Navajo blankets and rugs Audrey states that the family often went to Taos in the 1920s and 1930s and purchased things there. They were not interested in trying to buy the work of any particular weaver.

#### **TAPE FIVE, SIDE A:**

Some of the textiles and other artifacts were purchased by Alpers's parents in 1911 from local Cimarron stores, such as Lail's Supply, in order to furnish their new home. Her mother also purchased mission oak furniture at this same time. Alpers has a number of paintings done by Manville Chapman. Chapman was an artist who was employed by the WPA in the 1930s; he painted the murals in the Shuler Theater in Raton.

#### **TAPE FIVE, SIDE B:**

Many of the Chapman paintings were obtained by Alpers' mother when she traded her mission oak furniture with him for the paintings.

#### **TAPE SIX AND TAPE SEVEN:**

Interview is concluded on September 3, 1996, with a continuing discussion of artifacts donated to the Museum. Alpers states that she collected many things: dishes, art glass, coins, buttons, and furniture. Gladys Smith gave her many pieces of glassware, art glass, and china. Both Alpers and her mother would purchase things they liked and did not attempt to collect work from a particular pueblo, potter, artist, or weaver. Alpers did not purchase items for resale, although she was approached at times by buyers who were interested in purchasing her collections.