



ORAL HISTORY PROGRAM
INTERVIEW ABSTRACT

CONSULTANT: Jack Gracie

DATE OF BIRTH: Circa 1915 GENDER: Male

DATE(S) OF INTERVIEW: March 19, 1998

LOCATION OF INTERVIEW: Gracie residence, Anthony, New Mexico

INTERVIEWER: Eddie Folks

SOURCE OF INTERVIEW: NMF&RHM X OTHER _____

TRANSCRIBED: Yes: May 1998

NUMBER OF TAPES: One

ABTRACTOR: Sylvia Wheeler

DATE ABSTRATED: September 7, 2001

QUALITY OF RECORDING (SPECIFY): Good

SCOPE AND CONTENT NOTE: New Mexico mining camps with an emphasis on Dawson.

DATE RANGE: 1920-1998

ABSTRACT (IMPORTANT TOPICS IN ORDER OF APPEARANCE):

TAPE ONE:

Eddie Folks, a NMSU Public History Graduate student, is interviewing Jack Gracie. Gracie was born in Falkirk, Scotland. He came to the U.S. in 1920 at four and a half years of age. He has a younger sister. His father worked in the mines in Scotland. Gracie's family lived in a number of New Mexico mining camps: Brilliant, Swastika, Koehler, Madrid, and then to Dawson in about 1926. His father always had a job. In 1940, he was the general manager of the whole company at Dawson. Twelve working mines existed in Dawson. When his father became the fire boss, they moved to Raton. As many as different twenty-six different nationalities lived together and got along well in the different camps. Gracie has this number from having worked, himself, as a young man, as a census taker for the camp. No racial discord existed, he says.

The interviewer, Folks, asked him about a town called "Coontown" in the Dawson mining camp. Gracie says he didn't know of it, that Dawson was spread out, that he, himself, was young. He speaks of the two big explosions in Dawson, one in 1913 and another in 1923, many men were killed; both happened before the Gracies moved there. He says that Dawson had excellent public schools. Raton didn't have as many students. Dawson's population was double that of Raton which was at four to five thousand.

Not everyone was acquainted because the town was "scattered." He recalls having a Mexican friend in Raton, but doesn't recall any Mexicans in Dawson. In high school, they had football, basketball and baseball; they played marbles. His father wouldn't let him mine; he wanted him to get an education. He worked briefly as a young adult on the tippie, screening coal. His father was never hurt in the mines. His father said that all accidents could be traced to human carelessness. He does say that the earlier explosions killed men because they were asphyxiated when the explosion drew all the oxygen from the mines. Since then they have placed huge fans at the mouth of an entrance to the mine to draw the air through the mines. He agrees with the interviewer that it's possible that some men were asked to go back to work before the mines were safe, but thinks that would have been before unionization and the policies implemented by the federal government under the Worker's Compensation program. Folks comments that if an explosion occurred Phelps Dodge would compensate the family monetarily. Gracie agrees that they would.

Gracie displays a map of old Dawson, of which no buildings are extant today. He explains the Dawson coal washer as something that washed off the dirt and impurities from the coal and sorted it. They had one washer there for the whole camp. His father went back to Swastika because he said that Dawson was not practicing safety precautions. Later, he says, they did. He describes the town as appealing with a beautiful theatre, a mercantile store selling a number of things, schools, other stores, bakeries, a pool hall, and a swimming pool.

He says that Dawson mines were not safe, though better after the major explosions. He agreed that black lung was a given, that his father had black lung, though he didn't die of it. He said the miners could not light matches in the mine, that they had to wear helmets. His father worked in the mines at night for eight years. The explosions were caused by inadequate ventilation and Phelps Dodge knew about it. The company paid to bury all the miners in the Dawson cemetery.

Gracie explains what coke is, coal that is heated and to burn out everything but the coke. Coke was used largely in steelworks because it burns hotter. The Dawson mines closed in 1950 he comments looking at photos with the interviewer. He has not been in Dawson since 1927 or 1928. Dawson, again looking at photos, had ice trucks because many people did not have refrigeration.

In answer to the question as to what teams played against Dawson, Gracie said, Raton, Vegas, Springer and Mora.

He said the people from Dawson came from Italy, Greece, the British Isles, Mexico, France, Germany, and a few from Japan and China. They were immigrants. The railroad ran from Tucumcari to Dawson. Gracie says there was much wildlife there, elk, and deer. You needed a permit to hunt, though his family didn't hunt.

Gracie says that the mining area in New Mexico where he grew up, down to Madrid, is all closed. The mines were bought out, closed in a month, throwing 800 men out of work who never recovered. There were mines around Gallup too, that also shut down. The mines did not help these men find work. "There is nothing there to see in Dawson."