



**ORAL HISTORY PROGRAM**  
**INTERVIEW ABSTRACT**

CONSULTANT: Eloise Whittles

DATE OF BIRTH: June 2, 1911 GENDER: Female

DATE(S) OF INTERVIEW: October 27, 2000

LOCATION OF INTERVIEW: Whittles' home, Las Cruces, NM

INTERVIEWER: Marcie Palmer

SOURCE OF INTERVIEW: NMF&RHM   x   OTHER \_\_\_\_\_

TRANSCRIBED: Yes: July 9, 2001

NUMBER OF TAPES: One

ABTRACTOR: Marcie Palmer

DATE ABSTRATED: July 30, 2001

QUALITY OF RECORDING (SPECIFY): Good

SCOPE AND CONTENT NOTE: Life as a minister's wife during World War II. Rural living in  
Claunch, N.M. and Las Cruces.

DATE RANGE: 1930s - 2000

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

### **TAPE ONE:**

Consultant moved from Coleraine, Minnesota, to Claunch, New Mexico in the fall of 1937. She and her husband, Leonard, lived in the church basement until a house was built for them in Claunch. They moved to Alamogordo from Claunch in 1940-1941.

They had a very comfortable life in Minnesota when her husband decided to become a missionary. They sold almost everything they had and bringing only what they could in a four-wheeled trailer. The trip to New Mexico took about four days at thirty-five miles per hour. It was very far between places and very barren. There were many tumbleweeds, which the consultant had not seen before. They moved during the drought of the 1930s and it was very dry.

The Presbyterian Church sponsored a program called Sunday School Missions. Mr. Whittles had shown an interest and they asked him if he would take the New Mexico field, which was like a foreign field because of the many people who had lost their homes and had nothing. People came to settle in the Claunch area and work the farms; they raised pinto beans.

Consultant did keep in contact with her family. Friends and relations sent books until they had enough to hold school, which included one year of high school.

Her husband would hold three or four services each Sunday. He served the Willard, Pintada, and Ancho communities, and occasionally other areas as well.

Consultant became a schoolteacher in Minnesota before marriage, and taught there in a one-room country school, all grades. Later in New Mexico, she studied at the University of New Mexico and taught school.

The school in Claunch had been built by the W.P.A. of rough lumber from the nearby forest. Some people had a few milk cows. There was a big market for pinto beans and in the 1940s a bean elevator was built. In Claunch, one family put in a post office and restaurant, and another came and built a grocery store.

Volunteer labor built a house for them to live in next to the church.

Mrs. Whittles remembers young men coming to break horses and politicians coming through promising them they were going to have paved roads. They had 4-H clubs and the County Agent would come to town and stay the night at their home or in the church or yard. The consultant had a group of eight or nine girls in the 4-H program.

In the few years the Whittles lived in Claunch many things were improved. Her husband dug a cistern and put guttering for it along the church roof.

Water and fences were the big problems for everyone in Claunch.

Mr. and Mrs. Whittles moved to Alamogordo and were there when Pearl Harbor was attacked. Her husband (a Presbyterian minister) joined the army. The town changed very quickly. When Leonard joined the Army Air Corps, she went to Norman, Oklahoma, to stay with her sister.

After Leonard's basic training and officer training, his papers were stamped, "This man should be in the chaplaincy." The chaplaincy had no room for him and he did not want to wait, so he joined the Red Cross and went overseas to the South Pacific, then to Fort Knox.

Consultant went to school in Oklahoma, then went to Fort Knox and got a job at Calvert-Seagrams, where she worked all the time they were there. Her husband was then discharged to the reserve to wait for his call in the chaplaincy. They went to Duluth, Minnesota, for the winter and he volunteered for the Red Cross. Then he took training in Washington, D.C., and was sent to the desert with the Army.

She went with him most of the time. They lived in Riverside, California, until he shipped out overseas. She was working for the Red Cross and stayed in California. They had government housing and the wives were paid \$27 a month.

When the war was over they went back to Minnesota for a visit, and then lived in California. They moved to Albuquerque in 1951. During this time they adopted their children, two daughters, in California. In 1957 they moved to Las Cruces. She and her husband went to school in Albuquerque and he went to Clauch on some Sundays. After they moved to Las Cruces, Leonard's health continued to decline and he was hospitalized at Fort Bayard Veteran's Hospital. He died in 1965. Mrs. Whittles earned her teaching credentials and taught first and second grade at East Picacho School for twenty years.

The most unique thing about living in the rural areas in those hard times was the friendships; they were "something special."

She grew up on a farm in Minnesota, but it was very different from the Clauch area. It was very dry and there were hard times in New Mexico during and after the Depression.

