

TRUJILLO ADOBE PROJECT

Transcription of Oral History Interview
with
Olive Trujillo Vlahovich ("Aunt Olive")

Recorded at the Trujillo Adobe Historic Site
October 18, 1980

Interviewers: Joyce Vickery, with children of the Trujillo Adobe Project
Team

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000 Joyce Vickery (JV): Aunt Olive tell us what you can remember about the Adobe when you were real little. What was the first thing you remember about the Adobe?

Aunt Olive (AO): I remember it as being very happy and very secure and very protective and very much loved. Our parents were quite concerned about us. As the children came along, the doctors from Riverside used to come out on their bicycles. Later on, on different occasions when the babies were born, my dad had to go after the doctor in horse and buggy. At that time, it was Dr. Darling and Dr. Brown who used to deliver most of the babies. The babies were delivered at home. There used to be four or five women come to assist, and they would sit around the table and my dad always had a gallon of claret wine and about a quart of port wine. I remember these old ladies sipping on that and then I told you about the olive trees out in front. They used to cure those olives and then when these old ladies were sitting around waiting for the babies to arrive they had a big bowl of these cured olives in there and they would nibble on those and they would sip on that port wine. It's a wonder they were sober enough to assist, but they did. Some would take

care of the baby and some would take care of the mothers, and then they would place the baby in a hammock, a homemade hammock, which they made out of old blankets. They would place the hammock near the bed so at night time the mamas didn't have to get up and walk the floor with them, they just pushed the hammock and rock it. Then from the hammock they graduated to the baby buggy and also they could reach and just shake the buggy like that and put the babies to sleep. Then when they were bathing the babies, they usually bathed them either in the kitchen or right on these windows here (south window in la Sala). As you see, the sun shines in there. Then after their bath they were put in their baskets and they would sleep there, it was nice and warm.

JV: What happened to the other children while your mother was having a baby?

AO: Well, usually they were put to bed in the room we are in (la Sala). We used to have what they call a sanitary couch. It was more like your chain link fence, that is the springs were like a chain link fence, and they folded down on the sides and all three of us were put in there. Once in awhile, they would take them across the street over to Aunt Benina (Aunt Benina Rubidoux Trujillo--Juan Trujillo's wife) who was the wife of my father's oldest brother, Juan. She always participated in the parties, she was a little on the nose side.

JV: Did they really boil water, like they do in the movies?

AO: Yes, I remember them boiling water and having a lot of clean, white cloths. I suppose to receive the baby in.

JV: Anyone want to ask Aunt Olive any questions about this or anything else?

- 095 TT: The kitchen and the bedroom were knocked off, they aren't here anymore.
- AO: The kitchen starts over there about the end of the wall where the green part (north wall--rear) is, oh, it isn't either, up where you see the end of the adobes and the kitchen extended that way. That was our kitchen and living room; and on this side here (south side--rear) was a pantry and it had a dirt floor and that is where we used to store our canned goods and used to hang our meat up and things like that.
- TT: Was the horse's name really Stephen?
- AO: No, I think that is one of Joyce's little jokes. I think that was Pet.
- TT: Did you have a normal daily routine like chores you had to do around here?
- AO: Oh, yes. At that time we didn't have electricity in the beginning. We had kerosene lamps and I remember Ted and I, my oldest brother had to take turns in cleaning the lamp chimneys. And also we had to help bring in wood and take care of the younger babies.
- JV: What else did you have to do? The chore you dislike the most.
- AO: Oh golly, well at that time, now you children are fortunate and I'm sure you at least have one or two bathrooms that you can go to, but we had the outdoor houses, sometimes a two-seater and sometimes a three-seater, the smallest hole for the younger children. At night time, mother used to have a chamber that the children used to use at night. But in the day time we had to go out there and we all had to take our turn at emptying out this chamber and rinsing it out and

leaving it out in the outhouse to air out and then bringing it back in the house. And that was one little job we didn't like.

TT: When did they put the plaster on the side of the wall?

AO: The plaster was already there on it when I was born.

TT: What was one of your favorite amusements?

150 AO: One of them was hide-and-seek, we used to run around and in here was a hallway and two doors going into the bedroom and only one door from the hallway coming into what we call "la Sala", that was our living room or parlor, in those days. We used to run around in between those two doors and then there was a closet at the end of the hallway over here (in the middle) and we used to occasionally hide in there. We played hide and seek, as I said, and we played hopscotch. We didn't get too many toys, so we had a lot of marbles and we played jacks a lot and we had to make our own fun. We had swings too.

TT: Over in the corner we found a mouse's nest. Did you have any mice in the walls? (Evidence of mice was found during archaeological excavations.)

AO: Yes, we did. Because at that time, we didn't have a subfloor. We had just one floor over the dirt (see notes of building analysis). Big rats used to get in there, and I know my mother was always fighting them. Always being careful for us children not to leave the doors opened and to watch it because these rats used to come in and they would steal things, even pieces of clothing they'd find, you know. So we did have them.

170 TT: What was the basic furniture you had when you were born, like in the living room and kitchen?

AO: It was quite simple. I remember a little four-legged square table, it was in the center of the room. And we had a little metal box, which I still have, that was full of photographs (obtained by Joyce Vickery) and that set down on the bottom shelf of that. And as I told you, we had that sanitary couch in there which had a cover on it that we bought from an Arab who used to peddle household goods.

JV: What did you call him?

182 AO: "El Arabe". He was an Arab, and, of course, they were few and far between. He was the only one I remember having seen. But he used to peddle household goods. And we had that cover which was reversible, and then we had probably three or four straight-backed chairs that were really the dining room chairs, no over-stuffed furniture or anything like that.

TT: Who was the oldest out of all the kids?

AO: My brother Ted was the oldest, then me, then my sister Stella, and then my brother Dutch (Randolph). We were all four born here at the house.

TT: Why did you call him that?

AO: Well, he used to have beautiful golden hair and it was cut like a little Dutch boy style. And that time they used to wear the Buster Brown suits which my mother used to make for him. He had a little round face and looked exactly like a little Dutch boy. Guy S. Garner, who used to be Justice of the Peace in Highgrove, and really the only one in the area at that time. He used to come by and visit with us and he nicknamed him Dutch, so it stuck with him.

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JV: What did Dutch do when your mother would do the laundry?

AO: We used to wash out there (behind Adobe--north). Dad used

to draw the water from the well and fill the tubs. They had one great big tub that was just black on the outside and that is where they used to boil the clothes. But on wash days dad would draw the water and he would leave some tubs in there filled, you would have to have three or four because you would have to wring the clothes out by hand. They had those great big bars of Fels Naptha soap, it was a kind of brownish looking soap, they used to have to shave that, and that was part of our jobs to help mother shave the soap to put in the tub where they boiled all the white clothes. And Dutch would, he was faster than lightening, we were suppose to watch him, he ran out there and he jumped into those tubs and just jumped up and down as happy as he could be with all his clothes on. At that time you didn't have as many shoes as you children have now. You were lucky if you had one good pair at a time. So it was terrible. So what he would do, he was as strong as a bull, he was really young, he wasn't past four, but he would take those tubs (at that time this little hill--behind Adobe--seemed to have larger slope) and tip them over and rolled them down the hill. He would just laugh out loud. Then we would catch the dickens because we weren't watching him close enough.

JV: Did he catch the dickens too?

AO: Oh yes, but it didn't do any good, he would do it over and over again.

TT: What did you eat?

AO: We had plenty to eat. My father had a huge garden out there (behind Adobe--south west). He used to plant enough for both houses, my uncle Luis and his family lived you'll see on the little map we made right opposite over there (due

north 60') right where that trailer is. And her husband passed away sooner so my dad used to put in a garden and share it with them, as well as the well water we had then. We used to grow squash, potatoes, carrots, string beans, tomatoes, and most all vegetables that were available then. Corn, real tall corn, at that time they used to call it white corn, now we refer to it as field corn. We did not have the little yellow corn, but it was delicious. Mother used to cook great big kettles of it like that and for the children's snack, if we got hungry in the afternoon, we wouldn't come in for a piece of candy or anything like that because we only got that for like once a month, we would come in and pick an ear of corn and run outside and eat it. Or pick up a tomato and eat it.

JV: Tell them about breakfast.

AO: We had our own chickens, so mother (dad was a big potato eater) would fix a great big skillet of fried potatoes and either ham or bacon. His favorite was fresh salt pork. Then she would fix a great big platter of eggs. We were never asked how many eggs we want, or anything like that, like we do now. She would just fix a big pot of eggs. Everybody ate just what they wanted. So breakfasts were like that. Then sometimes she would make tortillas maybe on a Sunday morning and roast some meat in the oven. The delicacy at that time was breast of lamb, which was very good for a late Sunday brunch. So, anyhow, I have to go back and tell you about the vegetable. They used to grow a lot of squash and to me, as I remember it, was like a zucchini only it was a lighter color. And they take that and slice it and then string it out and then they would clean the clothes

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lines real good and string this out and dry it and then pack it in little flour sacks. Then in winter time we would take that and all you had to do was add moisture to it and then season it and you would have your squash, especially during Lenten season.

TT: Can you tell us more about the swing you had in the tree?

AO: You see the branch that is broken there (on large Pepper tree--south west Adobe), that was a big branch that used to extend out in this direction and it was a huge swing out there. We used to really use it a lot, but we never fought over it, you know. We never argued about who was going to swing next, we just each use to take our turn. That was one thing our parents taught us is to be obedient and respectful as well as have respect for the other person's toys, whatever.

TT: Can you tell us about the hammock?

AO: I was just going to tell that we also had a hammock out there. We used that a lot.

TT: Whatever happened to it?

AO: I really don't know.

TT: Did Dutch have a real first name?

AO: His name was Randolph. Randolph William. I've got to tell you more about him. When we moved over to Highgrove when we left here, I had been promoted to the fourth grade. At that time children would start school when they were five years old. We didn't have any kindergarten. And the school teachers would teach the whole classroom. As you know, in your packet there it tells you about the Trujillo School. Let's see, going back to Dutch and his name, when we moved over to Highgrove, why the teacher asked us one day, "How

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come his name is different than yours?" I said why, his name isn't different than ours. He said he told us his name was Randolph Williams. He used his middle name.

TT: Was there anyone around here you used to play with?

AO: We used to get together usually on Sundays. Either birthday time or baptisms or marriages. They always had music-- they'd have a violin and a guitar and they would serenade one another. I can remember very well when they would wait until we were all in bed and then they would tin can you and they would play and sing and they would bring a bottle of wine and cookies, which were mostly sugar cookies, and they would sprinkle cinnamon on them and they would bring other food to eat, but it was really fun to be able to get out of bed and participate in these things.

TT: What kinds of plates or dishes did you use to eat on?

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AO: We had regular plates. They had some porcelain cups and things like that. At breakfast time while we were small, mother would be busy preparing the food and dad would be busy bringing the children in from the bedroom all wrapped up in blankets because we only had the big wood stove for heat until in later years we finally got a little potbelly stove which sat between those two windows (north) over there for heat. She used to, after cooking our dinner at night, take the stove lids and wrap them up in newspaper and a towel and then warm our beds that way for the children.

TT: Did you have any pets?

AO: We had a little pet chicken which we used to call Little Blue. She was kind of a grayish blue color, and my grandmother lived in Highgrove at that time, that was my mother's mother (Bersabé Castillo), and of course dad would hitch up the

buggy and we would all go for a ride. And that little chicken would follow us out to Orange Street. And then when we would come home it would greet us. That was one of our favorite pets. I don't remember having any cats or any dogs or anything like that.

TT: What about the horse?

AO: Well, dad had horses. I think he had about four horses about that time. And he really used to take care of them. In the mornings before breakfast he would get up early and he would light a fire in the stoves so that the house would be getting warm. Then he would go out there and take care of the horses while mother would get up and fix breakfast.

TT: About how many friends did you have?

350 AO: Well, we had a lot of friends, most all of the people who lived here at the time in the area. But we used to see one another mostly at school.

JV: Aunt Olive, since you obviously weren't able to get to the supermarket to buy your meats and vegetables and your grocery items, how did you get your groceries out here?

AO: Well, dad used to go to the store about once a month into town (Riverside), what we used to call into town, and the rest of the time there used to be a time when they would come out with vegetables and goodies; there used to be a meat man who used to come out from AM Lewis, and before that there was a Martinez fellow who came from Colton and he carried all kinds of groceries, mostly your staples. And the rest, of course, we got from our garden.

TT: What did you do to get into trouble?

AO: Probably tease my younger sister. She was the youngest. I've got to tell you about her, and another little story

while I think of it. There was a lot of mosquitoes here at that time and my sister Stella scratched herself and she got blood poisoning. And she came to almost her losing her little leg. I remember the doctor coming out and he made poultices of cranberries and he sat up with us two or three nights because it was something that was just give and take. We didn't know if we were going to lose her or not. And so my mother was very, very frightened of these mosquitoes. So she would take dry horse fertilizer and put it into little buckets and put it outside the windows and doors and burn that in order to keep the mosquitoes from coming into the house. We had no sprays like we do now.

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TT: Why did you bury your marbles in tin cans by the olive trees?

AO: Why? We used to do it to hide them from one another. You may find some out there.

TT: Are you the last of your brothers and sisters?

AO: No, I'm not, I'm second to the oldest.

TT: Are any of your brothers or sisters alive?

AO: Oh yes, my brother Ted lives here in Riverside. I wanted him to be here today so he could kind of refresh my memory, but he is out fishing in Susanville. Won't be back till the first of the month.

TT: Is Dutch around?

AO: No, Dutch is the only one in the family that passed away. He passed away in 1954, I think.

TT: How did he die?

AO: He had cancer.

TT: Do you know when they had these outlets?

AO: Those came later, after my time here. We moved away from here when I was about 8 years old. So those were put in by, I think, John Trujillo.

TT: When it rained, when they built it, do you know if they put the plaster on right after it?

400 AO: I imagine they did. It had several coats of what we called a whitewash on the outside, and also in the inside.

TT: What about the front yard, what was out there besides the palm tree and the olive trees?

AO: It was our play yard, it wasn't much else. Benina and Juan Trujillo's house, as you saw on the map out there, was out in front out there (north east of Adobe near Cantina site). There was kind of like a big driveway between the two houses there, it wasn't fenced off or anything else. So when these peddlers would come by, we'd all go out there, you know.

TT: Was there any kind of lawn?

AO: I don't remember of any lawn. I remember a lot of geraniums planted out here.

TT: What did your parents do to occupy their time?

AO: They were busy taking care of their children, working hard in the garden. My dad used to plant a lot of alfalfa out here. They also used to plant a lot of hay out in the Pigeon Pass. They used to lease land there and they used to raise hay and bale it and sell it.

TT: Did your father have any other work, that's the family income?

AO: Yes, at that time. Later on, they worked in the orange grove.

JV: Olive, tell them about the fertilizer. Kids, I want you to hear this. Aunt Olive is going to explain a very resourceful business.

AO: This was a little later on. We used to go out to the ranches at Alessandro and Moreno Valley and buy the fertilizer and have it shipped to Highgrove where they had a siding there.

And then he hired about 4 teamsters to haul it out to the different orange groves, because at that time they, the orange growers, didn't allow any trucks. Of course, there weren't too many of them available at that time either. But even in later years, they didn't allow the trucks to go up to the orange groves. But they used to have to work like mad because they only had so much time to unload those cars.

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TT: About how much land did you own?

AO: Well, right now, I can't tell you exactly because I talked to a cousin of mine who is supposed to be here today but unfortunately isn't. He is a little older than I am, he is in his 80s. He was telling me over the telephone, though, that we had 60 acres out this way (west of Adobe) and years ago they had more land, but from what my mother told me that my father's older brothers used to bet the farm on races they used to have here horse races on North Orange. So they actually lost a lot of the land.

TT: Were you ever able to ride the horses?

AO: We never did. They were mostly work horses, some were trained to drive the sulky or the buggy. I've got to tell you more about these buggies before I forget. When there were funerals, dad used to go into Riverside and rent a 3-seater buggy, so that if other members of the family wanted to go to the funerals at Agua Mansa why we'd collect them all and, they didn't have babysitters like they do now, they'd take the children along with them. They used to stop over in Colton after the funeral, because they rented the buggy for the whole day. They would go over to a brewery over in Colton that used to serve beer and they had picnic benches outside. They also had lunch meats and things like that. Sarsaprilla for sodas and creme sodas and orange sodas, strawberry sodas

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not all the rest of these fancy things. We used to enjoy them. It's terrible to say this, but we used to kind of look forward to funerals and things like that so that we could have a picnic and have the day off.

TT: Did your whole family ever all go over to the Cantina?

AO: Oh yes, we could go in and out because at that time there wasn't any rules, you know, and regulations for youngsters going in there, but we didn't unless about the only time I remember actually going over is if mother had dinner ready and dad was over there talking to his compadres and having a beer or something like that.

TT: At funerals did you ever dress up? Did you put your best clothes on?

AO: Oh yes. You are fortunate what you can wear now, but mother used to starch our dresses. Little high collared dresses and lots of little pleats and ruffles and everything starched even down to your panties. And long stockings and high-topped shoes with tassles on them.

TT: Did you know any laws?

AO: Yes. Our parents made our laws, you know. And, of course, we abided by all the laws that existed at that time.

JV: What kind of rules did your parents make?

AO: We were taught to be obedient and respectful at all times. Everybody was aunt so and so or uncle so and Don Fernando or Dõna Beatrice. Everyone was either called aunt or uncle.

TT: We saw that picture of you with your brother and sister, you're in there with your white clothes on.

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AO: Oh my goodness. It was at a studio upstairs, I don't remember the name. It was probably on the card. But it was so warm and as I told you a minute ago I had on this starched

white dress, you know. It was so warm up there, and Stella just wouldn't hold still. So they would have us posed for the picture and Stella would move. And I was always pouting and hanging my lower lip. They used to tease me about it till I was an older child, you know. I was so aggravated and so mad at my sister for not holding still and I was so warm and perturbed you know that I just made an awful face in the picture as you can see. Oh, I was so mad. I didn't like my little sister that day.

TT: What was the worse thing you ever did to your little sister?

AO: I'll tell you what I really caught the dickens for. There used to be a faucet out there and water trough and there wasn't any water in it. I told you how they used to take the children to funerals, so I told my little sister that she was to play dead. So I put her in this little water trough and I completely covered her with geraniums, you know. And I told you about Aunt Benina over there, she was really a busy body. She came over there and she just bawled the tar out of me, she had me in tears, she told me that God was going to punish me and take my little sister away from me. So I was really scared. So then she came in the house and proceeded to bawl my mother out. And my mother saw that I was just frantic. I very quickly started taking the flowers away from my little sister and made her get up. I was really afraid that she was going to die. It was terrible. I think that was the worse thing that I did to her outside of making her chase us around the house. I don't know where we got the name Soccorina (?), but we thought it was funny. So Ted and I would run around and say "Here Soccorina!" and poor little thing she would be all out of breath but as long as we would keep calling her she kept following us.

TT: What did you do at night before you had electricity?

AO: My mother used to take the lamp, we had a kerosene lamp, and Ted and I had to keep those clean. We had two, one in the bedroom and one for the kitchen. There wasn't too much light so you would try to get your cooking all done early. Of course, what you don't have, you don't miss. She would take that lamp at night and go into all the rooms and make sure there wasn't any mosquitoes around.

TT: Who was younger, Dutch or your little sister Stella?

AO: Dutch.

JV: Then she had some more brothers in the future.

AO: Yes. After we moved to Highgrove, there was five boys and two girls.

JV: I think we will wind up this session now, kids, because we have to get out there and dig. So we will end this session of oral history now. We want to thank Aunt Olive, don't we?

TT: Thank you!