

Oral History Interview

with

ALLICE COMPTON

October 10, 1972

By Jean Burroughs

For the Eastern New Mexico University Library  
Oral History Project

Burroughs: This is Mrs. John Burroughs. Today is October 10, 1972, in Portales, the old-fashioned home of Mrs. C. M. Compton; long-time resident of Portales and widow of the late attorney, C. M. Compton. Good afternoon, Mrs. Compton. You were telling me it had been how many years since you came to Roosevelt County?

Compton: Well, it would be. . . . I believe it was 61. . . on the thirteenth day of this month, see, when we arrived in Elida.

Burroughs: You came direct to Elida. Where did you come from?

Compton: Burnet, Texas.

Burroughs: On the train?

Compton: And it took us. . . . We got our tickets in Burnet, but we had to change in Lampasas. Then we changed again in Coleman-- I think we spent the night in Coleman, Texas. And then we had

to spend the night in Sweetwater. . . .

Burroughs: All that? You say that was a romantic trip?

Compton: Yes, we. . . . You wanted to know how I come [indistinct] ?

Burroughs: Yes, how you happened to come. . . .

Compton: Well, I intended to come out here with an elderly woman preacher.

Burroughs: Let me ask how old were you then?

Compton: Oh, I was old enough to file. I don't know how . . . .

Burroughs: You must have been over twenty-one.

Compton: Oh, yes.

Burroughs: Do you mind stating the year of your birth?

Compton: It was '82.

Burroughs: 1882. So then you were quite a young lady when you decided to make the trip.

Compton: Oh, yes. I wasn't very old, I was old enough. . . . But me and this. . . . This old lady wanted me to come out here. . . .

Did you ever hear of the Led Newton [?] College, [indistinct] ?

Burroughs: No, I don't think I did.

Compton: Well, it was right near that, and she wanted me to come out here and teach in that [indistinct] college. She was quite a contributor with what was my aunt. They started. . . they helped start that college, you see, out there in Leland.

Burroughs: Leland. That was a little rail stop on the Santa Fe.

Compton: Leland is still there.

Burroughs: But the railroad is discontinued.

Compton: Well, I don't think. . . .

Burroughs: I don't think. . . [indistinct] . . .

Compton: Well, she wanted me to come out and teach in the college and wanted me to come and look around, so when I didn't come with her on account of . . . well, alot of other stuff started to happen, and I still didn't get to come with her. And then later, I went down to spend the night with her, and she begged me into the notion of coming out her and taking up her file, you see.

Burroughs: Of her claim.

Compton: Yes, of her claim. So my sister then decided to come with me. I was going to come alone.

Burroughs: You were adventurous!

Compton: [Indistinct] was braver than me. My sister then came with me, and we decided that we might go to Canyon to school. It was new then, you know, just like that other school. And we didn't, but we. . . we were both working on our permanent certificates. But they wouldn't recognize our certificates in New Mexico, then.

Burroughs: That happens.

Compton: And we attended the seminar school . . . .

Burroughs: At ENMU?

Compton: It was just a seminar . . . [indistinct] . . .

Burroughs: I see.

Compton: [indistinct]

Burroughs: But anyway, you were trying to get your certificates.

Compton: We were trying to . . . yes, we had to take the examination, because they wouldn't recognize our certificates. We didn't know that when we came. I have an idea I wouldn't have come. I got a school at Wagon Mound, and I taught there that year, and went to Oklahoma to teach when I married.

Burroughs: But now you came to Elida to take over a claim.

Compton: Oh yeah, that was interesting. I wanted . . . I started to tell you about our trip.

Burroughs: Your trip on the . . .

Compton: On the train. My [indistinct] told me to put some old shoes in, take an old suitcase along extra, well, we put our guns in the suitcase.

Burroughs: Guns!

Compton: Yes, we brought two guns.

Burroughs: What kind of guns?

Compton: Dismantled our target, and we had a four-gauge pistol. And it fell open--the whole suitcase--the catch had broken on it in Canyon, and they . . . I wish I could tell you the head of the rangers . . . I think it was Hughes . . . but I'm not sure.

Burroughs: Texas Ranger?

Compton: Uh huh. He came along and he said, "Sister, may I help you fasten your suitcase?" And our pistols had fallen out. And he helped me fasten up my . . . it's alright, though, it wasn't against the law.

Burroughs: To carry a gun.

Compton: And he fastened my suitcase, and then a big, nice-looking lady came along and said, "Oh, I'm so happy that you came." She said, "You're Miss Friar who's come here to lecture here at [indistinct], and I said, "Oh, thank you very much, I'm glad you took me for someone like that, but I'm not Miss Friar." And she said, "Well, I'm Miss Duckson." It happened to be Bessie's mother. Bessie Compton's mother. And she says, "I'll take you somewhere, we're down here in a buggy, and I'll take you up to a boarding house."

Burroughs: Now, Mrs. Bessie Compton was later Mrs. . . . she was J. C. Compton.

Compton: She was married already, then.

Burroughs: So this lady took you to the boarding house.

Compton: Then she took us to the boarding house, and the lady told us, "Now in the morning, I'll be gone, but I'm going to leave your breakfast for you. I'll be gone to Amarillo, and you can just leave here whatever on the dining table for your board." We didn't get up, says "I'll be too early for you to get up." So we got up, and we ate our breakfast. We washed our dishes for her because we thought that she'd been so wonderful to us.

Burroughs: That was nice.

Compton: And we left our money on the dining table, she told us where on the dining table. So then we went down to the train and it came on. Oh, it came . . . I believe it was a pretty day. Because as we got out of here . . . [indistinct] . . . I thought we'd come to the

end of the world.

Burroughs: I thought lots of people thought that.

Compton: Got to Elida and it was still the same way, and we went to the hotel. I believe that was called the Light Hotel. I was going to phone somebody this morning and ask them . . . .

I was so afraid to eat anything there, I thought "Well, these people look like they're on starvation." But when we went in to eat that night, the food was wonderful. We had sweet potatoes, hot biscuits, and ham, I felt better about it then and so so I ate alot.

Burroughs: Did you have your gun handy?

Compton: I had it in that little suitcase. We fastened . . . the man fastened it back for me. And the old lady came in a said, "Do you girls want me to get some guns for you?" We told her no, thank you, we had lots of guns. But she fussed at us for coming out there. She said, "Don't you know you'll starve to death?" And old man said, "Now you just hush. We came out here," and said, "they'll . . . they'll get along alright, I'm sure they will." And I said, "Well, I'm not afraid we'll starve to death."

Burroughs: Did she know you were trying to teach school?

Compton: Uh huh.

Burroughs: But she still thought you'd starve.

Compton: Then our suitcase came open again, as we started to get in the . . . suitcase . . . as we started to get in the . . . I believe . . .

. . . guess a covered buggy, and the people in there . . . There was an old man that carried the mail. He was so interesting. We really fell in love with that old fellow before we got there to our destination because he fussed at us all the way.

Burroughs: How far, now, did you have to travel?

Compton: We went from Elida across to Lykins, New Mexico. And there's that . . . . Do you know where Harry Davis has his ranch?

Burroughs: No. What was the name of the little place that you went?

Compton: Lykins.

Burroughs: Lykins. How many miles was that, do you suppose?

Compton: I just really don't know.

Burroughs: Riding in a buggy.

Compton: Uh huh. And he had . . . had a lantern in the buggy to keep us warm. Well, he fussed at us because the old suitcase came over, and I threw it back in the house and told the woman, I said, "Well, just send it down to us, someday when you feel like it." We never got real, real acquainted with Mrs. Comwell. And she said, "Well, don't worry about the suitcase, I'll send it to you."

Burroughs: Were your guns still in there?

Compton: They were still in there. I was getting pretty mad, so then oh, it was the coldest day. You can't imagine it. Just turned from a warm day like today--freezing! Snow was everywhere.

what the story was. I said I haven't seen any rain for 7 years.

Burroughs: Down in Texas.

Compton: Heard some old man back in the house say, "There's our next schoolteacher." Old man Moore. So then we had to get in a buggy without a top, and it was cold. That old man was very nice to us, just along side [indistinct]. I lost my coat. Well, when we got to Turner's, we boarded there. We managed to go up to the little claim house. And we boarded a week with Mrs. Turner, and they were lovely to us. And she said I'd never get my coat, she knew I wouldn't, but some man found it. Dorothy Greathouse's husband found it.

Burroughs: On the prairie.

Compton: Uh huh, and brought it to me. He knew, you know. He had heard all about us, of course.

Burroughs: I guess anybody new coming to the community is subject to discussion.

Compton: Well, so he brought my coat home, and brought it over to the Turner's. We stayed there, we went up to the place, there wasn't a sign of wood and some old man brought us a big dishpan full of mesquite roots that he . . . he thought we wouldn't have any wood . . . [indistinct] and he had a long beard, long hair. And he hauled us some wood, and we got along fine. I wasn't a bit afraid, I just felt so safe.

Burroughs: There was nothing out there, was there.

Compton: We led about . . . up toward . . . I guess it was maybe a  $\frac{1}{4}$  of a mile. More than that. It was a  $\frac{1}{4}$  of a mile to the Turner place.

Burroughs: Well, now, what means of conveyance did you have?

Compton: We didn't have any.

Burroughs: You walked.

Compton: We went with the Turners, you know. They had a wagon, and we went with them.

Burroughs: Now, where was the school, though.

Compton: One was located at Benson, and that's where I intended to teach. However, I've got a place up there on the mound and Angie was going to teach down in the valley. I don't know what the name of that school was. . . .

Burroughs: So you never did teach out near the claim.

Compton: No.

Burroughs: Now, do you mind telling me a little more about that house and that claim? Where did you get your groceries and water?

Compton: We got them over at Lykins and Mr. . . . Oh, we had . . . we were very well fixed. We had the zinc . . . what do you call them that holds water?

Burroughs: Cistern?

Compton: Well, it was pretty good size. I've forgotten how many gallons it would use--nothing large like you usually have, you see. But it was pretty good size. And they had the water running off the little claim house into it. Mrs. . . . the old lady, you know,

had things very nice. And then Mr. Turner would haul us water and fill that up with it. She had a table and a little . . . what were those little stoves that had the drums, you know, where you cooked?

Burroughs: A little bachelor stove?

Compton: Yes, a bachelor stove. Then she had a folding bed. It was all very nice in there, you see.

Burroughs: That's just incredible, though, that you two young girls . . .

Compton: I felt so safe out here. Well, there just wasn't anybody but the claim people, you see, and we felt perfectly safe. I never thought of being afraid.

Burroughs: But you weren't going to work any of the land. You were just going to live on it until you got the title for it.

Compton: Mr. Turner was, if we'd stayed longer, he said he would break the land for us, you see. He rented the little pasture from us, you see.

Burroughs: I see. So you had a little bit of income, then.

Compton: And we went down and stole a tub and wash board down at the next claim house.

Burroughs: Nobody was living there, I guess.

Compton: No, he wrote to me after that, we corresponded awhile. He was a railroader then, and he had proved up on his claim, and Mrs. Turner told us to go down and get them, you know, before somebody else got them. So we went and got us a big tub and a wash board. And when he came, you see, and Maxia explained and told us not to worry about us stealing it.

Burroughs: Well, that was common practice. After an individual had proved up then he could leave the claim for a while.

Compton: Yes, he had proved up, but he came back to see how it was. Well, I guess he came back to maybe sell it. I can't think what his name was. We wrote quite a few . . . I still have some of the cards.

Burroughs: Well, now, did you ever prove your claim?

Compton: No.

Burroughs: You relinquished it.

Compton: No, we didn't stay because Mrs. Deal [?] had a lawyer son and he said he thought we were cheating her, so . . . .

Burroughs: And then you turned out to marry a lawyer.

Compton: Yes.

Burroughs: Well, when did you marry Mr. Compton?

Compton: Let me see, it was in . . . '13, I believe.

Burroughs: About two years after you had come this far.

Compton: Yes, it was in '13.

Burroughs: When was your son Charles born?

Compton: Well, he was born the next year.

Burroughs: In 1914.

Compton: But, it was very interesting out there. We'd go to the store and get things to eat. They had very good bacon and kept flour and meal. Well, I guess they kept everything you . . . except fruit, they couldn't keep. I think they got on fruit--bananas once in awhile. And we went over to Mrs. Foremans [?] on Sunday--Agnes Copeland's mother's house. She said the other

day she was a little girl. I remembered Agnes as a little girl. And I asked her where we ate. Did we eat at her house when we'd go to Sunday School over there? She said, "I guess you did, everybody did."

Burroughs: I think that was the custom to visit around on Sundays.

Compton: So, alright, we were very good friends of Mrs. Foreman because she was . . . kind lady. I think she was kind of a practical nurse, you know, and we were very good friends of hers.

Burroughs: Now, you told me, I think, before that Mr. Compton and his brother, J. C. Compton, had both come and filed on separate claims.

Compton: Uh huh. Mr. Compton filed west of town, and he had a few cattle out there, and sold them and went . . . .

Burroughs: West of Portales.

Compton: Uh huh.

Burroughs: What years did they come?

Compton: You know, I think it was 1905.

Burroughs: So that was before you came.

Compton: Oh, that was before I came.

Burroughs: Well, how did you meet Mr. Compton?

Compton: Well, their office . . . . I worked in a millinery store in the summertime before I taught school, while they were going to the normal school.

Burroughs: Here in Portales.

Compton: And he and Cleveland had their office upstairs in the next

building, see.

Burroughs: So, you just saw him during the course of the day when you both had business.

Compton: Well, I'd stand on the street with my sister and Miss Eva Foster. I knew the boy that owned the team, you see, Gus Elrod. And I said, "I wish I would--I wasn't afraid to drive that team, I'd take Gus's team and we'd go driving." Some guy behind me said, "Well, I'm a good driver." I looked around, and . . . I'd never seen him before and Miss Eva then introduced me to him and that's where we met.

Burroughs: So your husband just overheard a chance remark and then took you riding. Can you tell me something about that ride?

Compton: We didn't go for the ride because I . . . I don't think I was afraid to take the team but I don't know how come we decided not to go. We stood there and talked for a little while. I guess I was just [indistinct] because I didn't [indistinct]. And so they . . . I believe the next time I met him was at a party, maybe. And he tried to make a date with me, and I said, "I'm so tied up in this school, I've got to study," and I couldn't get through to him. So I said I'll have to take the examination before I have a date. So I told him when he came in one day, "Well, I took the examination," passed, and he didn't make a date with me.

Burroughs: Oh, what a disappointment.

Compton: And then Miss Eva said, "You sure fixed yourself with him because he won't make a date." But he had told a story