

Oral History Interview

with

JIM WARNICA

July 31, 1972
Archeological site at Blackwater Draw

By Mrs. John Burroughs

For the Eastern New Mexico University Library

BURROUGHS: Mr. Warnica is being interviewed because he is a native son of Roosevelt County and because of his knowledge of the archeological site and his participation in the Blackwater Draw Museum Project. Jim, will you give your full name, date of birth, and the place you were born?

WARNICA : I'm James Milton Warnica and I was born July 31, 1926, and my mother went to the hospital in Clovis for my birth.

BURROUGHS: I noticed when you said that, that this is your birthday.

WARNICA : Yes.

BURROUGHS: Well, congratulations.

WARNICA : Thank you.

BURROUGHS: Can you give your grandparents' names?

WARNICA : On my mother's side, my grandparents' names were Mr. and Mrs. Joe Beasley, and they were originally from the state of Texas and came to New Mexico in the late 1880's. On my father's side, Mr. and Mrs. Fred Warnica, and they moved to Portlaes around 1901 and they were originally from Texas. I think they were probably born there and they lived in Roosevelt County until their death.

BURROUGHS: When was that?

WARNICA : In 19 . . . on my grandfather Warnica's side, he passed away in 1946 and my grandmother passed away around 1923. Then on my grandfather Beasley's side, he passed away in 1941 and my grandmother passed away in 1961.

BURROUGHS: They were all living here in Roosevelt County then?

WARNICA : They all came around 1901 to Roosevelt County and lived their lives, the rest of their lives here.

BURROUGHS: So you're a third generation native son?

WARNICA : Yes.

BURROUGHS: Not native son, but living here?

WARNICA : Family.

BURROUGHS: Family. That's unusual. Can you remember their telling you any unusual or interesting events of those early days?

WARNICA : My grandmother Beasley, she came to the Sacramento Mountains in 1887 and lived there until she moved to the White Sands in 1889. And my grandfather Beasley came to the White Sands in 1883 and lived there until 19 . . . well, 'til he married my grandmother in 1890.

BURROUGHS: What was down at White Sands?

WARNICA : Just ranching. Their post office was La Luz and they had to go to El Paso for supplies from White Sands, and that would be around seventy miles or eighty miles.

BURROUGHS: I imagine it would be.

WARNICA : They took a wagon or a buggy and went in there and they just ranched in that country, raising sheep and cattle, mostly cattle.

BURROUGHS: And then they came up to Roosevelt County?

WARNICA : Well, when they left White Sands they went to Oklahoma and moved back there and homesteaded. They went there in 1896, and then they passed this herd law where you had to fence all of your stock, and so he came back to New Mexico for the open range again in 1901.

BURROUGHS: Well, that's really interesting because that was about the time the homesteaders and the nesters started coming in here, too.

WARNICA : Yes. And then, they homesteaded in the Blackwater Draw. And the next year, 1902, they moved to town and had a home on North Main Avenue here in Portales. They lived there the rest of their lives.

BURROUGHS: Is anyone living in that house now?

WARNICA : Yes, but I don't know who. I know they lived right across the street from Doug Stone's family. The Stones.

BURROUGHS: On North Main?

WARNICA : On North Main, yes. And then, their next door neighbor on the other side was Mr. and Mrs. G. W. Carr, which were early day residents.

BURROUGHS: Yes. That's very interesting. Those were your father's parents?

WARNICA : No, my mother's parents.

BURROUGHS: Your mother's parents?

WARNICA : Yes, the Beasley's.

BURROUGHS: Now what can you tell about your father's parents?

WARNICA : I don't know a lot about them except they came from around Seymour, Texas, and moved to Portales around 1901. I know I heard my grandfather say that whenever he came through Amarillo, the sight of Amarillo, there wasn't nothing there but just a box car. I guess all the railroads fighting, you know. That was the extent of Amarillo at that time.

BURROUGHS: And it's interesting that both sets of your grandparents came to Roosevelt County about the same time.

WARNICA : Yes. I don't know any real interesting or unusual circumstances in their lives. One thing I might add on my grandfather Beasley's side, his father was a Texas Ranger in the early day Texas country. And I know I have an old Indian arrow, real arrow--and when he was in the Rangers, why these Indians made a raid and the Rangers went after them. One of these Indians shot the arrow at him, and he stopped and picked it up, and it was handed down through the family, and I still have it.

BURROUGHS: You have that arrow?

WARNICA : That's quite an interesting story.

BURROUGHS: It certainly is. Is it the complete arrow or just the head?

WARNICA : The complete arrow, feather, and arrow, and steel, and arrowhead, and all--the warpaint on it, you know?

BURROUGHS: And it was aimed at your grandfather?

WARNICA : Yes. That was about 1856.

BURROUGHS: That was the time when the comancheros were plying their trade back and forth too, weren't they?

WARNICA : Yes. Of course, and then, on my grandmother Beasley's side, her mother was twelve years old when the Indians killed her father. And I know I've heard her say that she didn't think much of Indians because of that.

BURROUGHS: Yes.

WARNICA : And I've also heard her say that she had seen her father pull out an arrowhead out of a man's head, you know, with the [unintelligible] that he got shot with by the Indians, you know.

BURROUGHS: Hmm.

WARNICA : In the head, So she was raised in Texas in the early days, too, my great-grandmother. There's a little story I might add to that, on the death of her father. These men were driving

a herd of cattle to Ft. Sumner. You know they had the Indians there at that time and there were several men, and they sold their cattle to the government at Ft. Sumner to feed the Indians. So, it was near Christmas, so my great-great-grandfather, he and two or three more [men] wanted to get home by Christmas so they went on ahead of the rest of the main party. They took the money with them on a mule--there was some silver and some greenbacks, and they were ambushed by the Indians down on, it was near the San Sabre River in Texas, and the Indians killed them all. They took the silver and they tore all the greenbacks up in pieces and scattered them around on the ground. You know, just scattered them around.

BURROUGHS: Yes.

WARNICA : But, when the men came along and found that they had been killed by the Indians, why they picked the paper money up and put it in a big bandanna and they took it to my great-great-grandmother, and I think she sent it in to Washington and, I believe, she got the money for it. They, you know, got it pieced together.

BURROUGHS: Pieced together. That's . . .

WARNICA : So that's quite an interesting story, too.

BURROUGHS: It certainly is. At that time, between 1864 and '68, the Indians were impounded in Bosque Redondo and many people, many ranchers, made money by furnishing meat.

WARNICA : Beef, yes, to the government.

BURROUGHS: Actually, the poor Indians didn't get very much of it.

WARNICA : No.

BURROUGHS: They got to leaving. That's very fascinating, Jim. Now start with your parents. Give their names.

WARNICA : My parents, my mother's name was Verda Beasley and my father was Jim Warnica. Both lived here all of their lives and they've both passed away. And then, I have one sister, Mrs. Meredith Ashby or Gladys Lee Warnica, and she resides in Anaheim, California now. She was also born in Portales.

BURROUGHS: There are just the two of you?

WARNICA : Just two, yes.

BURROUGHS: And is she older or younger?

WARNICA : She's older. She's five years older than I.

BURROUGHS: Than you. Who married your parents here in Portales?

WARNICA : Of that I don't know.

BURROUGHS: And you don't know what church they were married in or whether they were married at home?

WARNICA : No, I don't. I don't know that. My father was employed, he was an early day tailor in the city of Portales. He ran a tailor shop. And my mother worked, before she was married, she worked at the telephone office in Portales. She was a telephone operator in the days when you had, you know, the operator, 'can I have the number, please,' and you told her the number, and she connected you up and rang, you know.

BURROUGHS: Well, did you have the old fashioned rural telephones, where they cranked up and . . .

WARNICA : They cranked it, yes.

BURROUGHS: Were you on a party line?

WARNICA : I think they were all party lines, if I'm not mistaken.

BURROUGHS: Yes. Well that used to be the chief amusement, to go answer the telephone whenever the bell rang and . . .

WARNICA : Yes.

BURROUGHS: . . . and all of the gossip up and down the line. Who did you marry, Jim?

WARNICA : I married Helen Christian. She was a native of Oklahoma, but she had lived most of her life in Portales.

BURROUGHS: Who were her parents?

WARNICA : Mr. and Mrs. M. C. Christian.

BURROUGHS: Are they still living?

WARNICA : And they're still living, yes.

BURROUGHS: Don't they live next door to you?

WARNICA : They live, yes, they live just to the north of us. We live about a mile and a half east of town on a farm.

BURROUGHS: Well, is that what's called the cemetery road?

WARNICA : Yes, and then we live south of the cemetery.

BURROUGHS: South of the cemetery.

WARNICA : Three quarters of a mile south of the cemetery. We have two children. We have a boy, twenty. He's attending the University at Eastern. And then, I have a girl that's sixteen and she'll be a senior this year in high school.

BURROUGHS: What are their names?

WARNICA : The boy's name is Jimmy M. Warnica, Jr., III and the girl's name is Terri Warnica. Of course, they've both spent their lives here, too, and attended the Portales schools.

BURROUGHS: And you attended Portales schools in old times and you graduated from Eastern?

WARNICA : Yes. No, I didn't graduate from Eastern, I just went there part time.

BURROUGHS: You just attended.

WARNICA : Yes, we have three generations that have graduated from Portales High School, my mother and father, myself and my wife, and then my children graduated.

BURROUGHS: Well, you're a real dyed-in-the wool Roosevelt Countian, aren't you?

WARNICA : I think so.

BURROUGHS: That's very unusual and it's interesting. Now let's go to that part of your boyhood which has made you famous as an amateur archeologist. Tell us about finding your first spear point and actually how you became interested in searching for these things.

WARNICA : O.K. The way I got interested in the amateur archeology and collecting Indian arrowheads was, I was in school, in about the tenth grade, and we had a visitor named Oscar Shay. He was a boy about my age and he had collected arrowheads for a few years, and he made a little talk and illustrated some arrowheads and so I became interested, and we decided to go out the next Saturday and do some looking in the sand hills. When Saturday came around, we went out and we looked around, and we found some teeth of some kind of animal, perhaps a cow or perhaps a bison, and then we found an arrowhead or two. That was my first find. Actually, I was very much interested in collecting arrowheads. We didn't do it scientifically at that time because there was no one to tell us that we should record our finds, that we should keep a record of the things we found, you know, and so we just went out for the enjoyment of walking, and looking, and finding these things, which we did. Of course, at that time, we didn't find enough to lose. We knew pretty well, by looking at our collection, where we had found every arrowhead, you know.

BURROUGHS: How old were you?

WARNICA : I was ten. [There is a discrepancy here concerning his age as stated in the previous paragraph.]

BURROUGHS: Ten?

WARNICA : Yes. And so, as the years went on, well we kept collecting and, of course, we were aware of some of the finds made at the gravel pit of the Blackwater Draw site because when they were building the highway there in 1932, one of the workers brought a pick-up load of big bones and big teeth of these large prehistoric animals to town one day. It is known now that it was a mammoth, remains of mammoths, there was bones and teeth and so . . .

BURROUGHS: That was in '32?

WARNICA : Yes, that was in '32. And so, we looked them over and I was aware of the idea that these animal remains were around and so we always kept a look-out for these things.

BURROUGHS: Now before you leave this thing, there was in the paper yesterday, in July 30 under the "50 years ago" column, you mentioned to me something about the record of two men finding some mammoth teeth fifty years ago. Do you happen to know them and was this the very earliest find, in 1922?

WARNICA : Now I don't really know the two men, Charles Anderson and Jimmy Sane, which they did find some bones and teeth of some prehistoric animal, some mammoth. I know of Charles Anderson. He lived in Clovis and actually, he was probably instrumental in the find at the gravel pit of the Blackwater Draw site in calling attention to archeologists to come in and look at these finds. He probably covered the Blackwater Draw and the sand hill country alone in the early day before there was really any actual archeological investigations. In some finds that he did make, why he would call attention to different archeologists and they would come in and look the finds over. So, he was probably instrumental in bringing about the first scientific aspects of the gravel pit.

BURROUGHS: Well, I'm glad to know who started it all.

WARNICA : The first scientific work done at the gravel pit was in, started in 1932, and it was done by the University of Pennsylvania Museum and the Philadelphia Academy of Natural Sciences. These people worked from 1932 to 1937, and they made some great contributions to archeology. They established the fact that the Clovis point was older than the Folsom that lay below in a lower stratum, and that these people mainly subsisted on hunting, and killing, and butchering mammoths, which had become extinct in the next era of the Folsom era. They also helped to establish that this Clovis Point, or the culture that used Clovis points, was around 11,300 years old when your Folsom culture, or your next succeeding culture, was about 10,000 years old.

From 1937 to around 1949, the gravel pit was there, but it was . . . the archeological work was practically non-existent and then, even the gravel mining wasn't carried out then. In the late '40's, Mr. Sam Sanders, he was a construction man, he had been in the construction business in Artesia and he knew gravel mining, and he came in and reopened the pit for gravel mining. Of course, he was uncovering bones and things all during this time. At that time the Texas Memorial Museum at Austin came in and they worked several different periods. But from 1949 'til up in the

late 1950's, they did a considerable amount of work there, archeological and a great deal of geological work. During this time, there were several institutions all over the country that worked there, also. One was the University of New Mexico, and some from California, and then the State Museum of Santa Fe. Then in the early 1960's, well one of the most important finds made on the North American continent was made there at this gravel pit, and through the gravel mining and the uncovering of . . . taking off the over-burden to get to the gravel, there were several mammoth skeletons uncovered, you know, and they were complete. There was a total of five skeletons there, and there was a lot of associated man-made artifacts that were found with these skeletons. There were the spear points used to kill them, and there was flint tools used to butcher, and there were knives, and there were hide scrapers, and other implements. This find was made near the northwest portion of the site. The site actually is a, was a depression or a lake, and it was bounded on three sides by low caliche walls, and they were gently sloping walls. Probably at no time were they over five or six feet above the lake bed. So the mammoth finds actually were near the northwest corner of the pond.

Now the pond in itself is unique in the fact that it lays higher than the Blackwater Draw, which is approximately a half a mile to the south of the site. This pond was fed by springs flowing out of the caliche banks which surrounded the pond. Of course, all these prehistoric animals--the mammoth, and the horse, and the camel, and the ground sloth, and, of course, naturally carnivores that followed game--all came there to drink. And, that was where the animals appeared to have been ambushed by the man hunter and he killed and butchered a great number of animals at the site. But, it appears that there was probably times of drought when large numbers of animals perished probably through starvation and thirst, which man did not have a hand in their death. Surely at one time there was lots of water there, lots of spring action and the vegetation was lush, lots of grass, and the mammoth, you know, was a grazing animal, and also the horse and the camel. There was probably, as far as trees . . . the pollen analysis show that there was juniper and oak on the plains and then there was probably spruce and pine, and this is from the pollen analysis on the escarpment to the north and to the east of the Llano Estacado. But mainly in this area right here, there were lots of juniper and oak, and then probably other brush, but mainly it was grass lands, grazing land. Of course, this was during the latter part of the Pleistocene Ice Age, and I doubt if there was very much of what you would call snow and ice. It was probably a period of tremendous rainfall. Of course, you know, we would be in the rainfall area, and this would help make the vegetation lush.

As far as the climate is concerned, the reconstruction of the climate shows that summers were probably a lot cooler than what we have now and the winters maybe a little cooler, but there wasn't such a tremendous difference between summer and winter temperatures. It was more of a normal, cool period with a good amount of rainfall. This wet period lasted up until around 6500 years ago, and then there was a gradual drying and the temperature became warmer, and finally it was climaxed with a long drought period of around 2500 years. There's not much of an archeological record there, except there is a dune deposit in the lake bed itself, and it shows that there was not much activity by man or animals, either, during