

## 1. El Paso Reporter Recalls Lure of Juárez in 1920s, 1968

Mr. Chester Chope

Interviewed by Wilma Claveland

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CC: I came to El Paso to work in 1917. I went to work for the *El Paso Times* the day I got here. At that, El Paso was a city of about 75,000 people. In addition to that, there were numerous troops that had been brought

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Chester Chope, interview by William Cleveland, July 27, 1968, interview 27, transcript, Institute of Oral History, University of Texas at El Paso, pp. 1-2, 13-20.

here to the border following the Columbus Raid in which Villa attacked Columbus.

In those days, El Paso was a wide open town. The prisoners were primarily dope addicts, drunks, etc. Marijuana was common in those days and narcotics addicts came to El Paso because it was easy to get drugs. The drugs were manufactured across the border. There were frequent fights and killings; every Saturday night we expected to have a shooting before the first edition.

In the Roaring Twenties, Juárez was a Mecca for thousands of thirsty Americans. Bars and cafés—they were called cabarets in those days—stood wall to wall on the 16th of September Street. Owners imported bands and orchestras from the United States for the cabarets. People came here, especially on weekends, to make 'whoopie'. Part of the time the bridge closed at 10:00 or at 12:00, depending on the conditions at that time. At one time I was the only newspaper reporter who had a pass to return across the border after 12:00. It was issued by the Assistant Customs Collector, Mr. Warren Carpenter. Customs inspector, Louie Holzman, was in charge of the bridge at night. It was his duty to open the gate for me when I yelled for admission into the United States. On some occasions he was too busy to come down and open the gate, so I had to climb over. I recall that one time I tore the seat of my pants and became very angry. I reported the incident to Mr. Carpenter and then he issued strict orders that thereafter the gate was to be opened for me.

On many occasions, people were trapped in Juárez when the early closing hours were inaugurated. One time when the bridge was to stay open until 12:00 but orders came to close it at 9:00, El Pasoans didn't believe that the bridge would be closed at that hour and remained in Juárez. When they came to the bridge it was closed and they couldn't get over. I usually telephoned my office before returning from the Río Bravo, which was the best hotel in Juárez at that time. On this occasion, the lobby was filled with young women, most of them members of prominent families of El Paso, most of them wailing that they wouldn't get home at the time they had promised their families. They were using the phone and when they saw me using the phone they tried to get me to use my influence to get them through the gate, which I could not do, of course. On such occasions, some El Pasoans slept on tables, especially in the Big Kid Café.