

Maria C. Martinez/Dana Echohawk Transcription
Transcriber: Hannah Wilson
02/20/2011

Note: Maria C. Martinez reviewed the following transcription and made the corrections or clarifications placed in parenthesis.

Dana: Today we're with Maria Martinez. We're at Fort Garland in Southern Colorado, in Costilla County. The date is January 29, 2011. I'd like to introduce Maria and have her introduce herself and spell her name, please.

Maria: My name is Maria Martinez, M-A-R-I-A, M-A-R-T-I-N-E-Z. I'm an area genealogist, historian I guess you could call me. I've been doing this since 1988, 1989 probably. (Maria Clara Martinez).

Dana: And where is your home.

Maria: My home is in San Pedro where I was born. San Pedro, Colorado. It was one of the earliest villages in La Culebra. Established probably shortly after San Luis in the 1850s, mid 1850s.

Dana: And tell us a little about San Pedro, what is it like?

Maria: It's a small village; I bet there might be 100 people left. There, are, most of the people have gone onto better bigger things. We moved back here in 1996, I think, from San Diego, California where we had been working. And, we have probably one neighbor to the south of us and one neighbor across the street, and just a few to the north, not very many people live there. It's very quiet at the foot of the mountain.

Maria: ...It was in New Mexico territory until 1861 when it became Colorado territory.

Dana: You mentioned Narcisco. How old was he?

Maria: Narcisco Beaubien when he got the grant was probably seventeen. And it was a matter of his dad couldn't get another grant because he already had one. So probably had deep pockets so they went ahead and they paid somebody to give his son, seventeen-year-old son, a million acres in the Sangre de Cristo land grant. Which was pretty bad but that's what happened.

Dana: And then when he was killed along with his partner Lee, who inherited?

Maria: His father, Charles or Carlos Beaubien the Frenchman.

Dana: Tell us a little more then about the grant, the Sangre de Cristo grant, which is the one that he inherited.

Maria: I can't remember how many, do you remember how many acres there were, over a million acres? It was probably purely speculation when he brought the settlers in from Northern New Mexico he didn't give them the land he charged them for it. He actually sold it to them. And when he died, his descendants probably didn't even know the value because they sold it to him (Gilpin) for very little. And Beaubien died and his descendant sold it to the first Governor of Colorado, which was William Gilpin. And Gilpin probably turned around and sold it for double or triple what he had paid for it. So from then on it became purely land speculation.

Dana: And meanwhile, there were people living on the land grant...

Maria: And William Gilpin actually wanted to chase them off the grant. I don't know how they succeeded in hanging onto it but they did.

Dana: And just recently in the news maybe a couple of years ago was the Taylor Ranch court proceedings that involved the descendants of both those who lived on the grant and those that eventually bought the William Gilpin tract of land, can you tell us a little about that?

Maria: When Carlos Beaubien was selling the tracts to the Hispanic people that he invited to come in to settle the grant, because that's probably the only way that he could hang onto it, he had to sell it, he made a provision that he put in the deed that *said that they were to use the mountain tract for a gathering wood, hunting, fishing, grazing their cattle, grazing their sheep, and that provision was actually a part of the deed when he gave it to Gilpin. And it's subject to the rights of the people. So that's what (the rights that were were won) Juan, how many years later, 1860's, a hundred years later? (so

Dana: A hundred and forty years later.

Maria: That's what the court based their decision on, to allow the people to graze and gather firewood and gather timber.

Dana: So to this day they're able to use that land as communal...

Maria: As communal property; actually what they should have done was give us fishing and hunting but they didn't so they can use it for grazing their livestock, for gathering firewood for their homes, and for gathering timber to build homes or whatever. So it's very limited and what needs to be done is that it needs to be

bought by the Feds or the State so that everybody can enjoy it. That's what my opinion is, anyway. So you can come fishing one summer or somebody can enjoy it other than just the limited rights that the court gave us.

Dana: Dana says something.

***Maria:** A *vara strip* is, I'm not real sure, I know that that was how the land was measured at the time and they were long, narrow strips of land. But other than that, I can see them on a map and you can see the long strips of land and they were deeded over and over and over again so that ** (descendants) people got three acres or, but my grandfather had vara strip which began in San Luis and ended up here in Trinchera.

Dana: How does that compare to our more contemporary maps?

Maria: Well your more contemporary maps like your farmers that came later? They would get a section and so that's different. With that section now they can put the irrigation circles and stuff. The vara strips can only be irrigated with surface irrigation. They can never be irrigated any other way because of the way they fall.

Dana: You had mentioned where you are from. Tell us about the other small villages, maybe name them and tell us a little about a few of them.

Maria: Well there was San Luis. What happened at the very beginning is that all of the villages were called Culebra and so now that they're trying to place people say in San Acacio and in San Francisco and Chama, they can't really do that in the early days because everything was Culebra, La Culebra. And it would be *La Plaza del Medio* and *La Plaza De Abajo*, *La Plaza de Arriba*, they were all different, different plazas but they weren't called like San Pedro, it wasn't until probably 1860s that I find some reference to *San Pedro de la Culebra*. Same thing in San Acacio, *San Acacio de la Culebra*. San Francisco, Chama was settled quite a bit later, probably the mid to late 1860s. So the earliest villages were San Luis and it wasn't named San Luis til probably the 1860s. It was always *Culebra*. There is actually mention of naming it San Luis in one of the commissioner's meetings in the 1860s. So it wasn't always *San Luis de la Culebra* it was officially named that much later.

Dana: I didn't know that. When it was incorporated as a town, was it incorporated as San Luis?

Maria: Yes.

Dana: Okay. What other towns or villages are there?

***Maria:** There is *Los Vallejos*, which was east of San Luis, closer to the mountain tract, almost at the foot of the mountain tract. It was called *Las Fuertes*, which means the forts, or *Los Vallejos*. And the reason it was named *Los Vallejos* is because of the Vallejos family who were first settlers. There was a large family, the children of Juan Bautista Vallejos and what was her name, Maria Gertrudis Martin and at least seven, eight family members came as extended family. My great grandmother Maria Dolores Vallejos married to a Vigil. Her sister Guadalupe married to his brother. Miguel Antonio Vallejos who was one of the first commissioners ended up in the Trinidad, Walsenburg /Trinidad area. Antonio Vallejos who was here again with the earlier settlers moved on to Walsenburg, his wife died and he married an Indian woman that he had been having children with while his wife was alive. There was a bunch of them, a bunch of Vallejos. The one that stayed here the longest and died here in the 1880s after coming here in the 1850s was my (great great)grandmother Maria Dolores. So she was a true pioneer. She was here from 1850 to 1882 when she died.

Dana: And that was your grandmother?

Maria: My paternal, (probably great, great)third great grandmother on my dad's side.

Dana: Okay.

***Maria:** I remember peaking into my (grandmother's) mother's coffin when she died in 1944 and I was two, that's all I remember about her. But they tell me stories. Her older granddaughters remember she would tell them stories about Indian raids and scalping and hiding under a wagon when they were attacked by Indians on the way to Walsenburg. She was born in the 1860s. And then she was, like I said she died in 1944, I guess she was quite a character. She had a half sister and my brother remembers that when her half sister came over they would take everything out of the kitchen turn the music on and start dancing. So that was one of the happy stories I remember about her.

Maria: She lost all her children during the 1918 flu epidemic except for my dad and his brother and his sister. And she had had ten children.

Dana: That would be very sad. When you mention the Indians, which tribes were predominant down here in the Valley?

Maria: I did a story on Fort Garland a while back but the Ute I think were probably predominant although there was a lot of passing tribes coming through here and Fort Garland and then moving on. Arapaho I think is mentioned in Fort Garland history. There was a doctor here in Fort Garland who wrote about his adventures here, what was his name? He was a nineteen-year-old young man from New York

and he was the resident doctor here in Fort Garland. And he wrote some beautiful letters home, they're all in the History Museum I'm sure you've seen them. They're absolutely incredible. His vocabulary, I could go on and on about him but...

Dana: He was young to be a doctor.

Maria: Yeah, he was and he spent some very lonely days here. He could hardly wait for somebody to come through so he could talk to somebody. He would send home for white shirts and his parents would oblige him, send him civilized stuff.

Dana: So he was probably in a...

Maria: It was very remote, very, very remote. He talks about a George Washington celebration where the whole fort was lighted (lit) up and he talks about seeing the wagons coming from San Luis with all the guests. And he talks about the food that they served and he talks about the men going outside probably to drink moonshine, whiskey. It's just a beautiful, beautiful letter.

Dana: Besides him, there were other characters that came in and out of this fort. Could you tell us about some of those people?

Maria: Of course Tom Tobin, he was the scout explorer. He was a scout for the government there for a while. There was of course Kit Carson and let's see who else. There's a lot of Irish soldiers here that were actually having their children baptized and being married and having their children baptized in Arroyo Hondo because that was the only Catholic parish that served this area for a long, long time.

Dana: Which parish?

Maria: It was Arroyo Hondo in Northern New Mexico. It's maybe sixty miles from San Luis? So it's quite a ways from here.

Dana: But there were quite a few Irish?

Maria: There were quite a few Irish, yes.

Dana: And how did the Irish interact with the Hispanic community?

Maria: I don't know that they intermarried but I don't know that there really was any interaction because they were soldiers here. I can tell you how they interacted with the Mexicans in Mexico during the Mexican war *[laughs]*. The San Patricia Brigade, they stayed there.

Dana: Going back to would you tell the story about Tom Tobin?

Maria: Tom Tobin came from Saint Louis, Missouri and he was just a kid and he was in Arroyo Hondo first, New Mexico. Well all of this place was New Mexico but that's where he was, he was probably even working at Turley's Distillery with his brother at one time. He married in New Mexico, he married an Hispanic woman in New Mexico and then eventually he moved to Costilla, New Mexico and from there he moved on to Fort Garland. And I guess the best-known story about him is his killing of the Espinoza brothers. He actually shot them and cut off their heads and brought them to the commander at Fort Garland. That's the story that I've heard.

Dana: And what were the Espinoza brothers being charged with?

Maria: They went on a killing spree and the people that they were killing were white people. And they, I guess, I don't know if it was because they wanted revenge for something that had been done to them. I don't know the story real well so I really couldn't... what the common story is that they were taking revenge for something that the white people had done to them.

Dana: What type of livelihood was there in the Valley back then for families? What type of things did they do to...

***Maria:** In 1960 there was 900 families living in Culebra. It couldn't have all been San Luis, they were in near surrounding villages. Most of them were, there's adobe-makers so those people I think were probably here at Fort Garland making adobes to build the fort. And those mostly were Vallejos families that were the adobe-makers. (I think there was one young Vallejos family listed as adobe makers) There was mostly sheep and cattle, that's how they made their livelihoods. There is stories about the people surrounding Fort Garland growing gardens and selling the produce to the fort. And strawberries stand out in my mind for some reason.

Dana: You mentioned...

***Maria:** (my maternal grandfather Celestino Manzanares) No he never had sheep of his own, he was an expert shearer and what the men here would do is they would go to Wyoming and that was later, much later. They would go to Wyoming and that was later, much later, they would go to Wyoming and work in the sheep industry. They would herd, they would shear, and they would come back and leave some money and babies and go back. But he died quite early he had probably stomach cancer. They put him on a train somewhere in Green River, Wyoming and sent him home and he went to visit his brothers in New Mexico and came back to die. He was actually, I never knew him. My mom used to say, well she had nine brothers and one sister, a baby sister. So he was especially good to my mom. He would bring her, whenever he came home from, they called it *la borrega*, which means the sheep, he

would bring her a new dress or new shoes or something. She was already a teenager.

Dana: I think a lot of families for temporary reasons, for jobs, what other places would they go or what other industries would they leave for?

Maria: With no education? My dad worked as a dishwasher at the Cosmopolitan Hotel in Denver when he was a kid, when he was single. Fort Collins, the sugar beets, a lot of families are still there, you know they never came back home. So most of the Hispanos in that part of Colorado stayed there because their parents went to work in the sugar beet industries. They followed the crops. They were migrant farmworkers, actually. I can't say that they went like the Mexican people from Texas did, they'd go to Wisconsin and stuff, I don't think our people ever went that far. But within Colorado and probably in New Mexico to work in the crops but not, I don't think any further than that. I don't think they were willing to leave their homes for that long of a time.

Dana: What about railroads? Was that an industry that people were...?

Maria: When the railroads came yes, in Wyoming. And most of your people from Chama, Colorado, you'll find in Laramie Wyoming, you'll find all the Villalpandos. A bunch of Sanchez's, they all went to work in the railroads and they stayed there.

Dana: So many people did leave home for many different industries?

Maria: Yes.

Dana: Did any come back?

Maria: I don't think that a lot came back. I think they stayed. My uncle Gaspar Manzanares went to work in Wyoming and never came back home.

Dana: Did he go to the railroads?

Maria: Yes. He worked in the railroads. And a lot of the Villalpandos from Chama went to Laramie and never came back.

Dana: What about mining?

Maria: I don't know, there was a lot of mining in Walsenberg, Trinidad area but I don't know that a lot of people from here went to work there. I think that the people who had already moved there worked those industries.

Dana: Okay. Lets go back to your childhood. What holidays....

Maria: I remember the 4th of July. The mountain tract was still accessible to us and we would, my mom would get everything ready for a picnic. It was an all day affair. And she would put everything into a tin tub; all the food that we were taking, potatoes and lard and salt and pepper for cooking and she would get it ready for my dad but she never got us ready so we were the last ones in the whole community to leave. We'd get there when everything was cooked [laughs] because we were always late. But it was a day where families gathered and visited. It was like a giant homecoming. People from all over the state, all the people who had grown up here, would come back on the 4th of July just to go out there and spend the day.

Dana: Was it a patriotic type of celebration?

Maria: Not really.

Dana: Okay, more family?

Maria: More family. It wasn't like fireworks or reading the Declaration of Independence or anything like that. It was just family mostly.

Dana: What about Santana?

Maria: Santana was usually again a big family gathering. The masses, they had baseball games, they had horse racing, they had *vendibles* which were booths; everybody would set up a booth. And it wasn't only in San Luis, it was in Chama because Santiago is just a day before Santana. So that was also celebrated. They had dances, they had a lot more activity than there is now.

Dana: Explain the significance of the holiday.

Maria: It's a Saints day. It's celebrated in San Luis, it's celebrated in Taos on the same day. So it's really a Saints Day. It's a religious holiday.

Dana: And it's in July.

Maria: July 25th-26th I think.

Dana: What about other holidays, for instance, Christmas. What do you remember about your family at Christmas time?

Maria: Christmas time is not my favorite holiday and so... we would have, my family was very poor. My dad would go work in Green River, Wyoming, like I said, in Colorado Springs. We had a couple of cows, pigs, he would butcher a lamb, but he had enough ground, enough land so that he raised his own beans, his own potatoes,

his own garden. And so we never lacked for food. We lacked for maybe, not even clothes because my mom made our own clothes and she canned our own food so we never lacked for anything really except maybe white bread from the store, bologna. So Christmas was, by Christmas time Dad was up to his ears in debt at the local store. But he would still go and get us oranges and apples and nuts and hard candy. And mom would make dolls or an item of clothing for us. And what I remember mostly about the holidays was the Luminarias, the days building up to the Christmas holiday. And that's when the young men would gather, they would build bonfires in every community and they would gather and it was a ritual where they lit the bonfires and then they would sing and dance and just, I can tell you about the traditions if I read it but as far as I remember, it was just the praying, the singing, the bonfires, the crackling of the whips.

Dana: Okay, tell everybody what Luminarias are.

Maria: Luminarias are, well to me, they were bonfires. Luminarias now are like, they put a candle in a paper sack and they, or a light in a paper sack, and they call those Luminarias, actually to light the way for the Christ Child.

Dana: So when you were growing up they were not lights in paper sack?

Maria: No, there were actual bonfires. The Luminarias were actual bonfires.

Dana: Were they huge?

Maria: And they were like nineteen days before Christmas, they were huge bonfires. They would take the *alcawi* which is the wood that burns the hottest and they would use that to light the bonfires so that they would go all night.

Dana: Okay. Besides the Sangre de Cristo there was the other land grants but the Trinchera Ranch is interesting. Tell us about the Trinchera Ranch.

Maria: The Trinchera Ranch was part of the Sangre de Cristo land grant.

Dana: And then it was divided?

Maria: It was divided into the Trinchera and the one in San Luis.

Dana: The Costilla land grant.

Maria: Yeah.

Dana: Okay what do you know about the Trinchera Ranch?

Maria: Not a whole lot. I just know that it's been sold and re-sold. And it's private, very, very private, it's not like people around here are going to get access to it. And I don't know what the difference is because it was all a land grant so why didn't the clause and the deed apply to here, because they don't use it as often? I have no idea, I know the soldiers hunted and fished and Fort Garland probably used wood from the Trinchera.

Dana: And the Breen family that came back to the Trinchera Ranch. Were they soldiers?

Maria: Patrick Breen was a soldier. He was a (civil) war soldier and he stayed on here.

Dana: So is his family still here?

Maria: No. Oh no.

Dana: But they were Irish?

Maria: They were Irish.

Dana: Okay, tell us a story that you know about the Breen family.

***Maria:** I know that Patrick Breen's great, probably third great grandson contacted me on the Internet and wanted to know if I knew anything about the Breens in Trinchera. And I knew about the Breens only because I have access to the Arroyo Honda records and the Costilla, San Miguel de la Costilla records. Both of those churches were in New Mexico and that's where the Breens who came here, the children of the Breen who came here, were baptized because they were Irish-Catholic. Probably after the civil war, Patrick Breen decided to stay here in Fort Garland and (his family) married into most of the Anglo families that were here at the time, McCarthy, a bunch of families, I can't remember the names right off, I think they were going to settle here and they had to move because they found out that it was a land grant. They couldn't buy so they left here and they moved on to Durango. Patrick ended up living and dying in California in his later years. And I was telling you earlier they are all buried at the private cemetery that's on the Trinchera Ranch. And Tom Tobin's there and all the Breen family who died here are there. And all of them have beautiful tombstones except for Patrick Breen who was brought back to be buried here because he was the last one and there was no one to erect a tombstone for him.

Dana: He doesn't have one?

Maria: He doesn't have a tombstone. But all his babies and his wife, they all have tombstones.

Dana: Any stories that you could tell us about politicians...

Maria: Well I'm sorry I didn't mean to interrupt you but Patrick Breen's son, I think William was a sheriff in Costilla County. And for some odd reason, he left in some controversy, apparently he beat a prisoner pretty near death and so he moved on. He was, I have his picture somewhere.

Dana: You actually have some pictures you could tell us about, the oldest house?

***Maria:** Oh yes. The extended Vigil family who married into the Vallejos family were first settlers in San Luis, among the first settlers in San Luis. My great, great grandfather's brother Juan Angel Vigil was killed by Indians in 1855. His burial recorded is in Arroyo Hondo but I think he was killed in San Luis de Culebra or near San Pedro La Culebra. This is the house that Juan Angel Vigilo had built. It was a long, long house. These were the quarters, the family quarters. And this was all European style. The hay wagons, probably even animals lived in the other part of the house. And this was torn down probably ten years ago.

Dana: And where was it located?

Maria: In San Pedro, right in the town of San Pedro.

Dana: Do you remember seeing it?

Maria: Oh yes, I remember going upstairs and it was empty for a very long time and we used to go up there and just look at the China, they had China stored up there.

Dana: And it was still there?

Maria: It was still there. It was still there. It was beautiful stuff and whatever happened to it I don't know. I don't know what became of it. That's what that is.

Dana: And then you have a photo of one of the first settler families.

Maria: I have this family; we're in San Pedro again in fact right down South of here in the early 1850s again.

Dana: And what was their family name?

Maria: Martinez, they were Martinez.

Dana: Relatives of...

Maria: Not my relatives. I'm a Martinez by osmosis. *[laughs]* My DNA shows that I'm not a Martinez at all, I'm a Sandoval.

Dana: Okay. You had DNA testing done?

Maria: We had DNA testing done, my brother did. He is ancient Celtic European and from Europe but we do not match the Martinez side of the family in New Mexico so the story my dad said, and the DNA proves it, is that there was an attack on a wagon train in New Mexico, somewhere near around Santa Fe, and all the people were killed except a baby boy that was taken in by a Martinez, he took their name. And when you're a Martinez for a hundred years you don't accept the fact that you're not a Martinez very easily. And that's happening a lot in New Mexico. And the families that came to Colorado from New Mexico are having their DNA done and most of the women are Indian, Native American. My mother is haplogroup C, which all her matches are in Canada and Mexico. And my dad of course is a Spaniard, all his matches are in Spain, France, some other country around there, what is it, Scotland, Ireland.

Dana: So how is DNA changing or affecting genealogy? I mean are people looking at DNA and changing records or...

Maria: No I can't change any records. Martinez I can trace back to 1760 so that's probably the time, maybe twenty years before then, when this Sandoval child was taken in by a Martinez family. I have no idea where to look for Sandoval. There is no Sandoval's attached to the Martinez at all so I have no idea where to look. So my Martinez line ends in 1760, I can't go any further. Other Martinez's can go back to 1598 with Hernan Martin Serrano, but I can't.

Dana: Is there anything you would like to tell us that I've overlooked?

Maria: I can tell you all kinds of genealogy stories but you don't want genealogy stories.

Dana: Tell us on

***Maria:** Mostly I do Vigil family and that was my maternal grandmother her name was Nazarena Vigil. And she was born here in La Culebra. Her parents were here in 1851, were the first settlers. She married her fourth cousin who came from Arroyo Honda and (she) was given a dowry of 500 acres, maybe so he could, you know, marry her and take her off their hands, I don't know *[laughs]*. But she had something like twelve children and only three survived to adulthood. My dad remembers that during the 1918 flu epidemic they were taking the children that had died out the

window so that she wouldn't know that (another) of her children had died so that's pretty sad, a pretty sad story. But her ancestor can be traced back to Sierrro, Spain near, I think it's Northern Spain near the French border. And that's on her Vigil side. Her (Arguelles) side can be traced back to 1390 and also in Spain.

Dana: Same area?

Maria: Same area, that goes way, way back. Her ancestor in Mexico came to Mexico in 1611. They actually have a record of passage for him. And in order to come over at that time he had to prove that he wasn't Jewish, that he wasn't a priest or that type of thing and that he was free to come and... so he landed in Veracruz. He was actually on his way to Peru but I guess decided that he didn't want to go to Peru so he stayed in Mexico, made his way to Mexico City. Seven years later he married in Mexico City, another Spaniard, and then moved on to Zacatecas, the mining region. He was actually a pawnbroker. He would lend money to the rich Spaniards. They would bring him their silver items to pawn and he would lend them money. So that was kind of interesting. And a hundred years later, his grandson came to New Mexico in 1693 as a soldier settler.

Dana: Around Santa Fe?

***Maria:** Actually he was in Santa Fe, no he was actually, he got a land grant outside of Albuquerque in Alameda, over a hundred thousand acres and he didn't want to be bothered with it so he sold it and moved to Santa Cruz and that's where most of the Vigils originated and moved, North. (he was a soldier in the garrison in Santa Fe)

Dana: Okay, so you enjoy genealogy and finding all those stories?

Maria: Oh I do, I love the stories. I have a thousand stories. I have this one was especially interesting.

Dana: And who are they?

***Maria:** He was a Vigil, I can't remember his first name and she was an Archebeque. Her ancestor was a Frenchman (Jean L'Archebeque) and they lived among the wild Indians in the South for years until they found a party of Spaniards who rescued them and brought them to New Mexico. That was L' Archebeque and Grolet G-r-o-l-e-t, (name would eventually become Gurule). And this young man moved away from San Luis (from San Francisco, CO) when he was a young man and ended up in Dolores Colorado where he married his wife. And his granddaughter (daughter) never knew that he had even lived in San Luis until he died and they found his records. So apparently there was some secret he was hiding or he just didn't want people to know where he was from and so it wasn't until years later that she found her relatives here in this area.

Dana: So do you help other people do their genealogy?

Maria: Yes.

Dana: Okay.

Maria: I do. That's pretty much what I do. I do genealogy for people and I'm on the internet quite a bit helping answer queries and stuff.

Dana: Okay well it'd be fun to talk to you much more about it.

Maria: *[laughs]*

Dana: Anything else?

Maria: I don't know what else you'd want to know except...

Dana: Well you've given us some good information and I can't think of anything else to ask you so I'm gonna thank you for your time and thank you for the interview and it's gonna be fun to put it...

Cameras talking...