



**ORAL HISTORY PROGRAM**  
INTERVIEW ABSTRACT

CONSULTANT: Roland Sanchez

DATE OF BIRTH: October 28, 1948                      SEX: Male

DATE OF INTERVIEW: November 21, 1996

LOCATION OF INTERVIEW: Dr. Sanchez's office, Belen, New Mexico

INTERVIEWER: Jane O'Cain

SOURCE OF INTERVIEW: NMF&RHM  OTHER \_\_\_\_\_

TRANSCRIBED: Yes: August 18, 1987

NUMBER OF TAPES: Two

ABTRACTOR: Sheila Klug

DATE ABSTRACTED: July 30, 2001

QUALITY OF RECORDING (SPECIFY): Good

SCOPE AND CONTENT NOTE: Describes his early life growing up on a farm in Pueblitos, New Mexico, his decision to go into medicine, his involvement in raising Santa Gertrudis cattle, his pioneering in intensive grazing in the area, and his role in the founding of the New Mexico Ranch and Heritage Museum.

DATE RANGE: 1955-1996

## **ABSTRACT (IMPORTANT TOPICS IN ORDER OF APPEARANCE):**

### **TAPE ONE, SIDE A:**

Dr. Sanchez is the Chairman of the Farm and Ranch Heritage Museum Board, a position he had held since July 1996.

After providing some biographical data, he describes his childhood on a small family farm. His father was a social worker and his mother a teaching assistant. They grew alfalfa and wheat and raised poultry, pigs and beef, principally for home use. Stories concerning family history were very important in the family, and his grandparents lived nearby. His paternal grandfather spoke only Spanish and never considered himself as living in the United States.

Dr. Sanchez was graduated from New Mexico State University with a degree in civil engineering. He had been involved in community projects in Las Cruces and helped start GED classes and Chicano studies. He knew that as a civil engineer he would be traveling all over the country but wanted to live in one of the small communities in New Mexico and serve the community. He took the requisite twelve additional hours for admittance in to medical school and attended the University of New Mexico. After serving a residency in Fort Worth, Texas, he returned to Belen and opened a clinic near the new hospital in 1979.

He describes how he always dreamed of owning a farm of at least fifty acres and how he got involved in raising Santa Gertrudis cattle. He now has the largest registered Santa Gertrudis herd in the southwest and sells semen internationally to places like Guatemala and Venezuela. In addition to his medical practice, he currently farms 140 acres and lease ranches in northern New Mexico. Much of his stock descended from cows he purchased from the actress Greer Garson.

The first farm he bought happened to be the farm he and his brother hoed chile on. Dr. Sanchez relates how they worked with a bunch of "wetbacks," who passed along much of their folklore. The consultant goes on to describe the very large families prevalent at the time and how almost all of the children went on to graduate from college. He also describes life at that time: how people were very close and helped each other out, how his grandfather was too embarrassed to apply for Medicaid, and how as children they would stand quietly and listen and learn from their elders. At that time Hispanics tended to be Republicans, as they were independent and disliked the government. For cultural reasons, Dr. Sanchez was born at home rather than at the hospital even though his father had health insurance. People have transitioned to being far more dependent on the government, he feels.

Dr. Sanchez is bilingual, but the Spanish he was taught was archaic and occasionally triggers a funny look from someone from Mexico.

Dr. Sanchez is a board member of the New Mexico Hispanic Physicians and was appointed by Senator Pete Domenici to the National Advisory Committee on Rural Health. He is also on the board of directors for the New Mexico Boys Ranch.

### **TAPE ONE, SIDE B:**

He also is a member of the New Mexico Farm Bureau, the New Mexico Cattle Growers, and helps with the county fair.

The consultant feels that people in rural areas—whether it's the Catskill Mountains or the Appalachians—resent people who come in from urban areas and can buy land at a much higher price than the locals can pay for it. Therefore, when he purchased his farm in 1980 in Bosque, New Mexico, he decided it should be a model to teach people how to make a higher income so they can't say, "Blame those gringos who took our land." He re-laser leveled the land and then put in concrete ditches and an intensive grazing system like they do in New Zealand. With the help of the extension agent and soil conservation agent worked with him and sent the data to New Mexico State, which was able to get a grant from the Kellogg Foundation of \$1.8 million. People from all over have been coming to study the methods.

He feels that the other agricultural organizations are very supportive of the Museum and that once people see a presentation about the Museum they are very enthusiastic. Dr. Sanchez is trying to get out the message that although ranchers feel they've been here forever and they're the founding families, there were other families that thought they would never lose their ranch and that things would go on indefinitely. He views the Museum as "a little lantern" that will tell the farmer or rancher that there's someone who is going to tell their story the way they would like it told. He feels his mission as chairman is to keep it accurate and scientific and not give credit to one particular family or market.

He feels the Anasazi Indians, the Mogollon period, the Spanish colonization period, the ranchers from Texas, and the current people left in the industry should get credit for their contributions. The good things that are being done, including the proper use of water, laser-leveling so there is more water, the recycling of water and the recharging of the aquifer as they irrigate, should be told to the public.

He also wants there to be research and also wants the stories to include the small ranchers and farmers, not just the huge operations. He talked at length about the cohesiveness of the society and how they maintained the old traditions even though it was cheaper to buy a box of detergent than to make their own soap.

Dr. Sanchez relates how he first heard about a heritage center. He got a call from Walt Chavez, who told him Governor Bruce King was looking for someone from that area to be on the Farm and Ranch Heritage Museum committee. This was probably sometime in 1991, as he was officially appointed February 17, 1992. He was leery of the board at first, feeling that perhaps some of the board members saw things in a political way. He was impressed that they elected Felicia Thal as chairman because "she has guts, she has character, and she's extremely honest . . . and she is very intellectual."

When he joined, the building appropriation fund had not been made. Dr. Sanchez described the problems in getting enough money to keep a staff alive through the struggles of picking an architect, who was not selected. They nearly lost \$50,000 that Steve Strain claimed was owed him even though they had told him he was welcome to do some preliminary drawings without their being committed to paying him. They eventually picked the design firm they felt best suited and came up with a figure of \$6,500,000.

Most of the work in the first two years was legislative and he served on the legislative committee. He feels that one of the biggest strengths was Bruce King. Dr. Sanchez feels that without King there might not be a Farm and Ranch Heritage Museum today.

The consultant feels that once the building is up the rest will follow. In a few years the industries, peanut, dairy, beef, will think it is indispensable. Once the Farm Bureau and Cattle Growers start having their meetings there community activities, such as *quinceañeras*, weddings, and ethnic groups, will start meeting there.

### **TAPE TWO, SIDE A:**

Dr. Sanchez describes his activities in private fund raising. Whenever he talks to any group, he points out that the foundation exists and needs contributions, including for the collections. People are willing to give if the item will be respected and possibly returned. He feels they have a very good collection policy.

The consultant was excited to move from thirteen acres on the golf course to forty-seven acres on Dripping Springs Road. He feels space is needed to display animals and to not display one breed of cattle over another. He feels the worse thing that could happen to the Museum is to not be objective.

He feels that the Museum should remain under the Office of Cultural Affairs. He believes placing it under New Mexico State University would set up a competition for funds and that the Museum would be just another branch of the school, not “a star that’s shining out there on its own.”

The consultant believes that research and education are two of the most important aspects of the Museum's mission. The research issues should be those that are publicly important to counteract negative publicity that farmers and ranchers are being given. He feels that programs should be transmitted directly to classrooms. A film could be made, for example, of his intensive grazing system at his farm. The film would be educational now and ultimately be historical.

Dr. Sanchez feels there has not been a conflict of interest with any of the board members or leaders in the foundation. He feels most are not there for financial gain nor anyone wanting to do anything other than its mission, which is to preserve, collect and educate the public of the positive side of agriculture. People have differences of opinion; they state their differences, vote on it, and then move on with what the majority wants.

The consultant feels the best way to acknowledge the contributions of the very earliest people who worked with Dr. Thomas and Dr. Stephens would be to include them in a filmed orientation session welcoming visitors to the Museum. He feels this would be more attention-grabbing than a plaque on the wall.

Dr. Sanchez feels that the process of starting the Museum was easier than he expected. He feels that Governor Bruce King was very committed to the idea and was instrumental in getting the Museum off the ground.

His vision for the future of the Museum would be to have the exhibits be on a par with the Natural History Museum in Denver. He hopes to see established groups such as the Farm Bureau and the Chile Institute meet at the Museum and the community use the patio for weddings, festivals and the like.

He would also see a farmers' market supplying fresh fruits and vegetables and feels that children would find it rewarding to see milk turn into cheese and butter. He would like the Museum to

show what the producers are doing for the environment and the research on such things as raising the oxygen level of water being returned to the Rio Grande and the effects of hormones on beef, etc.

He feels that perhaps in twenty years the Museum will be self-sufficient and that farmers and ranchers from all over the state will develop a sense of ownership in the Museum, realizing that an individual cannot do the research or the facility to tell the complete story.

**TAPE TWO, SIDE B:**

Dr. Sanchez feels the Museum will be a good balance to the other museums in the state. It's the largest museum built in the last twenty years in the United States and it will be the largest agricultural museum. The real emphasis will be on the early settlers and also be a forum on all the land issues that come up in New Mexico.

Finally, he refers to a family history, *Dawn Comes to Jarales*, as a good source of material.