

**NEW MEXICO
FARM & RANCH
HERITAGE
MUSEUM**

CONSULTANT: Morgan Nelson

DATE OF BIRTH: September 27, 1919 GENDER: Male

DATE(S) OF INTERVIEW: June 14, 2000

LOCATION OF INTERVIEW: Consultant's home

INTERVIEWER: Marcie Palmer

SOURCE OF INTERVIEW: NMF&RHM OTHER _____

TRANSCRIBED: Yes: July 17, 2000

NUMBER OF TAPES: One

ABTRACTOR: Marcie Palmer

DATE ABSTRATED: August 16, 2000

QUALITY OF RECORDING (SPECIFY): Good

SCOPE AND CONTENT NOTE: Details the use of German prisoners of war on his parents' farm in East Grand Plains during World War II. The family maintained contact with one German prisoner of war, and visited him in Germany in the 1970s. Also discussed the Pecos River Bridge.

DATE RANGE: 1939 - 1946

ABSTRACT (IMPORTANT TOPICS IN ORDER OF APPEARANCE):

TAPE ONE, SIDE A:

Morgan Nelson has lived in the home he is in since 1928. He joined the service in June after graduating from New Mexico State University in May 1941. He was an engineering officer.

His parents' farm required a "tremendous amount of labor." They had a number of people living and working during the late 1930s until World War II started. The laborers chopped and hoed the weeds and picked cotton. Irrigation was difficult, the land wasn't real level and the ditches were dirt. The ditches required constant maintenance. They had about a 42-horsepower tractor; it was a big tractor in those days. The farm was very labor-intensive; cultivation and other farm work were done by hand.

Morgan Nelson left the farm for the air force in June of '41 and returned in October of '45. The German prisoners were still working on the farm when he got home. The Nelsons were putting in an underground pipeline from the reservoir on the farm. The German prisoners helped put in the pipeline and he supervised that job. They had four, five or more Germans. He doesn't remember if they were guarded. They are still using that pipeline today.

The consultant had utilized German and Italian prisoners of war in Europe and North Africa. During the war, his dad used both German and Italians but preferred the Germans.

Mr. Nelson's parents had some favorites among the POWs; one was Karl Dresser. The Nelson's neighbor, Mrs. Eccles, also used POWs. Another neighbor complained to the FBI that they were too friendly with prisoners. The FBI came out and investigated.

Mr. Nelson doesn't remember any POWs trying to escape. They seemed to be glad to be out of the camps working. It gave them something to do. He thinks they paid them by the hour. The farmers were very glad to have them to work. They needed the help.

When the consultant returned from the armed forces, he realized his parents had needed the help but he was a "little bit against them." He had "lost friends and everything else." But he said he was "very realistic about it. They served a good purpose."

His parents kept in contact with some of the Germans, by letters. They went to Germany in the '70s and visited with Karl Dresser and his wife. His father was Fred M. Nelson. He died in 1978. His mother was Florence. She died in 1992.

Mr. Nelson states that Mrs. Eccles also went to Germany and spent some time with Karl Dresser. Mr. Poethig, a former German POW, immigrated to Roswell from Germany and is still living in Roswell today. The German POWs lined the Spring River Canal [with large rocks] and they left a symbol (an Iron Cross) in one side of the canal [about one block from Main Street West].

He also spoke of his father raising Acala cotton 37-A in New Mexico, and added that Acala "is still the finest cotton in all the country."

The Pecos River Bridge was discussed. It was put in [east of Roswell] in the late 1800s or early 1900s. Two spans of the bridge now are up the valley from Roswell near Hondo, New Mexico. There might be a third span somewhere but Mr. Nelson can't recall it. The new bridge was put in on East Second Street in the 1930s or early 1940s.