

**NEW MEXICO  
FARM & RANCH  
HERITAGE  
MUSEUM**

**ORAL HISTORY PROGRAM  
INTERVIEW ABSTRACT**

CONSULTANT: Ed Remondini, Clara Jo (Jody) McSherry,  
and G.X. McSherry

DATE OF BIRTH: Ed: December 12, 1912; Jody: March 28, 1927;  
G.X.: November 23, 1924

GENDER: Male/Female/Male

DATE(S) OF INTERVIEW: December 1, 1998; January 14, 1999; January 19, 1999

LOCATION OF INTERVIEW: Consultant homes in Deming, N.M.

INTERVIEWER: Jane O'Cain

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

TRANSCRIBED: Yes: November 22, 1999

NUMBER OF TAPES: Eight

ABTRACTOR: O'Cain

DATE ABSTRATED: June 11, 2001

QUALITY OF RECORDING (SPECIFY): Good, although recording is interrupted by a chiming clock on the first and last interview sessions.

SCOPE AND CONTENT NOTE: The history of an irrigated farm near Deming, New Mexico, homesteaded in 1909 by an Austrian immigrant family to the present time (1999).

DATE RANGE: 1900 – 1999

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

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

The first interview session was held on December 1, 1998, with siblings Edward Remondini and Clara Jo "Jody" McSherry. Their father was born in the Austrian province of Tyrol (it has been part of Italy since the end of World War I). Her father was born in 1879 and became an American citizen in 1900. They discuss their father's history between the time he first left Austria and when he became a citizen. He had very little formal education, but knew several languages and was self-taught. When first arriving in the United States, he went to live near relatives (actually their mother's family) in the Upper Peninsula of Michigan.

Their mother was also born in Tyrol in 1889 and immigrated with her family to the United States as an infant. The consultants' parents married in Michigan and had two children. Their father worked as a miner. Their father went by the name Joe and their mother, Mary. They were married in 1905. The two oldest children, Irene and David, were born in 1907 and 1908, respectively.

After David's birth (1908), Joe and a friend, Joe Franzoy, came west to look for work in the mines at Morenci, Arizona. They didn't find work there, but on their way back to Michigan Joe Remondini was offered a job on a farm at the railroad station in Deming. Also hanging in the station was a sign advertising "Free Land." Remondini decided to stay in New Mexico, and homesteaded 160 acres (seven miles east of Deming).

Eventually, Mrs. Remondini and the two children joined her husband and they lived in a tent on the homestead; the land was covered in "mesquite and sandhills." But they were near the Mimbres River, and when it flooded it covered the land with rich, alluvial soil. They discuss floods and changes in the course of the river, also Florida Lake that is no longer a feature in the landscape.

A few families were already farming in the area when Remondini filed on his homestead in 1909.

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

Continue discussing some of the families in the area who attempted farming, but were not successful at it. Joe Remondini did not have an agricultural background, but became a successful farmer, although Ed Remondini states, ". . . that took years and years to do." Joe Remondini worked for the Dornbush brothers for seven or eight years while he cleared the land of mesquite and dug a well twenty-five feet deep for irrigation.

Eventually the Remondinis built a small frame house on the farm. Twins were born in Deming in 1912, Ed and Olive. A daughter born in 1910 died as an infant. In 1915, Mary returned to Michigan and gave birth to a daughter, Dorothy. All of her children born in Deming were born at home, although Ed thought that their mother might have moved into Deming before his and Olive's birth. (The trip into Deming from the farm would take all day in the wagon, particularly as their mother bartered produce, chickens, or turkeys for staples that were needed.) Jody McSherry stated that neighbor women would assist one another with the birth of their children. In the case of Mary Remondini's twins, she had delivered the first child by herself, before the doctor arrived. Her next child after Dorothy, a boy, Robert was born in 1919. Jody was born in 1927.

The consultants discuss various country schools and their locations in the area.

Description of clearing mesquite from the land with a “shovel and an ax.” The mesquite root is large, and the root was cut into firewood; it was a good wood to burn and the family used it for cooking for many years. Jody tells a story of her father using the wind to remove loose sand and level land.

To begin with Joe Remondini grew vegetables (lettuce, cabbage) in the five or six acre field he had cleared. Truck farming was done for several years.

Began discussion of an occasion when the Mimbres River flowed.

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

Mr. Remondini discussed that the river would never flow like that again, because the water table has dropped due to the amount of water that has been pumped out. Discusses a fifteen-foot well that was dug at the house. At places the water table was so near the surface that water could be found just below the surface. Floods deposit a great deal of sand and silt, and over time, change the land formation.

Mr. Remondini describes the irrigation system used when he was a child. Their first pumping plant engine ran on “distillate,” once it was started with gasoline. They pumped the water into an “open dirt ditch” that flowed by gravity to the field. Irrigation “was my main job for several years.” Discusses the pond near the house used to water the livestock and as a swimming pool. Water was carried in pails to the house from the windmill.

By 1924, Joe and Mary Remondini had built the house where Jody and G.X. McSherry now reside. They were gradually putting more fields into production as the land was cleared. Ed Remondini describes the pumping plant engine being brought out across the sandhills in a wagon pulled by “teams.” Ed believes they first got electricity to the farm in 1928 or 1929.

Eggs, as well as vegetables, were taken to town to use for trade. Celery and asparagus were two of the vegetable crops that were grown. In the 1920s and 1930s, the Remondinis began to grow potatoes. Ed recalls one year they loaded nine boxcars of potatoes and shipped from the Luxor railroad stop. During the Depression one year they sold potatoes for \$0.90 a hundred-pound sack. Pinto beans were also being raised. The family also raised sweet potatoes, but they were labor intensive as they had to be “cured,” by drying them in a consistent eighty degree heat. They kept a “pot-bellied” stove going in a cellar in order to achieve the desired conditions for sweet potatoes.

Jody McSherry discusses the work done by her mother: starting plants in cold frames, gardening, raising chickens and turkeys, including incubating the eggs. Eggs were packed and sold in town.

Tomatoes were also raised on the farm, and canned at a farmer-owned canning factory in the late 1920s and possibly the early 1930s. One year the family’s onion crop was destroyed by a flood.

The family also raised cattle. Ed Remondini relates an anecdote about their herd drifting many miles in a blizzard.

Jody McSherry reads from a family history (contained within the file at the Museum Library) written by her brother, David. David discusses selling produce to the workers encamped along the Southern Pacific Railroad. Ed Remondini stated there were twenty to twenty-five of these stations along the railroad between Deming and El Paso.

## **TAPE TWO, SIDE B:**

The railroad stops were only six to seven miles apart. The men were employed repairing the tracks. The families at these stops were “eager to buy almost anything.”

Discusses David’s childhood memory of scaffolding being built at the courthouse in Deming on which Villistas involved in the Columbus raid were to be hung.

Description of Camp Cody where soldiers were trained prior to World War I, and the great influenza epidemic that swept the camp, causing the death of “hundreds” of soldiers.

Ed Remondini attended country school for only two or three years, and then they began bussing the children into Deming. Their “bus” was a “stripped down Model T.”

Oldest sister, Irene, attended normal school in Silver City and taught in many rural schools in the area. Olive also taught school in the smaller country schools.

They discuss going to see Lindberg on his trip across the United States following his flight over the Atlantic.

Their father established a registered herd of Hereford cattle. On one occasion he shipped some cattle to Los Angeles and “topped the market.”

Eventually their father leased some pasture land, and they also began to raise some alfalfa and feed grain.

Ed Remondini remembers his father being interviewed by a woman in the late 1920s, “the very same thing you’re doing.” He thought she planned to write a book. He believes it was earlier than any of the WPA projects of the 1930s.

Jody McSherry comments that her parents said that when they arrived in this area there were “oceans of grass.” Including sacaton grass out of which people would make “prairie hay.”

Discussion of the purchase by their father of the “upper pasture,” and whether this land had been homesteaded. Describes the failure of many of these homesteads.

A peach orchard was planted at the farm in 1926 or 1927; however, in about 1925 pecan trees were planted, Ed Remondini believes the first in the Deming area. One year he recalls fifteen to twenty trees produced a thousand pounds of nuts.

Ed Remondini doesn’t remember that his sisters did a great deal of work outside. However, potatoes required “all hand work” for the harvest, and the first few years before they bought a secondhand potato planter, they were planted by hand as well. Eventually, they also purchased a machine to dig potatoes (the potatoes would still have to be picked up and bagged by hand) from a Chinese-American family who owned a small truck farm. The family did most of the work of cutting the potatoes to prepare them for planting. Potatoes were also labor intensive, because they required frequent irrigation, every eight days. The potatoes were cultivated using a horse-drawn cultivator. Six, seven, or eight workhorses were used on the farm at this period of time.

The Remondinis always had one family that lived on the farm. Many of the farm workers came out to the farm from Deming every day for work.

### **TAPE THREE, SIDE A:**

Ed Remondini discusses the first tractor they ever bought for the farm. A cantankerous John Deere that he one day ran into a tree when he was attempting to turn it in a small space. His father didn't react too badly to the accident, as Ed was the only one who could operate the tractor. Joe Remondini never learned to operate any machinery. They purchased their first automobile in 1926, but owned a truck, "a converted Ford Runabout" before that.

Describes Joe Remondini getting into a purebred Hereford operation with the assistance of "one of the doctors" from New Mexico A & M. Ed recalls going to Nara Visa to bring the cattle back to Deming via rail.

Remondini discusses that his father had some crop demonstration plots for NMA&M. Different varieties of crops were grown, the amount of water they used was carefully monitored, and the yield was measured. His father worked with Fabian Garcia on potatoes and onions (some discussion ensues about some photographs found by Jody McSherry). He also carefully followed the agricultural publications of the Department of Agriculture. Continue details on the work involved with crop demonstration. His father has some problems in finding a potato that would flourish in the climate and soil, but finally found the Irish Cobbler variety did well. Potatoes were grown on the farm until possibly 1950, after Jody and her husband had purchased the farm.

The peach orchard is discussed in more detail, including attempting to save peach blossoms from freezing by lighting smudge pots (actually buckets) filled with crude oil; the peach trees eventually only produced fruit on their upper limbs and it became too labor intensive to harvest the fruit so the trees were removed.

In addition to peaches and pecans, the family also raised Bing cherry trees (not well suited to the climate), pears and had a grape arbor. Their parents made wine for their own use. The grape they recall being grown was the White Niagara, which some people purchased as a table grape.

### **TAPE THREE, SIDE B:**

Joe Franzoy who had made the trip from Michigan to New Mexico Territory with their father originally homesteaded near Carne. However, when the land proved unsatisfactory he found a farm near Salem, New Mexico.

Discusses some of the families with children that lived fairly close to their farm. They did not exchange work very often with these families, because laborers, "mostly Hispanic," were readily available in Deming.

Ed Remondini describes that during the Depression two boys offered to harvest their Sudan grass for fifty cents a day. And even though they had a row binder, at that price it was cheaper to hire them to cut, bundle, and tie the grass by hand.

Jody remembers that later in the Depression they could hire laborers for a dollar a day with "a meal . . . thrown in." The Remondinis did not employ prisoner of war labor during World War II, but did employ bracero workers probably in the 1950s and 1960s.

Their father did not plant cotton, only a small test plot in the middle twenties. He planted chile on a few occasions but it "never panned out." Ed Remondini states that chile was also problematical as they didn't have the necessary facilities to dry it.

Because the land was newly broken they did not need to use fertilizer for several years. They did spread manure on the fields as it added humus to the soil. Because their crops were diversified they did not plant the same crop in the same field year after year. After harvesting potatoes, black-eyed peas were planted. As a legume, their roots contain nitrogen-laden nodules that return that important nutrient to the soil. After this planting they could expect, "an extra good crop of whatever you planted on that same ground."

Their potatoes developed "rust," so it was important to rotate the crops. Later, a hardier variety of potato was planted that was not as susceptible to rust. Ed Remondini believes that in later years they grew the variety Kennebeck.

#### **TAPE FOUR, SIDE A:**

Interview continues with Ed Remondini on January 14, 1999.

Began discussing additional details on the tomato cannery. It was funded by local farmers and located in Deming; the building is no longer extant. Remondini believes that poor management of the cannery led to its demise. He also mentions that in the early part of the twentieth century there was also a cannery at the little rail stop of Hondale. During the time the cannery was operating in Deming each farmer had to commit to producing a certain amount of tomatoes. Tomatoes grew well in the valley.

Pinto beans were grown as a cash crop at the same time that potatoes were being grown. Now, very few beans are grown in the valley due to the market price of beans which was driven down by competition from beans produced in dryland farming areas. In general, beans were a less labor intensive crop to produce than potatoes. Marketing beans or other products into Mexico in the 1920s or 1930s was difficult due to the lack of good roads.

Remondini describes a "round of work" for a year from the time he was a boy. Includes planting and harvesting of potatoes, grains, and vegetable crops. They were double cropping both beans and potatoes during this period of time. They grew corn and dug a silo in the ground, but only used it two of three times as it was very labor intensive.

#### **TAPE FOUR, SIDE B:**

Discusses that during the Depression it was difficult to find a crop to plant that would turn a profit. Onions were planted for several years, but El Paso was the only market they had for the onions.

His father did not have any difficulty in obtaining credit at the local bank; however, that was not the case for other farmers in the area. Remondini believes his father borrowed money for operating expenses.

While finding markets for their crops was the most difficult aspect of farming during the Depression years, labor was readily available in Deming.

They did a great deal of bartering at the grocery stores; they did not expect to get cash for their products, but accepted credit instead. They still used workhorses to a great extent during this time, so did not have to expend cash for machine parts and replacements.

The onions would be attacked by an insect called a thrip that was "quite destructive." Describes spraying the crop with an insecticide that "Fabian Garcia . . . was helping us with." The machines used to deliver the insecticide were horse-drawn. Garcia said, "about the only ones (thrips) we killed was the ones the horses stepped on." Also describes trying to kill the boll worms on cotton by carrying a bag of pesticide in each hand and riding up and down the rows on horseback dusting the plants.

Discusses soil conservation and other federal programs targeted to the farmers during the Depression.

Describes some community celebrations, the 4<sup>th</sup> of July in particular. Economic conditions in Deming were impacted by the railroad, Camp Cody, and later a tuberculosis sanatorium being located in the town. The sanatorium was located on the west side of Camp Cody and administered by the Sisters of the Holy Cross. After the sanatorium was closed, the buildings burned to the ground.

He doesn't recall that his parents observed traditions or holidays from the Austrian culture. He describes that his mother did make polenta and describes it.

#### **TAPE FIVE, SIDE A:**

In addition to cooking polenta, Remondini remembers his mother canning fruit. Vegetables like cabbage could be kept all winter if they were stored in the ground covered with soil and straw. Discusses that the family always raised chickens and had eggs to eat.

Kerosene was used as a remedy for colds. A doctor was always available in Deming; however, Remondini doesn't remember any health emergencies.

Discusses that family's involvement in the Catholic Church in Deming. His father also spent a great deal of time reading and educating himself. His mother sewed most of the children's clothing. They had a radio and also visited with their neighbors. They played cards in the family, and made ice cream for birthdays and on Sundays.

The consultant graduated from high school in 1932, and stayed at home and worked on his father's farm until 1937 when he married the first time. After his marriage, his father helped him purchase a farm across the road from the homestead. He initially raised potatoes and beans, but later planted cotton. He did not serve in the military because he had three children when World War II started.

During World War II labor was difficult to find, "the only help we had was . . . the little kids from town." They assisted with harvesting cotton and potatoes. Occasionally the children were dismissed from school in order to assist with the harvest. They did not start to mechanize until after World War II.

The biggest change in farming in Remondini's lifetime has been in "finance." When asked what he thought about farming in the future he replied, "Stay out of it. That's what I think." He states that even a "real big operation" is in "debt all the time."

#### **TAPE FIVE, SIDE B:**

Continues the discussion of the viability of farming today. He believes that the drastic changes occurred in the farming economy immediately following World War II; the change was related in a large degree to the cost of mechanization. Both labor and credit are also more difficult to obtain. Sometimes when farms are turned over to the next generation, "some of 'em have lost everything." He says, "Because the young ones just won't do what the old ones did," as far as making sacrifices and working hard.

Although retired, Mr. Remondini still owns his farm and likes to go over and check on the progress frequently.

Discusses his siblings and their careers. His parents believed it was important for the children to complete high school.

### **TAPE SIX, SIDE A:**

The interview continues on January 19, 1999, with Clara Jo “Jody” McSherry and her husband, G.X. McSherry. The initial portion of the interview details aspects of rural living in the 1930s and 1940s. Jody discusses her father obtaining books on agriculture and other subjects from his employer, Mr. Dornbush. He also obtained pamphlets and other material from New Mexico A & M in Las Cruces. Discusses double cropping of potatoes and beans and raising other crops such as onions and peaches. Jody describes a desert her mother would make from the small, second crop of peaches, called peach-o.

Her mother sewed for relaxation in the evening. Only staples were purchased in town. They raised hogs and made their own hams and sausages. Describes her mother making polenta, egg noodles, and ravioli. She also made a special bread, a cornette, which was very crusty. She made sauerkraut with pork. Polenta would be served in many different ways, for example, sliced and toasted on a griddle then eaten with cheese. They had a variety of food available to them.

As the youngest child in the family, her experiences were much different than those of her older siblings. For one thing her parents were “very comfortable” financially.

Jody describes a typical day in her life as a child of eleven or twelve. She didn’t do a great deal of cooking, cleaning, or sewing. In the case of cooking her “mother didn’t like anybody in her kitchen, I mean (chuckles), that was her domain.” Also her father did not want her mother to teach her to cook as he had a “delicate tummy.” She was not allowed to play in the house, unless it was to play cards or read a book. Mr. McSherry states that the same rules applied at his home while he was growing up. Jody would occasionally help with the farm work by checking on the cattle for her father.

### **TAPE SIX, SIDE B:**

Her father enjoyed traveling, as well as reading. She names the periodicals to which the family subscribed. Her father was a staunch believer in assimilating into the American culture. He did not teach the children to speak the Italian or German language. In that way her family was different than her relatives that remained in Michigan where there was a larger group of people who had immigrated to that area. Other than some of the food they ate, the only other cultural trait the family maintained was their religion, Catholicism. Even her father’s making of wine was not pursued with the same fervor as it was by other immigrant families they knew. Her parents, unlike many immigrants, never had the intention of returning to Europe but rather wanted to become American citizens.

Jody’s father was opposed to the New Deal programs of the 1930s. He was a staunch Republican.

Description of treatment for migraine headaches; however, there was not much illness in the family.

Discussion of neighbors of the Remondini family. G.X. McSherry states that after World War II those small farms that had provided a living for a family were no longer economically viable in the new economy. The G.I. Bill offered opportunities for young men to get an education.

Jody describes hunting for mushrooms in the mountains. Her mother dried many of them. She would cook the mushrooms and feed some to the cat to determine whether they were poisonous.

Jody discusses that she attended college at New Mexico A & M.

## **TAPE SEVEN, SIDE A:**

Visiting with neighbors was one method rural people had to educate themselves, to learn what their neighbors were doing, what worked and what didn't.

Jody discusses belonging to the 4-H club as a child. She was taught cooking and sewing.

Jody and G.X. McSherry married on December 27, 1945. G.X. had not served in World War II because he was needed to run his father's ranch and farm. He was also "under the supervision of the extension service to help with the other farms and ranches . . . up and down the valley." He had a 2-C agricultural deferment. The two of them first met when their parents were involved in some business together. Jody graduated from high school in 1944 and attended three semesters of college before her marriage.

Jody states that in the Deming area the men from the CCC camps constructed "outdoor privies" out of cast concrete. Her mother called one of them the "Roosevelt toilet."

Jody discusses that her father "wouldn't hear" of her going into the cadet nurse corp., "you can go to . . . New Mexico A & M, or you can stay home." Against her wishes she enrolled in Home Economics at college, but she found that some young women were enrolled in agriculture, "I didn't have enough sense to say . . . [or] do something about" getting her major changed.

The remainder of the interview details the changes in the farm from 1945 when the farm was purchased from the Remondinis by G.X. and Jody McSherry.

When G.X. bought the farm he did not have experience with row crops or with irrigation techniques in the type of soil they had at the farm. They were in-between "being mechanized and still using workhorses." The Remondinis only stayed on the farm with the McSherrys until April of 1946 after the first potato crop was planted.

Discussion of the evolution in farm equipment from two-row planters, plows and cultivators to the large machinery they have today. Cultivating with a horse a person could work five acres per day, nowadays with modern equipment a person could cultivate forty acres by noon.

Discusses irrigation techniques in 1945 and the improvements in the irrigation system over time.

Two years after they took over the farm, the McSherrys began to raise cotton. Cotton became more feasible to raise after laborers became available through the bracero program. There was a privately owned gin in the area; however, "if you didn't sell to them they wouldn't gin your cotton."

Discusses that pinto beans remained an important crop and they also double cropped barley. They also raised hegari and potatoes. Potatoes soon became uneconomical, as competition increased.

## **TAPE SEVEN, SIDE B:**

It is important to double crop and maintain a revenue stream year around in order to be able to employ workers on a permanent, year around basis.

Discussion how additional acreage was acquired and added to the farm. On one occasion this was done in order to obtain water rights, as they were having problems defining the water rights for the farm.

Describes clearing the newly acquired property as a contrast to clearing the land when the farm was first homesteaded. Eventually, they planted eighty percent of their farm in cotton, but continued to raise cattle. The last crop of pinto beans was planted in 1954.

Discusses additional changes in the irrigation system culminating in laying an underground pipeline, which saved about thirty percent of the water used.

More land was purchased when state school sections were offered for sale. Describes clearing that land with an elevated scraper.

When they bought the farm the couple was told that they could make \$5000 per year. This compared very favorable to the \$3500 per year McSherry was offered for a job in California.

Discusses changes in the economics of farming; eventually it became economically unfeasible to grow cotton. He then gives an example of growing a beautiful field of onions that he owed \$5000 on by the time they were harvested and marketed.

Now, cattle have become their main crop. They are able to grow feed and operate their own feedlot where they buy cattle at five hundred pounds and feed them to eight hundred pounds. They are then finished at feedlots in eastern New Mexico, Texas, or Kansas. They got into the cattle business by borrowing \$800 from a neighbor to buy ten head of cattle. Initially, they fed the cattle in "big tubs," now the weighing of feed and feeding are all handled mechanically. Over time they have added an elevator and feed mill and can feed "a couple thousand head" of cattle. Their policy is to buy local, acclimated cattle. Cattle now account for forty percent of their production. They also run a cow/calf operation of about a hundred head.

In 1983, the McSherrys' son, David, joined them as farm manager. They list their other children's names.

G.X. McSherry discusses his feelings about people getting into agriculture. He believes they could still do so if they took a manager position for an older farmer or an absentee landowner.

#### **TAPE EIGHT, SIDE A:**

McSherry states that he has always had a "five-year program" that is flexible. He believes that agriculture has become a "political football." When he served in the state legislature the issue of water was his key interest.

Continues to describe changes in agriculture. Finding a stable market is a challenge. A farmer has to be able and willing to hold out through years when there is not much profit in agriculture.

Jody McSherry relates some childhood memories and discusses her parents' final years after they left the farm in 1946.

#### **TAPE EIGHT, SIDE B:** Blank