



**ORAL HISTORY PROGRAM  
INTERVIEW ABSTRACT**

CONSULTANT: Fred "Peg" Pflingsten

DATE OF BIRTH: 1913 GENDER: Male

DATE(S) OF INTERVIEW: October 30, 1998

LOCATION OF INTERVIEW: Pflingsten residence, Capitan, New Mexico

INTERVIEWER: William Boehm

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

TRANSCRIBED: Yes: February 22, 1999

NUMBER OF TAPES: Three

ABTRACTOR: Sylvia Wheeler

DATE ABSTRATED: May 18, 2001

QUALITY OF RECORDING (SPECIFY): Good

SCOPE AND CONTENT NOTE: Life experiences as a manager on big New Mexican ranches, and operating his own smaller one; and his involvement with various farm agencies in the state.

DATE RANGE: 1830-1998

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

### **TAPES ONE AND TWO:**

“Peg” is the local and preferred name of Fred W. Pfungsten. Part of his heritage is German. His paternal grandfather came to New York circa 1830, lived in Colorado, and finally in White Oaks, New Mexico, where he met Pfungsten’s grandmother. They lived in a dugout in Dry Gulch, where they mined.

Pfungsten’s father moved to Arizona and worked as a cowboy; later he was in the freighting business in the White Oaks area. In 1894, he filed on a homestead. The consultant’s mother also homesteaded in the Nogal area. Both filed under the Farm Homestead Act that entitled them each to 160 acres of which twenty had to be under cultivation. His brother-in-law, Bob Borne also filed in the region. He went into mining.

He knew John Dale, a cowboy of the Block Ranch that ran 150,000 heads of cattle. John Chisum was at that time running big herds from Seven Rivers country all the way through New Mexico and into Kansas. Chisum owned land all around Roswell. (Pfungsten’s father knew the OV Cattle Company, the site of Pat Garrett’s homestead, Cree Meadows and its history.) Chisum ran Black Angus and some Corriente, and then Herefords.

His father worked for the Veas gathering water samples for analysis. Soon he came back and worked for W. Hawkins on the old P.G. Peters place, above Angus. He worked from 1905 to get water rights on the land he’d bought. A pipeline was laid up near South Fork around to Nogal Lake and down to Carrizozo. His father hired Ed Mechem to come to New Mexico and become a water expert. In 1920, when they built the dam, his father bought water rights to the land around Alto and Eagle Creek. Around 1913, his father first bought land seven miles from Capitan. In 1914, his father bought the Fritch place, including the spring. They bought the water rights and the 335 acres included some of this water. Pfungsten’s father died in 1939. (To adjudicate water rights, the State Engineer’s Office was formed. Water had to be of beneficial use.) So, his father’s dealing with the water rights issues in the mountains is how Pfungsten’s family came to own their land.

At this time of his life, 1998, Fred Pfungsten only runs fifty head of cattle, having sold much of the land because of the intrusive elk herds. He was born in 1913 in Angus, and shortly thereafter moved to Capitan. He lived on the Fritz place for thirty years when his father ran cattle in the mountains there. Through family trades, Pfungsten ended up with about 4,000 acres. Currently, he runs about a hundred cows on the rough land.

In 1944, he went “to the other ranch up there,” then in 1966, Pfungsten went to work for a Chicago banker who had bought a 28,000- acre ranch. Pfungsten laid pipeline, fenced, operated a Cat, and had various jobs including one with the Soil Conservation Service.

He says that in the ’20s and ’30 s many wild horses roamed the area, that every family had some horses, a house, and forty or sixty acres. When cars became widely available, the wild horses were shot. Wild horses had stripped much of the land in the region. Pfungsten has many good horse stories. (There were also many cattle and delivering them to Roswell was hard. They averaged about \$13.35 per calf.) He speaks of the lack of vegetation to hold bottom soil due to wild horses running on public domain. The last big roundup for wild horses was in the 1920s. For a good horse, you could get thirty dollars.

Pfingsten grew up in Bonito Valley, then went to college in Las Cruces in 1934 to 1938. Previously, he had hauled hay or any other item, or person, in a truck, and did not want to drive a truck all his life. He has lived and traveled largely in New Mexico, although he has traveled to Europe and elsewhere, influenced by the lifestyle of Gaylord A. Freeman, the Chicago banker for whom he worked.

Pfingsten speaks of his friend, Bob Janz, who also worked for rich ranchers. At sixty-five, Pfingsten retired, but was called back and worked for the Freeman Ranch until 1979 when he moved to his current home. Later, Pfingsten's son, Ralph, worked for the wealthy "Uranium King" Charles (he can't recall the last name) who had a big ranch at Hayden. Charles had two plants on the ranch where they made the solid fuel that sent the rocket to the moon. He briefly ran cattle on the 90,000 acres that he owned. The ranch was sold to McCullough Saw. Later, subdivided, the land housed 12,000 people on the subdivisions.

Through his son, Ralph, Pfingsten then helped another wealthy rancher who owned "Cattle Fax." He worked awhile in Denver on Battle Mountain, the Thornton Ranch, a big outfit. Pfingsten helped Thornton fill his feedlots with Brangus bulls for breeding.

Pfingsten says the one of his own problems with running a medium sized ranch is trying to abide by all the regulations of the Forest Service and the Environmental Protection Agency. If you have an endangered species or plant on private land, they can make you fence it off from grazing. New Mexico has thirty-six endangered plants. Also, the Fish and Wildlife Department close drainages because of an endangered minnow. Sometimes the Forest Service will decide that the country's overgrazed when it's elk doing the grazing.

Pfingsten was on the Lincoln County Board of the Farm Service Administration for thirty-five years. The FSA helped, rather than hindered, the "fellow that was on the marginal ranch" to keep producing. Now, the organizations help the big guy, not the little one, Pfingsten says.

Describing the New Mexico area in which he's lived and worked, he comments that "along the side of this Capitan Mountains here where the G BAR F Ranch is, is some of the best cow country in the . . . state . . ." He extends that analogy to Fort Stanton country. The grazing and carrying capacity was high. He says that the urban sprawl will grind out the ranching business. He briefly mentions working for the Forest Service.

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

Pfingsten mentions the 1852 U.S. Cavalry vs. the Indians at Fort Stanton and the reservation cattle and horses, as well as the threat to Ft. Stanton. He mentions G.X. McSherry raising registered cattle. He elaborates, here, and earlier, on the details of laying pipeline. His ranching knowledge and the many people met are impressive.