



**ORAL HISTORY PROGRAM
INTERVIEW ABSTRACT**

CONSULTANT: Ernesto Carrejo

DATE OF BIRTH: February 17, 1925 GENDER: Male

DATE(S) OF INTERVIEW: September 18, 2001

LOCATION OF INTERVIEW: Datil Community Center, Datil, N.M.

INTERVIEWER: Carol Pittman

SOURCE OF INTERVIEW: NMF&RHM ☒ HSR ☐ OTHER ☐

TRANSCRIBED: Yes: May 7, 2002

NUMBER OF TAPES: One

ABTRACTOR: Sandra Lantz

DATE ABSTRACTED: May 5, 2005

RECORDING QUALITY (SPECIFY): Good

SCOPE AND CONTENT NOTE: Ranch life in Catron County, New Mexico. Also service in World War II.

DATE RANGE: 1925 to present

ABSTRACT (IMPORTANT TOPICS IN ORDER OF APPEARANCE):

TAPE ONE, SIDE A:

Ernesto Carrejo was born on February 17, 1925, on Jewett Gap Ranch in the Datil and Reserve area of Catron County, New Mexico. (At first, the consultant identifies his birthplace less specifically as Aragon, Catron County, New Mexico.) He now lives in Quemado, New Mexico, leaving the ranch when his “horses got too old to ride”, and he gave the ranch to his six daughters. Nettie and Carlton are buying the ranch from the rest. They run the store and are outfitters to elk hunters.

The consultant’s grandmother was Irish, with the family name of Whiskers (pronounced Why-skers). His father’s family was from Madrid, Spain. While he was growing up, one of his grandmothers spoke English and one spoke Spanish, so the grandchildren learned both languages.

In World War II Carrejo joined the Navy and served in the South Pacific, although he was not required to join because the family ranch was providing beef in wartime. There were eleven children — six girls and five boys in the family. He did not qualify for sea duty because of colorblindness, so he was sent on special assignment to Hawaii for training in what was called the military government. He worked with civilians after learning Japanese, then worked in the Philippine Islands.

Carrejo left the service as a chief petty officer, but to earn enough points for discharge he was assigned to an aircraft carrier that went to the east coast of Canada via the Panama Canal.

He returned to New Mexico after the war and ranched, then worked twenty-two years with the Forest Service while ranching. He raised cattle, although his father raised both sheep and cattle. Herders were used for the sheep, fences for the cattle. Two of the herders were Basque. Carrejo said cattle and sheep paid about the same, but with sheep you have both wool and lambs to market, so sheep are more profitable than cattle. Sheep, though, are harder to maintain because of predators like coyotes. If you scare a sheep, it will “fall over dead,” he said. Rambouillet sheep were raised.

Asked what happened to all the herders, Carrejo said that in those days life expectancy was only about forty-five, fifty years. He agreed that the hard life of a sheepherder could have contributed to that, plus lack of medication like there is today.

Carrejo went to St. Michael’s parochial school in Santa Fe and did not finish school before volunteering for service in World War II. After the service he studied electrical engineering in Chicago. He returned to New Mexico before his training ended, then later attended New Mexico State University (then New Mexico Agriculture and Mechanics College) for two years.

In the area where he was raised, there were several one-room schools, which have consolidated now.

His mother cooked on a woodstove, then on a carbide stove. Asked how his mother cooked for eleven children every day, he said the children had to work. The children made the morning coffee and took it to their parents in bed. He said their parents were strict with the children.

Herding sheep was one of the children’s tasks. When “sophisticated, pretty girls” drove by when the children were herding by the road, they would hide because they did not want to be seen herding sheep.

Carrejo said his father bought a large hotel at the stagecoach stop; the hotel was the family home. It was discontinued when trucks came in, but while there were there the Carrejos were the only family in the community who had running water. It came from a storage tank. The hotel was built of adobe and rock. The building was torn down. After Mr. Carrejo married, he and his family lived in an adobe, which was built by family and friends.

Asked what he thought was the future of his area of Western New Mexico, the consultant said a lot of people were coming in from out of state to buy expensive land. He said the newcomers who buy ten acres think they will make their living off the land. Actually, the acreage is too limited for a calf, and the growing season and water is limited for a garden.

Recreation in that area and in the United States brings revenue. He named national parks and game hunting as examples of recreation. Elk bring in a lot of money, more so than cattle, he said, so the Forest Service is cutting its cattle permits to allow elk to be in there. Dude ranches are things of the past. Only one outfit, in Red Hill, operates as a dude ranch and its business is down.

While the consultant was with the Forest Service he worked with recreation, timber, and fires. He was the fire control officer for his district in Western New Mexico, and traveled to fires in western states like Washington, California, and Montana. Many of the firefighters on the salaried organized crews were Indians, who also worked cleaning the timber and cleaning roads.

TAPE ONE, SIDE B:

Carrejo was about fifteen years old when he went into St. Michael's in Santa Fe. When he was younger he attended a small school at Horse Springs.

Five of the Carrejo boys, including the consultant, were in the service in World War II and Korea. All returned. Their parents, sisters, and hired hands ran the ranch while they were away. While in World War II, Mr. Carrejo was slightly wounded near Okinawa and was within 100 miles of Hiroshima and Nagasaki when the atomic bombs were dropped. He was on the transport ship, *USS Alpine 92*. The *New Mexico* battlewagon was hit in that area.