



ORAL HISTORY PROGRAM
INTERVIEW ABSTRACT

CONSULTANT: Barbara Funkhouser

DATE OF BIRTH: March 1, 1930 SEX: Female

DATE(S) OF INTERVIEW: July 17, 1996

LOCATION OF INTERVIEW: Funkhouser residence, Fairacres, New Mexico

INTERVIEWER: Jane O'Cain

SOURCE OF INTERVIEW: NMF&RHM X OTHER

TRANSCRIBED: Yes: May 7, 1997

NUMBER OF TAPES: Two

ABTRACTOR: Jane O'Cain

DATE ABSTRATED: October 4, 2000

QUALITY OF RECORDING (SPECIFY): Good

SCOPE AND CONTENT NOTE: Briefly details childhood on a farm near Fairacres, New Mexico. The consultant's father died in 1936 and her mother continued to operate the farm with the help of hired labor. Discusses career as a journalist. The major portion of the interview details the founding of the New Mexico Farm and Ranch Heritage Museum (NMFRHM).

DATE RANGE: 1924-1996

ABSTRACT (IMPORTANT TOPICS IN ORDER OF APPEARANCE):

TAPE ONE, SIDE A:

The consultant has “been attending meetings” with the New Mexico Farm and Ranch Heritage Foundation [NMFRHF] since 1983.

Funkhouser was born March 1, 1930, at the Hotel Dieu in El Paso. (Her brother was born at home in 1925.) Her parents moved to the farm where she currently resides in 1924.

She grew up on a farm near Fairacres, New Mexico; principal crops raised were cotton and alfalfa, but some vegetables were also grown. Funkhouser’s father died when she was six years old, in 1936. Her mother operated the farm with the help of hired labor. They had “families” living on the farm and later hired Mexican national workers through the Bracero program. During World War II her mother utilized German prisoners of war: “They weren’t very good cotton pickers, but they tried.” They had two “labor houses” on the farm, but also hired additional labor during the cotton harvest.

The consultant attended public school in Las Cruces and graduated from Las Cruces Union High School. She graduated from New Mexico State University in 1952 with a degree in English, although her area of study was journalism. After graduation she spent six months in Europe on a 4-H Club exchange program, and then worked for five years for the 4-H organization in Washington, D. C., and Chicago. She returned to New Mexico in 1958 and free-lanced as a journalist for a year, then worked for a Las Cruces paper for a year before being hired at the *El Paso Times*, where she eventually became the editor of the *Times*. Funkhouser retired in 1990.

She describes some of her impressions of Belgium, where she stayed as a foreign exchange student seven years after World War II had ended. She relates some of the misconceptions international students had about New Mexico during the time she worked for the 4-H program in Washington, D.C.

The consultant briefly discusses some of the border issues she covered while working as a reporter in El Paso; she is particularly concerned about education and ensuring that all children have educational opportunities.

Interview at this point focuses on the founding of the New Mexico Farm and Ranch Heritage Museum (NMFRHM).

TAPE ONE, SIDE B:

Funkhouser describes the NMFRHM as “Bill Stephen’s dream . . . his vision and he’d been working on it for years.” She became concerned because she observed that many historical artifacts and documents were being collected by people outside of El Paso and New Mexico. The consultant then observed, “I also felt strongly, and feel strongly today, that the ranching and farming in the early days as we knew it is disappearing.”

She describes the early board of the NMFRHF as the “most interesting board that I ever served on . . . because it drew such a diversity of people.” The consultant states that it “took awhile” for the board members to discover “how to talk to each other” and be “comfortable with each other.”

Funkhouser believes that a turning point in the Museum's development was when they finally agreed on the site for the Museum, which was an eleven-acre plot off University Avenue near New Mexico State University's (NMSU) golf course. Prior to that decision, other sites under discussion included Albuquerque, Moriarity, and Lincoln. She has always wanted the NMFRHM in Las Cruces because of the proximity to NMSU.

The consultant states that Dr. Stephens and then President of NMSU, Gerald Thomas, wanted the NMFRHM to be located in the old cotton ginning laboratory on the campus of NMSU; however, "the College of Agriculture, I understand, said they had other plans for that property."

She describes the difficulty in raising funds from private sources for the NMFRHM: "people had talked a lot about giving money, uh, but none had much been given." She recalled writing Dr. Stephens a check one day because they "didn't have any money." Funkhouser states that President Halligan did not want the NMFRHM in the budget of NMSU, and he was the one "who broached the idea of putting it in the Office of Cultural Affairs." Eventually the board received a grant to conduct a feasibility study, and she credits G. X. McSherry in his work in getting the bill to found the NMFRHM through the legislature. "Everybody was a surprised as they could be . . ." by the amount of money that was appropriated to build the museum building.

The consultant describes plans for the NMFRHM, one of which was rapidly put together to meet a legislative requirement.

At the time the decision was made to place the NMFRHM under the Office of Cultural Affairs there was "discussion about the role of the foundation and . . . considerable discussion about who would, uh, be in charge of the foundation finances . . ."

Funkhouser describes the efforts of the consulting firm that was hired to advise on fund raising for the NMFRHF. She stated that she met with the fund raising consultant, who was attempting to determine "the degree of financial support" she was willing to give, and also asked her whether she would contact a "certain number of other people." The fund raising consultant reported back to the board that the NMFRHM, "would be a success financially and that it would be feasible." Eventually; however, "Gerald Thomas and Bill Stephens dumped him, uh, because it wasn't working." She states that she was never given the names of other people to contact.

TAPE TWO, SIDE A:

The consultant states that people came to their work on the NMFRHF with their own "agendas"; however, they "cared a lot" and traveled at their own expense.

She describes the difficulties in choosing a logo for the NMFRHF, which she considered "a waste of time" and something that a "committee" might have handled. However, she states that the board was comprised of "individuals [that] have their own, very firm ideas."

Funkhouser states that she has two priorities for the NMFRHM, one is preservation of artifacts and the second is to "show the impact that New Mexico State [University] has had." She describes some of the changes in agriculture in her lifetime that have been impacted by agricultural research.

She reiterates the contribution made by Dr. Bill Stephens, Dr. Gerald Thomas, Dr. James Halligan, and G. X. McSherry to the founding of the NMFRHM.

The consultant describes the difficulty the board had in agreeing to a name for the proposed museum.

Funkhouser relates that G. X. McSherry told her that Dr. Stephens was very important to him in working with the New Mexico State Legislature. Dr. Stephens was experienced in the legislative process due to his many years as a lobbyist [during his tenure as New Mexico's Secretary of Agriculture].

She states that serving on the board was a rewarding experience for her personally.

The consultant describes how she feels the NMFHRM might be able to attract tourists and return visitors. Return visitors include local tours of school children and residents of retirement homes. She also believes that the NMFHRM should promote and publicize itself through NMSU.

Linda Harris, a local author, interviewed her mother and several other longtime area residents for a book.

TAPE TWO, SIDE B: Blank