



ORAL HISTORY PROGRAM
INTERVIEW ABSTRACT

CONSULTANT: John E. Wright

DATE OF BIRTH: 1914 GENDER: Male

DATE(S) OF INTERVIEW: March 12, 2002

LOCATION OF INTERVIEW: Wright home in Belen NM

INTERVIEWER: Carol Pittman

SOURCE OF INTERVIEW: NMF&RHM OTHER _____

TRANSCRIBED: Yes: June 30, 2002

NUMBER OF TAPES: One

ABTRACTOR: Bob Cogswell

DATE ABSTRACTED: June 22, 2005

RECORDING QUALITY (SPECIFY): Good

SCOPE AND CONTENT NOTE: Rural life in Mountainair, New Mexico

DATE RANGE: 1916-2002

ABSTRACT (IMPORTANT TOPICS IN ORDER OF APPEARANCE):

TAPE ONE, SIDE A:

The discussion begins with John's early years down in Pearce, Mexico, which is close to Chihuahua City. John was about two years old at the time and remembers very little. His father was killed during the raid by Pancho Villa's forces, and his mother was kidnapped. The Mexican authorities took the ranch away from the family.

After John and his mother were reunited in Columbus, N.M., they moved to Safford, Arizona. A few years later, his mother remarried and the family migrated to Mountainair around 1918. John was about four years old. They remained in Mountainair for seven years before going to Gallup in 1925. The family returned to Mountainair in 1930.

The discussion moves to Springerville, Arizona, where a bunch of paintings done by Bob Lee, a descendant of Oliver Lee from the Alamogordo, are located. Max Keeney owns a motel in Springerville where the Lee paintings are displayed.

The discussion returns to John's ranch, north of Mountainair, adjoining Forest Service land. It was acquired in 1965 or 1966 through a trade for his property in Clovis. He went to Clovis in 1948 and stayed until 1986, when he returned to Mountainair.

Discussion backtracks to 1931 when John left the family home to go west to Williams, Arizona. He worked various jobs from rodent control for the government to logging. He met and married his wife in Phoenix, Arizona.

In 1948 he and his family moved to Clovis. He later acquired and ran his own motel business until 1965 when he acquired his ranch. He lived in Clovis until 1986, when he returned to Mountainair. He retired in 1979. John is unable to say exactly how his mother and father got the ranch in Mexico. All he would say is that it was dangerous, but you could get land. When asked about buying it, Johnnie merely laughs.

John explains that the Mountainair area used to be farm country. Ranches did not come until as he puts it, "the dry spell" around 1945. His parents grew beans on the farm in this area, but now the area is all ranch land. The Cane Ranch began with a sheep rancher who bought farmland in the area, eventually acquiring about 800 sections. He then put cattle on the land. Later, he died, and his son attempted to run the ranch and was unsuccessful. The ranch wound up in litigation and was eventually lost.

John still owns a five hundred acre ranch he acquired in 1965 near Mountainair. He has about fifteen head of cattle, which his neighbor tends to for him. While still living in Clovis, he would go up and work on it from time to time.

TAPE ONE, SIDE B:

Time frame here is about 1918-1925 in Mountainair, N.M. With the absence of refrigeration, meat was cured to preserve it. Other perishables were hung in the air in wet gunnysacks. His mother raised chickens so there was an ample supply of both eggs and chicken, which the family ate. While corn and cane (sweet feed for livestock) were grown, there was no garden since the family didn't have a yard. Most of the people in the area were farmers and ranchers. No one had more than five or six cows at most. Feed for cows was a mixture of shucked corn and cane.

Wood was the fuel used for cooking and heating. John was the oldest of the six boys in the family. A large family was needed to help with the workload. John's life revolved around school and chores. There were only one-room schools up to the eighth grade. John started going to school at age ten and walked a mile to and from school because transportation was not available. In the one-room schools, there were about fifteen students in all. This small school system was abandoned in 1924, and the Consolidated School system was created in Ewing County, New Mexico. John recalls the school bus as being a Dodge pickup with a canvas over the back. John lived in several places around Mountainair while growing up.

In 1925 the family moved to Gallup. His stepfather got a job building a road across the Navajo Reservation in Shiprock. He briefly discusses Indian relations, specifically with the Navajo, in the 1920s. Relations were generally good.

John raised his family in the Clovis area. All but one of his sons were born and raised in Clovis. He ran his own motel business in the Clovis area from 1967 to 1979, when he retired. He moved to Mountainair in 1986. John has a small ranch located twenty miles north of Mountainair, but has never lived there.