

**NEW MEXICO
FARM & RANCH
HERITAGE
MUSEUM**

**ORAL HISTORY PROGRAM
INTERVIEW ABSTRACT**

CONSULTANT: Robert Cox

DATE OF BIRTH: February 12, 1922 SEX: Male

DATE(S) OF INTERVIEW: February 9, 1996

LOCATION OF INTERVIEW: San Augustine Ranch, Organ, New Mexico

INTERVIEWER: Jane Loy O'Cain

SOURCE OF INTERVIEW: NMF&RHM OTHER

TRANSCRIBED: Yes: August 6, 1996

NUMBER OF TAPES: Two

ABTRACTOR: Sylvia Wheeler

DATE ABSTRATED: March 30, 2001

QUALITY OF RECORDING (SPECIFY): Good

SCOPE AND CONTENT NOTE: A founder of The New Mexico Farm and Heritage Museum and his background.

DATE RANGE: 1922-1996

ABSTRACT (IMPORTANT TOPICS IN ORDER OF APPEARANCE):

TAPE ONE:

Mr. Robert Coffelt Cox's mother was born in Deming and was raised on a ranch near Kingston. His father owned the San Augustine Ranch. His parents married in 1917.

At the time of the interview, Mr. Cox is the Chairman of the Museum Board and has been a little less than a year; the term is limited to a year until the governor appoints a new board.

He went to college at Texas A&M and majored in animal husbandry. He joined the military in 1941. Following his military service, he purchased a ranch in Sierra County that he owned and operated for thirty years. Later, he took over the San Augustine Ranch from his father.

He has been active in the state Cattle Grower's Association for some time. He also belongs to another small group, the Southwest Grazing Association, which also is a support group for ranchers. Being active in the Museum is another way in which Cox hopes to create an educational place for the young to learn about the rural heritage, especially now that so few (two or three percent) people feed and clothe so many.

Cox recalls the tremendous labor of the immigrants crossing over the Rocky Mountains and the to get here, then breaking the sod, clearing the land, and the difficulties of getting water. He mentions that many times rocks were used for fences, due to the lack of other resources.

He first heard of the idea of a farm and ranch museum in 1987 through Gerald Thomas, then President of New Mexico State University (hereafter NMSU) who wanted the museum to be, in part, a repository for regional artifacts. About 150 people attended the first meeting. From that meeting the nucleus of the Foundation Board was formed. Bill Stephens was named the first Executive Secretary of the Farm and Ranch Heritage Institute, as it was then called. (Since Edson Way became the director many Museum concepts have been energetically developed.) Bill McIlhaney was the first president of the Foundation Board and appointed the various committees. Cox's job was to fund raise in all of southwestern New Mexico. Before the state legislature passed the legislation founding the Museum, it was difficult working through the government, the legislature. "It's never a good time to raise money," he says. And, because no building had been erected, corporations were loath to give money.

Cox feels that a lot of money was wasted on consultants that could have been better spent, but state law required that certain surveys, etc. be completed. Matching funds also had to be raised to meet terms established by the legislature. An architectural study of some of the historic farms and ranches in New Mexico was done.

TAPE TWO:

The consultant says that Dr. Stephens worked to get the Museum located in Las Cruces. NMSU didn't want it on their land because they realized that it was not going to be a University project. "We had to borrow some money to operate our Foundation Board, and individual's had to sign notes . . . Governor Carruthers then put it under the Office of Cultural Affairs. I . . . learned to have a lot of respect for Helmuth Naumer. He knew his business. He said, 'You'll do well if you have it [the Museum] in ten years.'"

Another problem was encountered in hiring the architect for the Museum—in the bid process and subsequent threats of lawsuits. Felicia Thal, "through her efforts . . . got this thing resolved."

When Governor Johnson was elected he also supported the Museum concept, and the completion of the Museum building. “ Ed Way came and got a thirty year lease on the land for a dollar a year on Dripping Springs Road.”

Cox feels that the Foundation and the Museum Boards get along well. Reference is made to the struggle over the kind of logo the Museum should have concerning the two interests represented, “farming” and “ranching.”

Cox speaks of strong Foundation people and mentions Barbara Funkhouser, Gerald Thomas for initiating the idea, Lana Dickson, and Bill Stephens.

Cox is pleased with the outcome of their plans for the Museum; now what remains is “ironing out the wrinkles.” “There will always be a struggle, competition for funds. I would like to see the Museum get the footing where it doesn’t need state money, although Naumer says museums never pay their own way.”