

**NEW MEXICO
FARM & RANCH
HERITAGE
MUSEUM**

**ORAL HISTORY PROGRAM
INTERVIEW ABSTRACT**

CONSULTANT: William Bronson Lujan

DATE OF BIRTH: May 17, 1925 GENDER: Male

DATE(S) OF INTERVIEW: November 9, November 15, 1999

LOCATION OF INTERVIEW: New Mexico Farm & Ranch Heritage Museum

INTERVIEWER: Jose Gomez

SOURCE OF INTERVIEW: NMF&RHM__X__OTHER_____

TRANSCRIBED: Yes: March 14, 2000

NUMBER OF TAPES: Three

ABTRACTOR: Caroline Palmer

DATE ABSTRATED: June 27, 2000

QUALITY OF RECORDING (SPECIFY): Good

SCOPE AND CONTENT NOTE: Cattle and sheep ranching in the Clayton, New Mexico area. Owning and operating a mercantile in Des Moines, New Mexico. Commentary on the Hispanic culture of northern New Mexico.

DATE RANGE: 1897 -1998

ABSTRACT (IMPORTANT TOPICS IN ORDER OF APPEARANCE):

TAPE ONE, SIDE A:

Family genealogy: The consultant's mother (French) was adopted by Juan and Juanita Martinez; his father and uncles were brought to the Taos/Mora area by their parents probably from California. His father and mother married just before World War I. They homesteaded one section (640 acres) in 1920 near Clayton, NM. His father served as county assessor. Bill had two brothers, now deceased. Bill ranched three thousand acres there, raising cattle and sheep. He sold the ranch in 1988.

Bill's great grandfather, Rumaldo Martinez, first ranched in the area; then his son, Juan, Bill's grandfather, owned the ranch and operated a mercantile in Des Moines. Although his parents were raised speaking Spanish, his parents didn't speak Spanish to Bill and his brothers, so they learned it from the hired help from Spain. A general discussion followed concerning the differences in language and culture between northern and southern New Mexico.

Bill's father was named comptroller of the State of New Mexico, so the family moved to Santa Fe. Bill attended first grade at St. Michael's School, then grade school and high school in Des Moines, and one semester at New Mexico State University in Las Cruces. Bill discussed dry land farming and severe weather. Bill loved his childhood ranching and farming.

TAPE ONE, SIDE B:

Bill Lujan loved to be on the ranch. He was never bored, there was always work to do. He helped his grandfather milk cows at 4:00 am and 4:00 pm, feed hogs and orphan lambs and butchered hogs and beef. On the ranch the family had radios powered by 32-volt, wet-cell batteries, and later had wind-chargers. During the Depression Bill's parents attended two of Roosevelt's inaugurations, and took plenty of cash with them because checks couldn't be cashed.

Bill was named Bronson (his middle name) for Senator Bronson Cutting of New Mexico, a special family friend.

Right after high school in 1943 at age eighteen, Bill was drafted for World War II. He was sent to Oregon where he went into the army infantry at Camp Adair. From there he was shipped to the island of New Caledonia, as infantry replacement. Bill had learned typing and shorthand in high school in Des Moines, so when the Air Transport Command was set up in Australia and needed people with secretarial skills, Bill was sent there to a desk job. Later Bill was sent to New Guinea, then to the Philippines where there was still fighting; however, his was a non-combat outfit. After the Japanese were pushed out of Manila, Bill's outfit finally went in. Bill was in Manila when the Japanese signed the armistice, and Bill has pictures of it.

By statute there was only one African-American family could reside in Clayton, and his family and this family were friends. The first time Bill was around any number of African-Americans was on the troop ship returning to the United States.

Bill's cousin survived the Bataan Death March, and Bill's Air Transport Command brought the Bataan survivors back to the Philippines, then shipped them to the United States.

TAPE TWO, SIDE A:

Bill describes his mother's coming to New Mexico on an orphan train. His paternal grandfather and great uncles owned sheep and cattle ranches near Mexoma, Oklahoma. Bill's father homesteaded a section (640 acres) in 1920 near Clayton, New Mexico, where his grandfather owned a mercantile. Bill recalled first grade at St. Michael's School in Santa Fe. Although Bill's parents spoke Spanish, they always spoke English at home. Bill learned Spanish from three Spaniards who worked on his father's and grandfather's ranches. In the 1920s and 1930s there were no Mexicans working on the ranches in that area of the state. Bill did everything on the ranch, and Bill describes the nature of the work.

From the second grade through graduation, Bill attended school in Des Moines and rode the school "bus" (an old covered pickup). Lunch was served to the students every day.

After Bill's marriage in Las Cruces, he moved back to Des Moines, owned and operated a mercantile, drove the school bus and the mail truck.

Bill described how his mother helped Dr. Steele during the flu epidemic, and how the doctor made house calls with his horse and buggy.

The family attended church in Folsom. When the railroad stopped running through Folsom, Bill's father bought the depot and some railroad property. He cut the depot in half, took one half to the ranch for a barn and moved the other half to property near the center of town and renovated it for the church in Folsom. The priest lived in Clayton and only traveled to Folsom to give mass. Bill described how his father was always helping the community. He was instrumental in getting electricity and telephones. Starting in 1932 his mother served as postmistress for more than thirty years in Des Moines.

Bill described difficult winter weather, snow and blizzards, and discusses one devastating blizzard during which his father struggled to save what sheep he could, and the postmaster froze to death standing up.

Bill recalled how even as a five-year-old child, his mother was made to work like an adult.

Bill was discharged from the army in 1946.

Bill's mother and father weren't too close with their own families but the immediate family was very close and participated together in church activities.

TAPE TWO, SIDE B:

Bill described how all the ranchers and farmers helped each other with branding, slaughtering, and harvesting. Although it is displayed in the patio of the Museum, Bill no longer has his own brand. Bill's daughter re-registered Bill's father's brand and she owns it.

In the spring of 1946 when Bill was discharged from the Army, he came back to El Paso and joined his father's cousin for a six-week trip into Mexico. Returning from the Mexico trip, they stopped in La Union to see relatives, and Bill met his wife, Otelia Guarderrama, whose family farmed cotton. Otelia Guarderrama's ancestors were Moors from Spain.

Bill discussed the people of many ethnic and religious backgrounds that he met in the army, and has since met here in New Mexico.

After the Mexico trip, Bill went to South Dakota to work on a ranch, but ended up only cutting hay, which he didn't like. After two or three months, Bill called his uncle in Alameda, California, who worked in the shipyards. Bill joined his uncle working at the Matson Line shipyards; re-converting troop ships back to luxury liners.

Bill went home for Christmas 1947 and then early in 1948 attended one semester of college here at New Mexico State University, then leased his father's ranch and in 1949 bought four hundred head of sheep. In 1950 he married Otelia, who moved to the ranch near Des Moines. They had four children in twenty-one months, and were very poor. In 1955 they realized they couldn't make a living ranching, so moved back to Las Cruces. After they moved back to Las Cruces they had two more children.

Bill briefly recounts the lives of his two brothers.

Bill worked at White Sands Missile Range, then at White's Store, an automotive store, until 1964.

Then the family moved back to Des Moines, purchased and operated the mercantile and drove the school bus and mail truck. He and his family were there for five years, but still couldn't earn a living, so moved back to Las Cruces in 1969. It seemed to Bill that because he had left and come back, the continuous residents did not trust him, so didn't buy at his store. All of his children graduated from New Mexico State University, and Bill described the lives of his children.

TAPE THREE, SIDE A:

Mr. Lujan describes how his mother and father worked hard to maintain the ranch and to feed themselves, the children, and the hired hands. The consultant discussed the problems moving back to Des Moines, owning the mercantile, and being mistrusted by many of the one hundred fifty residents. He described how going back home isn't the same.

In 1969 Mr. Lujan and his family returned to Las Cruces. In 1988 Mr. Lujan sold the ranch because he wasn't able to maintain it properly.

Mr. Lujan enjoys living in Las Cruces and has many friends here. He believes that people are the funniest animal there is, and volunteering at this Museum he learns something new and interesting all the time.

Mr. Lujan relates how his wife remembers the German prisoner of war camp in Las Cruces. The prisoners picked cotton and worked at Stahmann Farms. There was also an Italian POW camp here.

Mr. Lujan discusses life with his wife's large family.

The consultant recalls that as a child he and his grandfather would drive the wagon to Des Moines to sell milk. Their cream was transported by rail to Trinidad where butter and cheese were made. Then they would return to the ranch with a wagonload of groceries. The family would also trade butter and eggs for the other groceries they needed.

Mr. Lujan recalled that the first telephone lines were strung on the barbed wire fences.

Mr. Lujan describes his activities in Las Cruces with the Optimist Club and with the Junior Chamber of Commerce and particularly decorating downtown for Christmas.

Because Mr. Lujan learned to speak Spanish from the Spaniards, his accent was different than the Spanish speakers of Las Cruces, so he had a hard time being accepted. Finally the consultant reflected on his years living in Las Cruces, politicians he knew through his father, and the fiestas in Santa Fe.