

**NEW MEXICO
FARM & RANCH
HERITAGE
MUSEUM**

ORAL HISTORY PROGRAM

INTERVIEW ABSTRACT

CONSULTANT: Johnny Bean

DATE OF BIRTH: August 28, 1918 GENDER: Male

DATE(S) OF INTERVIEW: July 14, 2009

LOCATION OF INTERVIEW: New Mexico Farm & Ranch Heritage Museum

INTERVIEWER: Holly Radke

SOURCE OF INTERVIEW: NMFRHM

TRANSCRIBED: October 6, 2011

NUMBER OF TAPES: Two

ABTRACTOR: Donna M. Wojcik

DATE ABSTRACTED: July 23, 2009

RECORDING QUALITY (SPECIFY): Good

SCOPE AND CONTENT NOTE: The consultant discusses his WWII experiences and growing up during the Great Depression. He also discusses his work with race track horses, the tack shop at the racetrack, saddle making, and his farm in El Paso, Tex.

DATE RANGE: 1918-2009

ABSTRACT (IMPORTANT TOPICS IN ORDER OF APPEARANCE):

TAPE ONE, SIDE A:

Bean begins with a discussion about his farm in El Paso, Tex., which his son now runs. Family tragedies are briefly discussed, as is the brand block program at the Museum. The interviewer, Holly Radke, discusses the Museum's responsibility of preserving artifacts.

Bean discusses his parents. He is a "Depression baby," having grown up during the Great Depression. He currently runs a "horse hotel" in El Paso.

Bean describes the recycling of horses, a common practice in past years, and says that the whole horse was used for something. Bean was born in Searcy, Ark., a typical country town. Everyone had a garden and shared excess produce with others in the community. No one had money in those days. He recalls that typical wages were one dollar per day. His family farmed cotton, which was worth only about five cents a pound.

Bean joined the Army and was located at Fort Bliss, Tex. He was assigned to the 1st Cavalry unit and says that he had "the best job in the world" because he did nothing but ride horses all day. He spent some time in Louisiana before he was shipped overseas. He was stationed on the *Jose Navarra* and recalls that the ship was sunk in the Indian Ocean.

Bean quit school in the seventh grade and ran away from home twice. The second time he stayed with an uncle who owned a store, made corn whiskey, and taught him to gamble. He tells a story of how he thinks that his uncle told him that if the police came around he should give them a sack. Apparently the uncle was paying off the police. Bean says that he left home because he was not needed and his family could not support everyone. Politics and the dependency of Americans on welfare are discussed.

After he was discharged from the military, he chose to return to El Paso. He briefly discusses changes in land values.

TAPE ONE, SIDE B:

Bean begins a discussion about Bluemel's Saddle Shop in El Paso. He recalls that he first saw James Morris when Morris was working for Bluemel. Bean saw that Morris had a water canteen on his work bench even though he was stationed near a water fountain. [Editor's note: In a separate interview Morris explained this.] Morris did repairs and made some [horse] blinkers for Bean.

When Bean retired from the saddle business, he gave his shop and tools to Morris. At Morris' shop in Caballo, N.M., he has a room dedicated to Johnny Bean. Bean says he wanted to keep all his equipment together. Bean says that they make at least some of their tools. He used his G. I. Bill of Rights money to apprentice for S. D. Myres. He says that he was drawn to saddle making and working with leather as a child.

Bean discusses some of the people he has worked for and the different jobs he has done. He explains how he got involved in the racetrack business. He was the first person to gallop a horse on the Sunland Park track, which was just dirt at the time and had not been completed. He opened a shop at the racetrack and sold everything that the jockeys needed.

He briefly discusses the use of Ritalin to make horses run, which is now illegal. He discusses the loss of his first wife to polio.

TAPE TWO, SIDE A:

Bean met his second wife, a pottery artist in El Paso. Bean talks about leather production, supplies, and costs.

Bean had competition when he had his tack shop at the racetrack, but it did not affect him very much.

The wages for several jobs at the racetrack are discussed, including trainers and track help. Bean got exercise saddles from saddle maker Bob Ross. He discusses horsehair work done by inmates of the Montana State Prison, and he contends it is an art to work with horsehair.

Bean discusses his farm, which began as boarding stables for several race horses. At one time he also had an animal hospital.

TAPE TWO, SIDE B:

Bean learned so much about racing because he lived at the track and was not afraid to talk to everyone. His son now runs the farm. He discusses his death and arrangements he has made for that time.

Bean says that the strangest job he ever did as a saddle maker was the chaps that he made for the El Paso Sheriff Posse. James Morris states that the best qualities of Bean's saddles are that they were made with good quality leather, and that they were heavy.

There is a brief discussion of the Hubbard Museum. When asked if the way of life he experienced is still possible, Bean says that "everything is changing." There is no individual responsibility for debt, marriages fail, and financial ruin abounds.

Bean gets upset with himself because of his limitations but tries to do something every day. "There are some things I wouldn't do again, but a lot of things I'd do two or three times," he says. "I've had good friends." At the age of 91, he still drives but restricts it to daytime hours only.