



ORAL HISTORY PROGRAM

INTERVIEW ABSTRACT

CONSULTANT: Darrell Hawkins

DATE OF BIRTH: August 19, 1928 GENDER: Male

DATE(S) OF INTERVIEW: September 29, 2010

LOCATION OF INTERVIEW: New Mexico Farm & Ranch Heritage Museum

INTERVIEWER: Donna M. Wojcik

SOURCE OF INTERVIEW: NMFRHM

TRANSCRIBED: No

NUMBER OF TAPES: Three

ABTRACTOR: Donna M. Wojcik

DATE ABSTRACTED: October 7, 2010

RECORDING QUALITY (SPECIFY): Good

SCOPE AND CONTENT NOTE: Hawkins describes his career as a cowboy, his years spent with the circus, and the arts of trick roping and whip cracking.

DATE RANGE: 1928-2010

ABSTRACT (IMPORTANT TOPICS IN ORDER OF APPEARANCE):

TAPE ONE, SIDE A:

Family history is discussed as well as Hawkins introduction to the circus as a child when he worked at the Bud E. Anderson Circus' winter quarters, where he learned how to trick rope. He describes his childhood years in Emporia, Kan., and the various jobs he had working the wheat harvest prior to his graduation from school in 1947.

While working at the U Bar Ranch in Pueblo, Col., he was told that it was wild in New Mexico. He went to work at the U Bar Ranch in Hachita, N.M. and spent the first few weeks helping the wind-miller, and shoeing horses while waiting for the roundup wagon to pull out. After he was laid off for the winter he worked on a smaller ranch in the Deming, N.M. area until he returned to the U Bar Ranch in the spring. He did a lot of drifting from place to place.

He discusses growing up in Kansas during the Great Depression, the dust storms of the 1930s, and recalls that his dad was only laid off from his job with the railroad for thirty days during the Depression. His paternal and maternal grandparents had ranches and homesteads just east of Emporia with both cattle and crops. Hawkins remembers several local merchants in town and that he worked at a leather-goods store learning how to mend harnesses. While their house had running water, it depended on rain to fill the cisterns. They did not have a well, and used the outhouse most of the time even though the house was plumbed for water. They did have electricity to the house.

Hawkins recalls that when he was 9 or 10 years old his dad was transferred to work at the Santa Fe Railroad yard in Argentine, Kan. Hawkins was told that if he did all the milking and took care of all the outside work at the family home then he would get a pony when he turned 11 years old. Hawkins learned how to cook, sew, mend socks, and even how to knit and says that it was a good experience.

He discusses his school years, graduating from Emporia Senior High School in 1947, and recalls that he just wanted to be done with school so he could go work cattle. The family ate well-rounded meals. Each child in the family had a birthday party only on their ninth birthday. He does not recall any borrowing of money or serious illnesses in the family. Doctors, trading work, and socials are briefly discussed.

TAPE ONE, SIDE B:

The family had newspaper and rural mail delivery, but did not have a television. His fondest memory of growing up on the farm/ranch was doing the physical work. Hawkins recalls that he spun rope in school for Future Farmers of America and at the senior class graduation assembly. At the sixty-year high school reunion he performed again "just to show them that I still could."

As a 13 year old Boy Scout he sold books door-to-door, and worked in the hay fields. In addition to working on ranches, he sheared sheep for small farms. His first real paying job was working for Trailways Transport in 1943.

His first job as a cowboy was at his uncle's ranch, where he gathered, dehorned, and branded cattle. Ranch owners never ask for qualifications, he says: "if you can't handle it you left." He briefly discusses the different types of horses used for roundup—the circle horse, evening horse, and night horse.

A cowboy's typical day begins with breakfast. The horses are then wrangled and saddled up before you leave for your area. You check your cattle and fences, search for strays, and check the water source and windmills. Larger ranches generally had a separate windmill crew. Hawkins recalls that one year while working on the Diamond A Ranch, they pulled out on September 15th and pulled back in to ranch headquarters on December 24th.

When asked what his best job was, cowboy or circus performer Hawkins says that at the time he liked being a cowboy but now misses the circus life more than anything. In 1957 he quit working as a cowboy, went to barber school and had a barbershop in Deming, N.M, although he still did some cowboying. He briefly discusses the relationship between cowboy and ranch owner, how problems between cowboys were settled, and how cowboys found out about jobs.

TAPE TWO, SIDE A:

Cowboys furnished their own gear. Hawkins carried his own horseshoeing equipment. Animal diseases and die-offs are discussed. Hawkins recalls the January 1948 snow storm and how the drifts were very high. Bunkhouse life, meals served on the trail, accidents, and entertainment are discussed.

New Mexico has a "fence out" law, meaning that a person is responsible to fence out any cattle that do not belong to you.

Hawkins does not know of any cowboys who were getting paid more than other cowboys working on the same ranch; the pay was the same regardless of what job was being done or how busy it was. He does not know of any calves being offered to cowboys on shares, nor any groups organized to regulate cowboy's wages.

True cowboys have a set of ethics that they follow. Deloris Hawkins describes her husband as a true cowboy. Hawkins agrees with the statement that cowboys undress upward and dress downward and says that cowboys have changed over the years. Cowboys in his time would never have worn a ball cap or short-sleeve shirt. He also says that life is a little easier for them now because they have television, radio, and electricity.

TAPE TWO, SIDE B:

The interview resumes with a discussion of circus life. In 1987 the Culpepper and Merriweather circus came to Deming. Hawkins was hired on with the intent of working for the rest of the season, but in 1988 he closed his barbershop and stayed with the circus for the next twenty years. He worked as a truck driver, ran concessions, and helped raise the tent. A month later the boss added him as a roping performer and electrician.

Hawkins also did a horseback and roping act for Wild West shows with Monty Montana. Hawkins says that he enjoyed circus life. He has won several awards for showmanship. "For just being an old cowboy I done pretty good," he says. He recalls that on September 11, 2001, he and Deloris were in Las Vegas to do a show, but they were the only performers that were able to get there. Hawkins did all his acts — whips, roping, rolo-bolo, and juggling, and "got a good write up about me, too."

He enjoys doing impromptu performances and smaller local events. He names the circuses he has worked with, the places he has traveled, and the people he worked with. Photographs are discussed, in particular a photo of him standing on his head and twirling a loop with his foot. The biggest loop he has ever done was with a sixty-two foot length of rope.

TAPE THREE, SIDE A:

Hawkins spent fifteen years with the circus, thirty years as a barber, and was a cowboy from age 14 until he was 28 years old. He also worked as an up range security guard on horseback for White Sands Missile Range, gathering wild horses for auction, mending fences, and keeping cattle out of the area during missile testing. He relates a story about a missile landing in front of him when he worked at the Winder Ranch east of Rincon.

Fondest memories are discussed. Hawkins says that if he had the chance for a “do over” he would do it just the same way. Deloris discusses how she got involved in the circus. Various people are discussed.

TAPE THREE, SIDE B: Blank