

NEW MEXICO
FARM & RANCH
HERITAGE
MUSEUM

ORAL HISTORY PROGRAM

INTERVIEW ABSTRACT

CONSULTANT: Maydelle Meier

DATE OF BIRTH: June 12, 1928 GENDER: Female

DATE(S) OF INTERVIEW: November 21, 2009

LOCATION OF INTERVIEW: Meier residence in Albuquerque, N.M.

INTERVIEWER: Ramona Caplan

SOURCE OF INTERVIEW: NMFRHM

TRANSCRIBED: May 23, 2012

NUMBER OF TAPES: One (90-minute tape)

ABTRACTOR: Donna M. Wojcik

DATE ABSTRACTED: January 6, 2010

RECORDING QUALITY (SPECIFY): Fair

SCOPE AND CONTENT NOTE: Meier discusses her work as a Victory Farm Volunteer in Portales, N.M., during World War II. Also briefly recounts work for the Red Cross doing recreational activities for American soldiers in the U.S. and for about five years overseas. Concludes with discussion of her teaching career and the operation of a small farm near Bosque Farms, N.M. for twenty years.

DATE RANGE: 1928-1944

ABSTRACT (IMPORTANT TOPICS IN ORDER OF APPEARANCE):

TAPE ONE, SIDE A:

Meier was born in Kansas City, MO, and adopted by her parents when she was three weeks old. She grew up in Oklahoma until she was twelve years old. They lived outside of Weatherford and had no running water, electricity, or other modern conveniences. When she was in the fourth grade her father moved to Portales, N.M., to start a Mobile Oil distributor business. Meier and her mother stayed behind in Oklahoma for two and a half years before moving to Portales. They arrived there in June 1940. Her father died in September of that same year.

Meier was a Victory Farm Volunteer when she was fourteen years old. She believed it was a school program and was unaware that it was a federal program operated on local levels through the Department of Agriculture. The school year had been adjusted to begin on August 1st and to close for the month of October to allow school children to help farmers bring their crops in. She recalls that twenty to thirty children were involved. The participants were to meet at a location for pickup at five o'clock in the morning. Farmers would pick the children up in trucks or trailers.

Victory Farm Volunteers picked a variety of crops for the farmers. Meier recalls that she pulled broom corn, picked tomatoes, dug sweet potatoes and windrowed peanuts. She was paid 25 cents per hour, but recalls that she once got paid 35 cents per hour for picking tomatoes. Work days were usually 8-10 hours long. She did not have to work every day, but says that it felt good to support the war effort. She was a Victory Farm Volunteer for about two years.

Meier worked in a drugstore in downtown Portales when she was in her teens. She recalls seeing German POWs being transported from the Ft. Sumner camp to work the fields in Portales. Townsfolk would go out to the streets to wave at them as they passed by. She recalls that her mother kept a Victory Garden in their back yard.

When asked if she knows of anyone in her family having encounters with Indians, she stated that she heard stories of a great uncle who had an encounter with Indians over a horse they had stolen from him; he was killed. Her mother got her start in teaching at age 15 when she served as a teacher's aide in an Indian school in Oklahoma. Most of Meier's relatives lived in Oklahoma, and she states that she and a cousin are the only remaining Smiths (nee) in their generation. After her father's death, his brother [her uncle] helped out Meier and her mother.

During the Dust Bowl years Meier recalls visiting a cousin in Oklahoma; the dirt was piled as high as the top of the barbed-wire fences. Ditches alongside the roads were also filled with dirt.

When she and her mother joined her father in Portales, her mother tried to get a teaching job, but did not have the necessary college degree to teach in New Mexico. Meier and her mother returned to Oklahoma during the summer months for several years until her mother earned her degree. They returned to New Mexico and her mother began teaching. Her mother retired from teaching in 1958 at age 70.

Meier attended college in Portales and moved to Albuquerque to teach school. She taught fourth grade in a core curriculum school. At that time all subjects that were taught were related to a specific country that they were studying.

TAPE ONE, SIDE B:

After two years, she attended the University of Denver to get a master's degree in theater. She learned that the Red Cross was looking for recreation workers and got accepted to the program. Recreation workers visited military wards and camps to cheer the soldiers up. They played games, sponsored contests, taught crafts, wrote letters, and organized musical programs. She recalls that there was always ping-pong. After four months she learned that the Red Cross had a new program called "Supplemental Recreational Activities – Overseas." She applied and was sent to Korea for eighteen months. She also spent two years in Morocco and one year in France. Meier discusses the towns and places she visited in each country, and recalls that she was in Morocco when the Sultan returned from exile.

When Meier was a Victory Farm Volunteer the population of Portales was approximately 5,000. She states that there was no drug or drinking problems in those days. Young people went to ball games, hung out with friends at the local café. She did not grow up with television and recalls listening to Jack Benny, Amos and Andy, and The Shadow on the radio.

In 1967 she was married and lived in Bosque Farms. Her husband worked at Sandia Labs. Meier taught school at Bosque Farms from about 1969 or '70 until 1988. They owned twelve acres of land, of which six were planted in alfalfa. They had a horse, a colt, and approximately fourteen heifer Herefords which they raised for sale.

Since her husband was working at Sandia and was not there to work the farm, Meier and their children took on operation of the farm. When her husband felt he could no longer bear the burdens of family, farm, and job, he left the family and moved into town. After he left, Meier sold everything and purchased a home for her and the kids in Albuquerque. She continued to teach, commuting to Las Lunas, for twelve years.

When Meier retired, she purchased a new home and has lived there for the past twenty-one years. She discusses her cats, and shares the stories of a skunk in the house and the six skunks that lived under the front porch.