

**NEW MEXICO
FARM & RANCH
HERITAGE
MUSEUM**

ORAL HISTORY PROGRAM

INTERVIEW ABSTRACT

CONSULTANT: Neil Fuller

DATE OF BIRTH: November 17, 1945 GENDER: Male

DATE(S) OF INTERVIEW: March 21 and 27, 2012

LOCATION OF INTERVIEW: N. M. Farm and Ranch Heritage Museum

INTERVIEWER: Donna M. Wojcik

SOURCE OF INTERVIEW: NMF&RHM

TRANSCRIBED: November 23, 2013

NUMBER OF TAPES: Four

ABSTRACTOR: Donna M. Wojcik

DATE ABSTRACTED: April 3, 2012

RECORDING QUALITY (SPECIFY): Good

SCOPE AND CONTENT NOTE: Fuller grew up on the Fuller Ranch near Virden, N.M. He describes his life there and the work he did on the ranch. Tape Four contains several stories that had been passed to him by his uncle.

DATE RANGE: 1945-1969

ABSTRACT (Important Topics in Order of Appearance):

TAPE ONE, SIDE A: [March 21, 2012]

Fuller describes his great-grandfather H. A. Fuller's arrival in Silver City in 1875 and the homestead he acquired in the Red Rock area in 1884, where he farmed and ran cattle. His grandfather, Charles Fuller, liked to farm and ranch and homesteaded his own place, known as the Fuller Ranch. Fuller recalls finding pottery, arrowheads, evidence of an Indian burial ground, and cliff dwellings on the ranch.

He describes the ranch which was made up of state, patent, and leased land. He recalls hearing stories of rustling and the problems between wealthy landowners and smaller ranch owners. The Fuller Ranch raised Hereford cattle, including a small herd of purebred Hereford that Charles kept separate from the rest of the herd. Charles raised melons and other produce on the farm until the 1930s when he began growing silage, grain, and corn. He also raised hogs, referring to them as "the mortgage lifters." He explained to Neil that hog prices were generally up when cattle prices were down and vice-versa. Neil did not enjoy the chore of feeding the hogs. "The hogs were mean," he says.

Produce was marketed in Arizona. At the peak of ranch operations around 1,500 head of calves were branded. When Neil was at the ranch he recalls no more than 500 head branded in a good year. He describes the terrain of the ranch.

TAPE ONE, SIDE B:

Deer, mountain lion, javelina, coyote, and bear were often seen on the ranch. Fuller tells a story about a bear that escaped from a circus. Water sources included the Gila River and natural springs. The springs were developed so that the cattle could drink as long as the springs ran. He does not recall the springs completely drying up at any time. Several rotary-drilled windmills were developed as water sources for the cattle, but there was one hand-dug well at the farm. He discusses the irrigation system on the ranch.

During times of drought cattle feed was supplemented with a mix of cottonseed cake and salt. The horses and livestock at the home place were given hay as a supplement. Severe spring thunderstorms would often cause flooding which washed out the road to the other side of the river. Since the road was not a designated county road, ranch owners had to pay to have a grader come in to grade it. Fuller recalls seeing the remnants of structures in the tops of cottonwood trees in a box canyon. His dad told him that they were put there by a flood. During the rainy season there was plenty of gramma grass and filaree growing so supplemental feed was not necessary.

There were no pre-existing buildings when the ranch was purchased; several were added over the years, in addition to corrals and barns. Most of the fencing in the area was barbed wire, although several sheep ranchers in the Red Rock area had sheep fencing. There was no electricity or indoor plumbing on the ranch until the 1950s. The family used kerosene lanterns and had a gas generator that they used in the evening to listen to the radio. To pass the hours, they told stories, played solitaire or worked on puzzles. Fuller describes the brands associated with the ranch.

TAPE TWO, SIDE A: [March 27, 2012]

Fuller begins by correcting information on the bear story described on Tape One. He describes a typical roundup and says that he like to gather the cattle from the river bottom because there was shade and water. He recalls how he and his sister were given the job of crawling through the brush along the river to scare out the cattle that were hiding there. The brush was burned behind them so that the cattle could not return to hide. “The cattle would come out, then the snakes and everything else, and then me and my sister. It was a lot of fun.” His uncle always told him, “Don’t ever go where you haven’t seen the cattle already go.” One day he lost sight of the trail the cattle had taken, and ended up in quicksand. After his uncle pulled him and the horse out with a rope he got “a good cussin’” for not following instructions.

Most calves are born in early spring, but sometimes calving depended on the weather. After a dry winter, cows sometimes abort or never get pregnant to begin with. If there has been a good winter and a good spring there would be a good calf crop. Calving and weaning are described. While natural weaning is possible, most calves are separated from the cows at branding and weaned that way. He does not recall any problems with wolves or mountain lions, but recalls seeing a cow defend her calf against a pack of coyotes. Branding and the marketing of cattle are discussed. Fuller never did the actual branding or ear marking; he was tasked with vaccinating, de-horning, and castrating.

TAPE TWO, SIDE B:

At times additional labor was hired, but it was hard to find reliable people who knew what they were doing. Other family members and a few neighbors usually assisted when help was needed. Marketing practices have changed over time. There are no longer any big cattle drives, and the cattle were always shipped from the home place. During times of drought there were always plenty of cattle on the market because owners were unable to keep the cattle. This kept the prices low. A really good year would bring a price of twenty-five cents a pound for cattle. Fuller recalls that prices in the 1960s were up as high as forty cents a pound.

The bank would make a loan when credit was needed based on the next calf crop. Groceries purchased on credit were paid off with the calf crop proceeds. While he does not recall any major losses due to toxic vegetation, he says that cocklebur was a problem. “It gets in the fur,” and this is not good to see at cattle sales.

When there was plenty of good grass, the Fuller Ranch would increase the herd. Construction of additional wells meant better water distribution for the cattle. Electric pumps were installed if there was access to electricity near the well. When there is no wind to turn wind-powered well pumps, there was not water.

Fuller recalls that his mother raised turkeys one year. His grandmother had chickens, and there were two large gardens. His granddad raised hogs. The family made their own cheese and butter. If items were needed that could not be produced on the ranch, a bi-monthly trip to town was made, where items were purchased in large quantities and transferred to smaller metal containers for storage in the pantry. They often ordered from the Sears or Montgomery Ward catalogs when items could not be purchased in Lordsburg.

TAPE THREE, SIDE A:

A typical day usually began early and ended around six in the evening. Fuller recalls that by the time he was school age he was doing a full day of work and was flanking calves at age six. Family celebrations and traditions are discussed. Minor ailments such as pink eye and sore throats were treated at home. Cuts and scrapes were treated with iodine or Mercurochrome. Visits to the doctor were only as a last resort or for major ailments. Such a visit to the doctor was required after Fuller swallowed a needle. Several family members are buried in the Fuller Cemetery near Virden and in the cemetery at Lordsburg.

There was not much variety to meals on the ranch. There was always a pot of beans, meat, potatoes, biscuits and gravy, and seasonal vegetables. Lunch was always the biggest meal of the day, and lunch leftovers or just a bowl of cereal would be eaten for supper. Fuller, his sister, and parents would take a camping trip to the Gila once a year. He recalls people coming from Lordsburg to "noodle" for catfish in the Gila River.

Neighbors closest to the Fuller Ranch and the relationship between the neighbors are discussed. Although Fuller says that the neighbors were friendly, there were not any close relationships or socializing done. Neighbors were always welcome to sit and eat with the family if they were at the ranch at meal time. Equipment and tools were shared among neighbors.

Fuller's parents moved the family to Lordsburg during the school year, but he spent the weekends and all summer at the ranch. Students were permitted to be absent from school to work on the farms and ranches when needed; however, missed tests and homework had to be made up.

TAPE THREE, SIDE B:

Education was important to Fuller's parents, and although he wanted to return to the ranch after he graduated, his father insisted on further education. He attended New Mexico State University and graduated in 1968 with a degree in business administration. His granddad was a county commissioner, and his parents were both county clerks. His father was also a district court clerk. When asked if there was anyone in the area that was considered a community leader, Fuller says that his granddad, his father, Harry Day, Sherwood Culberson, and Robert Martin were all well respected.

His best memories of life on the ranch include the freedom and opportunity to commune with nature and learning what life is like. He says there is "something about growing up in the country," dealing with life, and seeing nature at its best. "You had to make do with what you had," he says, "because you were on your own." He states that he did not know what hardship was when he was young, but as he got older the "unknown" in times of drought, the times when you needed to borrow money without knowing if the bank would give you the loan, the uncertainty of the future, and not having control of your destiny are what he feels were the greatest hardships in the ranching business.

Fuller describes the impact of ranching on his life as being the life experiences gained and the appreciation of nature he learned. "Ranch life was better than life in town." Small ranches are being pushed out by corporation ranches and wealthy owners who hire someone to run operations for them. Cattle ranches are being replaced by exotic hunting ranches. He sees the

day coming when cattle will all be raised in feedlots. "Very few people understand what it takes to have that history and environment," he says.

TAPE FOUR, SIDE A:

Fuller tells several stories that were told to me by his cousin, Wayne Fuller. The stories are as follows: a bank robbery in Silver City; building the road from Lordsburg to Red Rock without a survey; a Pat Garrett inscription in a sandstone bluff; an inscription burned into a cottonwood tree; a bootlegged whiskey barrel; Tom Mix at the Hidalgo County Fair; and justice meted out without the law.

TAPE FOUR, SIDE B: Blank