



**ORAL HISTORY PROGRAM**  
INTERVIEW ABSTRACT

CONSULTANT: Tom McCalmont

DATE OF BIRTH: May 14, 1948                      SEX: Male

DATE(S) OF INTERVIEW: March 12, 1996

LOCATION OF INTERVIEW: Santa Fe, New Mexico

INTERVIEWER: Michelle Nawrocki

SOURCE OF INTERVIEW: NMF&RHM\_x\_\_\_\_OTHER\_\_\_\_\_

TRANSCRIBED: Yes: November 26, 1996

NUMBER OF TAPES: Three

ABTRACTOR: Sylvia Wheeler

DATE ABSTRATED: March 16, 2001

QUALITY OF RECORDING (SPECIFY): Good

SCOPE AND CONTENT NOTE: Briefly describes his personal history. The majority of the interview describes his tenure as the first director of the New Mexico Farm and Ranch Heritage Museum.

DATE RANGE: 1948-1996

## **ABSTRACT (IMPORTANT TOPICS IN ORDER OF APPEARANCE):**

### **TAPE ONE:**

Tom McCalmont was the first director of the New Mexico Farm and Ranch Heritage Museum (hereafter Museum). He served from April 1993 to July 1994.

He was born on May 14, 1948 in Jersey City, New Jersey. He did not have an agricultural background, but did attend New Mexico Highlands University in Las Vegas, New Mexico. He enjoyed outdoor activities. He became interested in agriculture through doing odd jobs for a friend's father, Lawrence C. Kaiser, manager of Salman Ranch near Las Vegas.

After college, he became the State Rural Development Coordinator for a year. In this capacity and other related ones, he gained experience in working with the legislature and in doing budgets. He worked for various state departments for many years, then Helmuth Naumer, Officer of Cultural Affairs, asked him if he would be interested in directing the Museum, primarily because of his previous experience with the legislature.

He took the position but did not know the museum business and working with the Museum and foundation boards proved to be difficult. (Helmuth Naumer, who had been his mentor, died in July 1994 just after McCalmont left the Museum.) Bruce King was the governor during McCalmont's tenure, and his concept of the Museum was essentially that of an "Anglo cowboy museum."

McCalmont tried to interest Governor King in the prehistoric, Hispanic, and the Spanish Colonial period. This was persuasive.

Running the Museum at that time was difficult because the directorship was ill-defined and once the money had been raised, interest dropped amongst the original board members. Initially, the agricultural community was not actively involved. Dr. Stephens was the torchbearer, but he died a month after Mr. McCalmont arrived in Las Cruces. Support for the Museum was strong in some places, weak in other areas.

McCalmont operated the Museum initially from his living room. Despite no formal office having yet been established, he felt that he should represent the Museum in the community. His buying a pickup truck to get around with and spending some of the Museum money (which would have had to have been turned back to the state in a specified time if not used) raised a little ire with the boards.

### **TAPE TWO:**

The consultant thinks his role was largely to "grease the skids in the legislature." He regrets that Dr. Stephens who worked so hard on the project died four months before its realization. And despite McCalmont's occasional disputes with the boards, he also enjoyed them very much.

Everyone seemed to have a different vision of the prospective Museum. McCalmont did not have much operating money or money for a curator.

Some issues have had a major impact on founding the Museum, one being the initial acquisition of the land for the Museum. After deciding not to place the Museum on the campus of New Mexico State University, NMSU provided an eleven-plus-acre site. NMSU administrators were supportive of placing the Museum under the Office of Cultural Affairs.

### **TAPE THREE:**

Another issue was that of an architectural design firm—it became very political. Yet another issue was that of moving the site of the museum from the eleven-acre site to the location on Dripping Springs Road, which as it turns out, is a “great thing for the Museum.” Choosing the logo for the Museum was also an issue amongst the boards. Many were tried; many rejected.

McCalmont says that the most important mission of the Museum in his mind is agricultural education and conservation, for example, the forest grazing permits and overgrazing. He hopes exhibits will be provocative rather than mundane (a plow, for example). “There is really not an agricultural community, i.e., cotton farmers don’t look at things the same way as chili farmers do,” McCalmont says.

Among the most important figures in the Museums’s founding were Dr. Stephens, Bruce King, and Felicia Thal.

McCalmont feels the Museum’s creation has been difficult because of the lack of support from the agricultural community, jealousy over its location is a factor in that; also that it is not a “cowboy museum.” People need to realize that regardless of the particulars, agriculture is vital to New Mexico.

He hopes that the Museum exhibits are not boring, but that they will have interesting themes: culturally, historically, and socially.