



ORAL HISTORY PROGRAM
INTERVIEW ABSTRACT

CONSULTANT: William McIlhaney

DATE OF BIRTH: May 17, 1936 SEX: Male

DATE(S) OF INTERVIEW: December 5, 1996

LOCATION OF INTERVIEW: McIlhaney residence, Albuquerque, New Mexico.

INTERVIEWER: Jane O'Cain

SOURCE OF INTERVIEW: NMF&RHM X OTHER _____

TRANSCRIBED: Yes: January 8, 1998

NUMBER OF TAPES: Two

ABTRACTOR: Jane O'Cain

DATE(S) ABSTRACTED: August 16, 1999

QUALITY OF RECORDING (SPECIFY): Good

SCOPE AND CONTENT NOTE: Discusses his work as a dairy farmer and changes in the dairy industry. He served as state president of the Farm Bureau and as a member of the State Fair Commission. The interview concentrates on his involvement with the founding of the New Mexico Farm & Ranch Heritage Museum. He served as the first president of the Heritage Institute Board.

DATE RANGE: 1936-1996

ABSTRACT (IMPORTANT TOPICS IN ORDER OF APPEARANCE):

TAPE ONE, SIDE A:

William McIlhane was the first president of the New Mexico Farm & Ranch Heritage Institute. He describes some of the feelings they had about the project when the Board was initially formed.

He grew up on a dairy farm in the north valley of Albuquerque. The year he was born, 1936, Albuquerque had a population of 26,000 people. There were many dairies, truck farms, and irrigated acreage's in the north valley during his childhood. He got into the dairy business while still in high school, and had developed a herd of his own by the time he graduated. Although he had a college scholarship, he decided to enter the dairy business full-time. His children (daughter and son) did not follow him into the dairy business.

Consultant describes aspects of the dairy business. In the middle 1950's the McIlhaneys set up their own processing plant, and "sold our product right out the front door." They also raised Jersey cows, rather than the more popular Holstein.

He discusses why he believes that the dairy business has become so successful in New Mexico. There are no longer any dairies in northern Bernalillo County. The size of dairies in Bernalillo county has expanded from an average of 100 cows to 1,000. He estimates that there are probably only eight to ten dairies left in the southern part of Bernalillo county.

Discusses dairying in the Albuquerque urban area in the 1970's. He got along well with his neighbors, and discusses how he was able to accomplish that.

TAPE ONE, SIDE B:

Consultant details his involvement with the New Mexico Farm and Livestock Bureau. He served as vice-president of the State Farm Bureau and eventually as president for eight years. He describes the Farm Bureau as a "lobbyin' organization" both "locally and . . . in Washington." The Farm Bureau in New Mexico has 13,000 family members.

Describes his involvement in the founding of the New Mexico Farm & Ranch Heritage Museum. He states that Dr. Stephens was very vital in getting the project implemented. He gives Helmuth Naumer, then director of the Office of Cultural Affairs, for the State of New Mexico a great deal of credit in supporting the project.

Discusses the period of time when Board members signed a note in order to secure operating expenses. He stated, "a lot of people just couldn't accept that; reachin' into their pocket."

TAPE TWO, SIDE A

Touches on his work with the State Fair that had not been mentioned earlier during the interview when his other community involvements were discussed. He has served on the commission from 1989 until the present (date of the interview). States that the fair has had financial difficulties related in no small part to the decline in gambling revenues (from horse racing). In 1989 85% of fair revenues came from horse racing. In 1996 that decreased to 15 or 16 percent. They have tried a number of different ways to increase fair revenues from managing their own parking to leasing their facilities during the period of time when the fair is not in session.

The consultant then returns to the discussion of the founding of the Museum and describes hiring a fund raising consulting firm from Fort Worth, Texas. He felt that the companies approach to fundraising did not “go over very well.” That experience with private fund raising reinforced the idea that the museum would need public financing. Discusses the challenges to get the Museum funded through the legislature. States that G.X. McSherry was a key person in getting the legislation passed that established the Museum, and Senator Altamirano also carried legislation to establish the Museum. He was surprised that some rural legislators did not feel that the Museum project had any “merit,” while some urban legislators supported the project. Generally, he believes, the Museum project had bi-partisan support.

The consultant states that all the governors in office during the period of time when the Museum was being considered were supportive. They include Governor Garey Carruthers, Governor Bruce King, and Governor Gary Johnson. He states that going back some time; Governor Jerry Apodaca also supported their efforts.

The consultant relates the early board members “got beat up bad” in the legislature, but they had to continue to attempt to get the legislation passed. Representative Gary King was another key supporter of the project in the legislature.

He believes that the Museum is still evolving, and it will take from 5 to 10 years for the entire Museum program to be completed. The length of time this will take depends on the funding available through the legislature.

TAPE TWO, SIDE B: Blank