



ORAL HISTORY PROGRAM  
INTERVIEW ABSTRACT

CONSULTANT: Ara Janelle Woodward

DATE OF BIRTH: February 2, 1934 GENDER: Female

DATE(S) OF INTERVIEW: October 10, 2005 and October 17, 2005

LOCATION OF INTERVIEW: Woodward home in Las Cruces, NM

INTERVIEWER: Donna M. Wojcik

SOURCE OF INTERVIEW: NMF&RHM  X  OTHER \_\_\_\_\_

TRANSCRIBED: Yes: March 12, 2007

NUMBER OF TAPES: Five

ABTRACTOR: Donna M. Wojcik

DATE ABSTRACTED: December 26, 2006

QUALITY OF RECORDING (SPECIFY): Good

SCOPE AND CONTENT NOTE: Cotton farming in the Chamberino, New Mexico area

DATE RANGE: 1934-2005

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

**TAPE ONE, SIDE A:**

Ms. Woodward begins with information regarding her birth in the help house on her grandfather's farm. She describes the C.C. W farm, the original family farm that she now owns in an equal split with her daughter, Amy. They also jointly own the 2-W farm, which was owned by her father, Cleburne Woodward, and her uncle Irvine Woodward.

Her grandparents originally traveled from Georgia to Santa Fe, settling in the Santa Rosa area. A few years after the Elephant Butte dam was built, the family moved to the Chamberino area, purchasing a ninety-five acre farm in 1925. This farm became known as the 2-W farm. She doesn't recall how her grandfather knew about Elephant Butte dam, but states that the dam is what drew him to the Mesilla Valley area. The dam was built in 1916. The family maintained contact with the relatives back in Georgia, but she doesn't know how this was done.

She describes the help house as a row of separate rooms. The first room located on the north side had a screened porch, and it was at this location that her grandparents spent their final years. Janelle was born in the room two doors from them.

She doesn't know if this farm was leased or patented land, and believes that it was a typical size farm for that time. She was impressed with her grandfather, who used a hand plow. She recalls that he gave her the nickname "Pete". It wasn't until later that she learned that Pete was his favorite mule. Her grandparents raised nine children. When Janelle was six years old, a hog killing was held. It was a memorable event and members of the extended family took part.

Janelle's role on the farm, as a landowner with crop sharing leases, is discussed. She states that she didn't realize what kind of responsibility it would involve. She thought she would rent land, pay water and taxes and that would be all that would be required of her. She learned that there is much more to farming than that.

Water adjudication and water rights are big issues at this time (2005). Tradition has been that water righted acres were allotted according to deeded acreage, but as time has passed it has come to mean water only used for crops. It no longer includes water use in homes, barns, sheds, or storage areas. Water taxes paid to Elephant Butte Irrigation District (EBID) include two acre-feet of water per acre to be used for crop irrigation. If farmers run out, and if extra water is available from EBID, farmers can purchase the extra water to finish out their crops. Farmers can also supplement with irrigation wells. Water is, and will continue to be a serious issue, in the opinion of Ms. Woodward.

She is concerned that farm land is being lost to development, and feels that once asphalt is laid, there land is ruined and cannot be reclaimed for farming. Food and fiber are also big concerns for her. Restrictions on chemical, fertilizer and pesticide use in the United States protects the food and fiber grown here, but we now import from countries that do not have the same restrictions. We are no longer dependent on our own country, but on foreign countries, and she feels that by the time our country realizes the harm it is doing, it will be too late. She says that she gets offers to buy her land every month, but states that she has no intention of selling.

She discusses how she became responsible for her own farm, which her father gave her in 1954. He rented it from her for the standard crop share of one-third/two thirds, with one third going to the landowner and two thirds going to the farmer renter. Her mother kept the books on her farm

for the first year and then turned it over to Janelle. Janelle did the same with her daughter, when Amy got her farm in 1990. Janelle says she learned a lot from her mother.

When asked if it is hard to be a woman farmer in a man's world, she says that when she first started she would say that she was "doing this for my parents, and my daughter, and I'm not sure what to do. Could you help me?" Everyone was very helpful. She always asked questions and developed friendships. It helps that she loves to talk about farming.

### **TAPE ONE, SIDE B:**

Overall, the response to her as a female farmer has been good. She recalls some major problems that she had in regards to a verbal agreement that her father had with the renter. He had not paid for equipment that he was using, and Janelle wanted to rewrite the lease agreement to tie the purchase of the equipment to the lease agreement. She felt that the equipment should be rented until it was purchased. She projected that she would be bound to re-rent to the same renter if the equipment had not been paid for by the time the lease was up. This ensured the renter of land, but Janelle felt that she was the one being cheated. She states that it did not discourage her. She feels that she is a strong woman with a lot of courage. Her philosophy is that "when you reach the end of your rope and don't know what to do, you do what you can. You can always talk to someone or read something." She believes her personal strength comes from how she was raised, and says she found out who she was from running the farm.

The principle crop grown on Ms. Woodward's farm is cotton. She discusses the difference between the Pima and Upland cotton varieties. Pima has long fiber, a longer growing season, and a three-lock boll. Upland has short fiber, a shorter growing season, and a five-lock boll. Upland cotton provides a better yield. She says that it has been exciting to watch the growth and promotion of Pima cotton over the years.

### **TAPE TWO, SIDE A:**

The tape begins with a discussion about Pima cotton. The consultant describes her association with the SuPima organization, and talks about how the demand for cotton products has changed over the years since the 1940s, when Egyptian cotton was the rave. The SuPima organization has been developing cotton/cashmere blends of cotton. The consultant believes that the SuPima product is a very fine cotton product, and that it is developed under high standards.

Ms. Woodward grows BG and BT varieties on her farm because they are more resistant to bollworms. She rents some of her farmland to Bobby Sloan who has been involved in the boll weevil eradication movement since 1995. She feels that total eradication is not possible, but does say that a lot of the weevils have been wiped out.

When asked if the terrain of the farm dictates what she grows, she says that the land is suited for growing cotton, and while varieties change, the crops never do. There has been some experimentation with new types of Pima cotton from Israel, which are more suited for drought conditions.

Irrigation systems, the role of EBID (Elephant Butte Irrigation District), and water allotments are discussed. Ms. Woodward receives a water allotment of two acre-feet of water. She feels it is an injustice to farmers that they still have to pay the same amount even when they receive half the amount of water. She discusses the use of well water and states that most of the water wells located on her farmland were drilled in the early 1950s. She recalls that getting permits to drill

wells is a big project, and tells the story of the frozen pump on the 2W farm and subsequent request to drill a new well. She stated that the State Engineers Office does not issue permits to drill new wells, and that the process to get permission to drill a replacement well is a long process, often hindering the farmer from getting a crop in the fields. She states that her farm was granted emergency status and was able to drill a well. She was able to get a fairly decent crop off that year.

She recalls drought years in the early 1950s, and remembers hearing two perspectives on the drought. The farmers were saying that they had no money to grow a crop, and the ranchers were selling off cattle. She remembers that the majority of the wells on her farmland were drilled in 1952. During the drought, EBID didn't give any water to the farmers, yet they still had to pay full water taxes. There were concerns that the pumped water would salt the land and ruin it for any future crops. This, however, did not happen. She recalls that her family pumped water for two years as the only source of water for crops, and that her father ran the pumps every year after that to keep the pumps up and in good condition. It takes longer to irrigate when you pump water than it does when the water comes out of the canal.

Ms. Woodward's farmland has cement ditches, which prevent water from absorbing into the soil. It is the farmer's responsibility to maintain the ditch. On the 120-acre farm located at Hollicker Road and Hwy. 28, there is a quick turn, and cars often miss the turn and end up in the ditch. This requires extra repairs. She also has a farm where three gas lines cross, and there is always extra care taken when preparing the soil for planting, so as not to dig too deep and cut one of the lines.

She fondly remembers her father's love for the land and comments that she finds herself doing many of the same things that her father did. She states that most people think that wet winters are good for farmers, however, they do not realize that wet winters impede tractor work because they must wait for the soil to dry out before planting can be done. There are new varieties of cotton that have a shorter growing season, and many farmers choose to plant those after wet winters. She also states that Pima is always planted first because it takes longer to grow. When there is a lot of rain when the cotton is ready to be picked, picking is delayed because the soil must dry out for the machinery and the cotton must be dry before picking.

### **TAPE TWO, SIDE B:**

The tape begins with a discussion of hiring laborers to help on the farm. Ms. Woodward says that additional workers were hired during picking season and for other large projects. A lot of pickers are needed to harvest the cotton. Her grandfather originally plowed with a hand plow and mule, and eventually purchased a tractor. She states that her grandfather believed that April 1<sup>st</sup> was the date that cotton should start to be planted even if it was cold, and says that the farm was never fenced.

She discusses EBID, and says that working with them is difficult. She wonders if it would be easier if she was a man and not a woman. She tells the story of the EBID ditch that collapsed, and how she was told that it was her responsibility to pay for the ditch, the liability, and any repairs that would be needed in the future.

The farms got electricity in the early 1940s. When her father built the adobe home in 1934, he plumbed the home with a toilet, sink and tub; however, none of these were connected until much later. She recalls that they still used the outhouse and water pump in the back yard.

She describes a round of work, and gives an overview of a typical growing season. After the harvest in the fall, the stalks are cut and plowed under. In the winter the fields are plowed and the soil is turned over. Many farmers plow across the rows or on the bias to soften the soil. In the spring, the soil is tilled and the rows are made. Then the fields are irrigated in accordance with when the planting will begin.

### **TAPE THREE, SIDE A:**

The discussion of a typical growing season continues. Ms. Woodward explains that it is important to have optimum moisture content in order for the seeds to sprout. She recalls that her father would crawl in the field rows and scratch away the dirt to see if the seeds were sprouting. Irrigation begins in early June, and through July and August. The cotton should have “squares” by July 4<sup>th</sup>. A square is a cotton bud that has 3 bracts that cover the bud. Bees like the cotton blossoms. Pima cotton blooms are yellow, while Upland cotton blooms are creamy white. The blossom turns red the following day. She remembers her grandfather saying, “First day white, second day red, third day dead.” Cotton leaves turn color to a deeper green and eventually fall off. Some farmers use exfoliation sprays to help drop the leaves. After the leaves have fallen off, you will see the stalks with big fluffy bolls of cotton on each stalk.

There is a discussion about pickers and the improvements made in equipment. Ms. Woodward remarks that she loves to ride in the cab of the picker as it moves up the rows. It is “a culmination of the year, a celebration of thanksgiving and a wonderful experience.”

She talks about planting alfalfa in the fields, and says that you don’t have to plant it every year because it keeps for three to five years. She states that it is essential to plant it in the fall so that there aren’t so many weeds in it. As each year passes it tends to get more weeds. The dairies like the first cut of alfalfa, while most people don’t. Corn is planted in the spring. Farmers can often plant onions and then corn, which has a shorter growing season.

The topic of marketing the crops is discussed. She recalls that her father marketed his cotton to R.T. Hoover in El Paso, but sold his cottonseed to SWIG. When R.T. Hoover closed, the cotton was sold to SWIG. The gin at Chamberino, a cooperative gin, processed only Upland cotton. The Anthony Gin, which was owned by her uncle, processed only Pima cotton. The Chamberino, Anthony and Mesquite gins were combined to form the Mesa Coop Gin. Both types of cotton are processed; however, they are never processed at the same time, since the process is different for each type.

There is a brief discussion about the new module makers.

### **TAPE THREE, SIDE B:**

The discussion of modules continues with Ms. Woodward stating that farmers want as little downtime as possible, since fuel is expensive. She describes the cotton trailer (“buggies”) and how the trailer driver keeps track of how fast it is being filled with cotton. When it is full, the picker is stopped and dumped into the buggy. The buggy then goes to the module maker and the picker resumes with another buggy following in order to minimize down time. She states that there have been a lot of advances made since 1995 when her father died. He didn’t live to see the module or a six-row picker.

Cotton prices have fluctuated, and at present time (2005), farmers are getting as much money per pound as farmers got for cotton in the Depression years. Costs and equipment are up, and labor is

down. She doesn't know how long farmers will be able to stay in business. She remembers the day that Pima went for \$1 per pound, and says that farmers think it is impossible to get that price today. She feels that an injustice is being done to farmers in the United States because they cannot receive subsidies. She doesn't understand why other countries that can't compete with the United States dictate our prices.

When asked what she thought farmers could plant instead of cotton if prices bottom out, she said that pecans would seem most logical. Some farmers are already switching some acres to pecans so that trees will be mature and producing if cotton prices go down too low. She has some concerns however, since pecans need more water to grow. She says that if more water is allocated to pecan farmers then the land will be worth more than farmers who grow cotton. She is also concerned that water restrictions will tighten even further, and farmers will receive 2-acre feet of water for one whole growing season, including irrigated water.

She doesn't recall any great losses due to disease or predation, but remembers that in 1993 one farmer had his cotton totally hailed out. The neighbors got together and replanted, and he was able to get a good crop.

She appreciates the opportunity to attend conferences, and feels that she has learned to be a better farm manager. The tape concludes with a discussion about her marriage and divorce, and her parent's failing health.

#### **TAPE FOUR, SIDE A:**

The discussion begins with the topic of water meetings held by EBID. She says that these are generally not well attended. At this time, EBID is considering increases in water taxes due to financial water reserves being used up during the drought. She feels that the Farm Bureau is working on behalf of the farmers regarding domestic water sources, and states that domestic wells are important to farmers because land developments bordering farm land will deplete the water, lower the water table, and destroy water content.

When asked what she thinks will happen to the farmer with development encroaching on farmland, she replies that over the past five to ten years she has seen an increase in traffic and development in the area. She cites Sonoma Ranch as an example of developments that require a lot of water usage for the golf course, and says that many farms are being lost to housing development. She estimates that in the next ten years, our current farmland will be cut by fifty percent, and farmers cannot fight the changes that will take place. It is her opinion that pecan farmers have banded together, but farmers have not pulled together because they are too independent. She believes that farmers do not have a valid input at EBID water meetings, and it is her opinion that no one at EBID listens to concerns regarding water adjudication. It is her wish that all farmers would go to the meetings so that they know what the issues are, because some issues are too complex to understand without knowing all the information.

Her grandparents and parents did not supplement income, although people in those days naturally shared in hard times. She describes a typical day on the farm as seen through a child's eyes, and describes it as "EARLY!" She did not have regular chores as a child, but did help her mother in the garden. She begins a story of how her father offered to pay her if she would chop cotton, which is thinning out the cotton plants with a hoe. She says it was very "tiring work."

#### **TAPE FOUR, SIDE B:**

The story of chopping cotton continues. She remarks that she learned a lot, especially how difficult and how slow chopping cotton is. She helped her mother in the garden and recalls that they grew black eyed peas, and a variety of vegetables.

She discusses the five farms currently in the Woodward family, with three farms being owned by Janelle and two farms owned by her daughter Amy. She currently rents all five farms to Robert Sloan, who farms them as one farm. It is easier to manage crop rotation this way. She revisits the history of the 2-W farm, the original farm owned by her grandparents, and later co-owned by her father and uncle.

Hog or calf killings were two of the family celebrations that Janelle remembers, and although the children were playing most of the time, she does remember running away after seeing the throat of the calf get cut.

Her mother and grandmother both made soap. Janelle recalls that the pot that was used to make soap was also the pot used to do the laundry. She remembers that wooden slats from old window shades were used to stir the soap, which was then poured into pans, cooled and cut into bars. Her mother tied the soap bars in cotton sugar sack material.

Janelle was born on her grandfather's farm. Dr. Tucker had an office inside the drug store in Anthony. She got her diphtheria shot in the doctor's office.

There was always a variety of food at meal times. The meals were well balanced, with meat, vegetables, and fruit from the fruit trees on the farm. Her mother canned a lot of vegetables, fruit, jams and jellies. Bacon was smoked at her grandma's house. In later years they rented a frozen food locker in a commercial building near Anthony. They kept their frozen chicken, pork and beef at this locker. After the introduction of electricity in 1939, they got an electric freezer and "it was great!" Her father often hunted deer in Baylor Canyon.

The nearest store was located in Anthony. She recalls that it had a wooden floor. There was another store near the Chamberino Post Office. This was a variety store that carried hardware; clothing, groceries, produce, gas and it had a nice candy counter. The family did their banking in El Paso.

#### **TAPE FIVE, SIDE A:**

The tape begins with a discussion of the neighbors. The Barillos lived to the south. They had a candy counter in their house. Janelle remembers that she got candy there until Pearl Harbor, when there wasn't any candy available except Ludens cough drops. To the west were the Escobar, Diaz, and Yabamoto families, and then her grandfather had his farm there. To the east was the Sam Donaldson family farm, and John Paul Taylor family farm. To the north was the Roy White farm, Yabamoto farm, and the Sauer farm. The Sauer family sold the farm to Janelle's father without interest.

When asked if work was swapped out, she replies that equipment was swapped more than work was. Community events included the R.T. Hoover lunch meeting held once a year at the El Paso Country Club, and the Farm Bureau meetings.

The school calendar was discussed. There have been many changes since she was in school. There are more holidays and a longer year now. She feels that children were offered a better education then because less time was wasted regrouping after holidays. The school year was more orderly. Higher education was never discussed other than hints like “When you start college....” Her parents hadn’t counted on her to work on the farm. It was a given that she would go on to college. None of the family members were involved in politics. Politics were considered a private matter.

Janelle says that she misses the sense of community that she felt as a child and young adult. One of the community leaders was Chope Benevidez. He was thought of as the “Patron” of the La Mesa community. She recalls that people looked up to him, and that he was heavily involved in the life of the community. Residents registered to vote at Chope’s Bar. There were also leaders among the successful business in the area.

The Woodward family has been active in many farming associations, and Janelle is a member of the Farm Bureau, American Cotton Council, and the SuPima Association. Funds are automatically taken out of the price of Pima cotton bales for the SuPima Association.

Her favorite social event has been the Mesa Cotton Gin barbeque, which is held in September. Everything is cleaned for the start of the season, and it is a catered event. Generally the FFA (Future Farmers of America) from Gadsden School serves the food. She tells the story of the FHA (Future Homemakers of America), which was active in the early 1950s. Another favorite event is the SuPima Conference, also held in September. She recalls the introduction of Pima/Cashmere blends and the hopes that it would become popular in the fashion market. The Farm Bureau has a dinner and conference that completes the social year. She says it is a good way to get to know people from Chamberino and La Mesa, many of whom her parents had known.

There is a discussion regarding her best memories growing up on the farm. She loved to get up in the summer, hearing the screen door slam shut and wondering who had just left the house. Her father had built her a playhouse with a bunk bed. She played house, with Gene Autry or Roy Rogers being her imaginary husband. She remembers the currant bushes, the Jersey cow with the big brown eyes, and the garden that was edged with dark irises. She also remembers that she hated chickens. She remembers the freshness of the farm, and the kitten she called “Bobtail”. She says that the cat would chase gophers around the field ditch, kill it, and bring it to the back step to show her mother. “Mother would praise kitty for catching the gophers” and he would then take it and eat it.

Most of the farms surrounding the Woodward farms have been sold, or have been passed on to surviving members of the families after deaths. The Yabamoto family was well respected in the community, and the Brown farm was eventually sold to the Spice Islands Company. She feels that the greatest harm to farmland is housing developments. There has been talk that the government would buy agricultural land to hold in perpetuity, but she doesn’t see this happening. She strongly believes that the farmers of today are in the end of an era.

The quality of life on the farm is different now than it was when she was growing up. In the early days times were hard. After the WW II economics were better, but then the drought of the 1950s hit. She comments that farmers cannot pass on the cost of fuel, fertilizer or water on to customers like stores can, therefore, farmers must buy more land and equipment and land and soon reach a point of diminishing returns. There is only so much land a farmer can handle. Equipment must



balance labor. Labor balances land, but balance is not always easy. Janelle feels that in America farming is seen as a business, a hard and complicated business.

What does the future hold for farming? “Not much”, is her response. More and more products are brought in from other countries. An increasing trend is to farm out jobs to foreign countries. She doesn’t understand how it can keep going like this and still remain strong economically.

The interview concludes with reflections on her life, her divorce, and deaths in her family. She enjoys her life, finds it exciting to develop new skills.

**TAPE FIVE, SIDE B:** Blank