



ORAL HISTORY PROGRAM
INTERVIEW ABSTRACT

CONSULTANT: Dale Petty

DATE OF BIRTH: July 20, 1954 SEX: Male

DATE(S) OF INTERVIEW: October 26, 1996

LOCATION OF INTERVIEW: Clovis, New Mexico

INTERVIEWER: Jane O'Cain

SOURCE OF INTERVIEW: NMF&RHM__X__OTHER_____

TRANSCRIBED: Yes: January 22, 1998

NUMBER OF TAPES: Two

ABTRACTOR: Sylvia Wheeler

DATE ABSTRATED: June 8, 2001

QUALITY OF RECORDING (SPECIFY): Good

SCOPE AND CONTENT NOTE: Brief personal, family, and farm history. The majority of the interview details the consultant's work in founding the New Mexico Farm and Ranch Heritage Museum.

DATE RANGE: 1940-1996

ABSTRACT (IMPORTANT TOPICS IN ORDER OF APPEARANCE):

TAPE ONE, SIDE A:

Dale Petty became interested in establishing an agricultural museum in 1987 or 1988 when Dr. Stephens called a meeting with the state's farm organizations to discuss the project. Eventually, some members of this group lobbied the state legislature on behalf of the museum project. In 1990, Governor King was elected, and he was sympathetic to the idea of a museum.

Mr. Petty was born on a twelve-hundred-acre, mainly dry land, farm on which was produced wheat, grain sorghum and hay. As years passed his father and he bought several other farms, together they now farm about 3100 acres. (His grandparents came to New Mexico in the early 1940's from eastern Oklahoma.) They run cattle as well.

A teacher in public school first sparked his interest in history with narratives of the struggle for survival, droughts, and depressions. He thinks history should be documented, thus his interest in the Museum.

He believes farming was easier in 1976 than now. He paid \$12,000 for all the equipment he needed to get into farming at that time. Today, you would have to inherit the land; irrigated land costs from five to seven hundred dollars per acre and acreage suitable for dry land farming from three-fifty to four hundred dollars an acre.

In addition to farming the consultant is employed as a lobbyist and field representative for the Farmers Union. (His wife is also employed off the farm as a schoolteacher.) As a lobbyist he represents all crops produced, water bills, and, earlier, with ethanol legislation. He travels to Washington a couple of times a year then shares the information with New Mexico legislators, as well as on the federal level. The Farmers Union was established in New Mexico in 1964.

TAPE ONE, SIDE B:

He was gone from the farm about 150 days the first year he worked for the Farm Bureau, which left the farm work to the weekends. He learned a great deal about worldwide agriculture through international conferences. He speaks of farming in Africa and Russia. He believes U.S. farmers and ranchers do not earn enough for their time and investment.

He belongs to the New Mexico Wheat Growers and to the Rocky Mountain Farmers Union. Some of the people in these groups got involved with the Museum project. Bill McIlhaney, the first president of the Foundation, was a good organizer. Dr. Stephens traveled the state; he didn't want the Museum to be perceived as a Las Cruces project. Petty says that Dr. Stephens could be "pushy," determined. Petty lobbied the legislature with some of Stephens's ideas. Petty regrets that Dr. Stephens didn't live to see his dream fulfilled; he died before the Museum building was built.

The legislature awarded a small amount of money for a feasibility study in '89 or '90. New Mexico State University gave an "in kind" contribution, perhaps ten thousand a year for a few years. In 1992, the legislature awarded the Museum thirty thousand dollars during the Bruce King administration. Bankers wanted "to wait until they saw the building" to contribute.

Petty states that the consultants brought in from Dallas to raise money didn't take the right tone to solicit from New Mexicans. At that time in New Mexico, there was a drought and cattle and grain markets were depressed (it was during the first dairy buyout).

It was also difficult to find the right people in Santa Fe with whom to work. G.X. McSherry on the House Agricultural Committee was very helpful, but they had trouble with legislators from Albuquerque, Santa Fe, and Farmington.

TAPE TWO, SIDE A:

Las Cruces would be the location for the Museum; that was decided rather early in the process. In original plans for the building, a waterwheel was planned for the exterior, and a windmill. They also considered putting up a metal building, but a ranch style building was finally decided upon.

In 1991, the Museum was placed under the Office of Cultural Affairs. Helmuth Naumer, Officer of Cultural Affairs, benefited the project because of his knowledge of museums throughout the state.

The Museum building was designed at seventy thousand square feet with room on the exterior for crop demonstration and livestock. In 1993, controversy over architectural firm bids arose. When the Las Cruces Chamber of Commerce and local people became involved and interested, he believes the Museum project came together more quickly.

Petty thinks the main function of the Museum should be to share with children New Mexico's past, to show them past crops, livestock, and agricultural technologies, as well as the heritage of the state. Petty mentions that corn was grown near Las Cruces in ancient times, and a general interest in American Indian history. He is also interested in regional artifacts.

He discusses the difference between the Museum board that oversees the day-to-day work of the Museum and the Foundation board that oversees the fund raising and moneymaking needs of the Museum. Dr. Stephens had told them it would cost over a million dollars a year for operating costs. Discussion of the choice of a logo arises: Petty laughs at the ensuing confusion.

Petty is asked how Dr. Stephens's contribution could be recognized in the Museum. He considers putting a statue in the lobby. (Petty mentions that Stephens worked best with people one to one.) Petty names Lana Dickson and Dr. Gerald Thomas as two other influential founders of the Museum.

TAPE TWO, SIDE B:

Petty agrees that founding the Museum took longer and was more time consuming than he had originally anticipated. Ideally, they would have been working from the beginning with a master plan, and then started asking for money. As it was, the group of founders cooperated and created the Museum.