

**NEW MEXICO
FARM & RANCH
HERITAGE
MUSEUM**

ORAL HISTORY PROGRAM

INTERVIEW ABSTRACT

CONSULTANT: Royal O'Bannon

DATE OF BIRTH: January 31, 1912 GENDER: Male

DATE(S) OF INTERVIEW: August 16 and 17, 2002

LOCATION OF INTERVIEW: Royal O'Bannon's home in Artesia, N.M.

INTERVIEWER: Jane O'Cain

SOURCE OF INTERVIEW: NMF&RHM OTHER

TRANSCRIBED: Yes: May 4, 2004

NUMBER OF TAPES: Four

ABTRACTOR: Donna Wojcik

DATE ABSTRACTED: July 27, 2005

RECORDING QUALITY (SPECIFY): Good

SCOPE AND CONTENT NOTE: Rural ranch life in the Artesia, N. M. area.

DATE RANGE: 1912-2002

ABSTRACT (IMPORTANT TOPICS IN ORDER OF APPEARANCE):

TAPE ONE, SIDE A:

Roy O'Bannon begins the interview by discussing his parents - when and how they traveled from Missouri to Colorado in 1923, and from Colorado to the Lake Arthur, New Mexico area. He describes the work that his father did at Lake Arthur, working with his horses at different ranches in the area.

Harroun Farms is discussed. Cotton was the main crop. Harroun Farms had their own school, store, and hotel. Workers lived in shacks on the farm. O'Bannon's father worked at Harroun Farms. He discusses his siblings and his job operating a hay-mowing machine. Harroun Farms grew and sold hay. Water from the Pecos River was used for irrigation.

TAPE ONE, SIDE B:

Cotton harvest using itinerant workers is discussed. O'Bannon's mother was an excellent cotton picker; she could pick three hundred pounds of cotton a day.

Harroun Farms grew five-lock Acala cotton, which is long-staple cotton. Pickers were mostly families. O'Bannon comments that he did not have "a knack for cotton picking." Alfalfa was also grown on the farm. The farm had its own blacksmith shop and machine shop.

The O'Bannon family left Harroun Farms in March 1935 because they could not buy any land to farm. They moved to Artesia and got some land. It was irrigated from a well, and cotton and feed for their few cows was grown.

O'Bannon worked on the WPA (Works Progress Administration) project, putting in a new dam after the Lakewood Dam went dry in 1934. He recalls that if you had a team doing dirt work, you were permitted to work them five days a week. However, you were only allowed to drive them three days. Another man was hired to drive them the remaining two days. He recalls that the pay was \$4 per day. Workers were picked up in Malaga in the morning and returned in the evening. Other workers were picked up in Carlsbad and Lovington. The lake was dry in 1935.

Haying at Harrouns' ran ten hours a day during haying season.

O'Bannon returns to the earlier discussion about his father's farming and his own work for the WPA. He worked with the WPA for four months, and then returned to work from ranch to ranch. When he had had enough of ranching, he turned to trucking for Harriet Wilson hauling cattle. He recalls that he did "anything I could do or get to do."

TAPE TWO, SIDE A:

O'Bannon begins a discussion about the Turkey Tracks Ranch. He says that they would wean the calves there and then ship them out of Lake Arthur to a ranch in Montana for summer pasture. When the calves reached two years old they would go to feed pens [feedlots].

He started working there in the spring of 1936 and lived at Rat Camp, so named because of the rats. He fed the cattle (500 bulls) one pound of cake per day per bull. He hauled it with mules and a wagon. He says Turkey Tracks ran 16,000 cattle and had six line camps. Each of the line camps had a specific amount of land that they were responsible for and a certain number of windmills that they were supposed to care for. He recalls that there was only one chuck wagon for the entire ranch.

Cowboys did not have to furnish their own horses. The Turkey Tracks paid \$30 per month plus room and board. The same work in Arizona was five dollars a month more. Typical food and a typical day are reviewed.

O'Bannon was responsible for five or six windmills. When repairs were needed, the Turkey Tracks had its own repairman to fix them.

He recalls that during the 1920s a lot of homesteaders were starved out and just left the area.

Rat Camp was a choice assignment because it was close to Lake Arthur, and families could send their children to the school at Lake Arthur.

Turkey Tracks Ranch was not completely fenced. A lot of it was just open country with some cross fencing in certain spots. There were several traps located throughout the ranch where cattle were gathered before being moved to other locations. Typical traps held 400 to 500 head of cattle.

Turkey Tracks raised Hereford cattle. O'Bannon discusses the treatment for worms and pink eye. Veterinarian services were not available, so ranches treated their own cattle.

O'Bannon recalls that in 1933 President Roosevelt had a lot of cattle killed in an effort to raise the price of beef. He says that some workers took meat from slaughtered animals home because they were starving. People from town would also come out to the ranch to get meat.

TAPE TWO, SIDE B:

Discussion about the Turkey Tracks Ranch continues with O'Bannon stating that it was a good place to work. When asked if he ever left Rat Camp when he worked there, he responded that workers generally went to town on payday. He tells of how he once rushed home to give his paycheck to his mother so that she could go to town the next day to get food. He recalls that by the time he returned to Rat Camp, it was midnight. As the oldest in the family, he took his responsibility to care for the family very seriously.

He remembers that he worked the soil around the family home and planted hay. In the summer of 1937, he yielded ten bales of hay. He says he got \$35 per bale. His mother used the money to pay the interest on the farm.

A brief discussion about the apple and pear orchard that had been removed from the family farm completes the tape.

TAPE THREE, SIDE A:

The O'Bannon family's move from Missouri to Colorado is discussed. O'Bannon remembers that his father pulled the wagon with horses most of the time, although he did have some red mules that he also used. The family rode in the back of the farm wagon that had been rigged with a cover. His father had taken the walking plow apart and tied it under the wagon. They did not have a cow with them when they left Missouri, although his younger twin brothers had sneaked two chicks onto the wagon. All the furniture had been left behind in Missouri. The family began the trip in May and arrived in Colorado in September. O'Bannon recalls that his father would stop to help with harvests along the way in order to make some extra money. All cooking was done over a campfire.

O'Bannon's father was a farmer in Missouri. Grain crops such as oats, wheat, and corn were grown in Missouri. Broomcorn was also a common crop grown in that state. His father did not know anything about cotton farming until he moved west.

He recalls that his mother milked cows back in Missouri. Milk was skimmed, and the cream, butter, and eggs from the chickens were sold. Selling eggs and cream was how a lot of families "got by", says O'Bannon.

He explains what a broadcast binder was and how it worked. He talks about shocks and steam operated threshing machines. He recalls that when he was twelve years old he took the loaded

wagon of grain to town. He remembers that his mother cooked for the threshing crew and says that her specialty was her homemade bread.

He describes a “monkey stove” saying that it was a stove that had an oven that was attached to the stovepipe. *[Research cannot find such a stove with an oven attached to the stovepipe. Perhaps the consultant meant a warming oven that was attached to the stovepipe. This was quite common.]* He describes the area around Delta, Colorado.

O’Bannon’s school days in Colorado and New Mexico are discussed. He recalls that time as being “hit and miss” due to the fact that he helped “run a plow and cultivate.” He remembers that the school was a three-room schoolhouse that went only up to eighth grade.

TAPE THREE, SIDE B:

Continuing discussion of school days. O’Bannon remembers having a test every thirty days while in the eighth grade and that he had to “read for three days to find out what was on one page”. He recalls that there was never any discipline for missing school to work and that you just “tried to catch up when you got back.”

Turkey Track Ranch is revisited. O’Bannon talks about the different foremen that worked there. The scab mite and subsequent dipping of cattle is discussed. When asked what makes a good foreman, O’Bannon replies, “one that’ll feed ya.” Butchering and beef preservation methods are briefly discussed.

Turkey Track had a strict rule about fighting among cowboys. “If you got into a fight, you were gone,” says O’Bannon. Another rule was that if you worked on the ranch you couldn’t take anything off of it. “But if you didn’t take nothing off the ranch,” you got wages.

Turkey Track supplied horses for the Army remount service. O’Bannon recalls that when cowboys came to Turkey Track, they had to bring their own saddle and tack, but that they were provided with a coil of rope. Extra rope was available at the store.

He discusses how his mother washed clothes and remembers that his mother was very strict about clean clothes.

Several area ranches are discussed.

TAPE FOUR, SIDE A:

Discussion about what the cowboys did for reading material when they were out with the cattle. O’Bannon recalls that if they saw a piece of paper anywhere along the trail or while crossing a road, they would get off their horse and read it. Some of the cowboys would buy 10-cent western magazines.

He talks about the bad blood between oil well drillers (referred to as “greasers or oilies”) and the cowboys because the “greasers” were always leaving the gates open.

Toxic plants are discussed. Locoweed is mentioned as one of the more prominent weeds that caused problems for the cattle.

After WWII the oil fields started producing, and many of the boys quit farming to work in the oil fields because the wages were higher. POWs in the Artesia camp is discussed.

O’Bannon discusses how he helped other ranchers with round up, how he found out that they needed help, and how long he would stay to help them.

TAPE FOUR, SIDE B:

O’Bannon discusses the cook at the Cross Stinkus *[sic]* who was an excellent cook. He relates the story of a ranch near Artesia. Upon arriving at the ranch he found a family living there who

had no food, and the small boys were crying because they were hungry. O'Bannon says that the ranch was out for the "mighty dollar" and would not give the family anything to eat.

The Depression years and the migration of families west to California is briefly discussed.

Changes in farm ownership over the years are discussed. O'Bannon feels that the changes are the result of the changing economy and problems with farming.

His years trucking cattle and hauling farm equipment are briefly discussed.

O'Bannon says that round up and branding were the activities he enjoyed the most when he was working for ranches. He feels that working with cattle offers more variety of work and more fellowship that farming does. He fondly remembers the evening sing-alongs.