



ORAL HISTORY PROGRAM

INTERVIEW ABSTRACT

CONSULTANT: Wanda Leighton Gard

DATE OF BIRTH: December 19, 1927 GENDER: Female

DATE(S) OF INTERVIEW: March 27, 2010

LOCATION OF INTERVIEW: Herzstein Memorial Museum, Clayton, N.M.

INTERVIEWER: Richard Chavez

SOURCE OF INTERVIEW: NMFRHM

TRANSCRIBED: No

NUMBER OF TAPES: One

ABSTRACTOR: Donna M. Wojcik

DATE ABSTRACTED: April 7, 2010

RECORDING QUALITY (SPECIFY): Good

SCOPE AND CONTENT NOTE: Ranching in the Clayton area during the Dust Bowl era.

DATE RANGE: 1912-1940s

ABSTRACT (IMPORTANT TOPICS IN ORDER OF APPEARANCE):

TAPE ONE, SIDE A:

Gard's family moved to New Mexico from Woodward County, Oklahoma, in 1912. They had lived in New Mexico earlier, but had moved back to Oklahoma. The permanent move here was because the water was so much better here than it was in Oklahoma.

Her mother traveled by railroad, and her father and some other men brought the cattle and horses by horseback. They filed a homestead claim of 320 acres and proved up the land. The government eventually realized that farmers could not make a living on 120 [160] acres because of the amount of rainfall, so they started making the claims larger. After they proved up on the land they had filed on, they purchased land around their claim so that they would have enough room to run the cattle, and do some farming. Her father also had horses that he used for farming. They grew whatever kind of fodder was needed to feed the cattle over the winter months. While there were sources of water on their land, her father drilled wells run by windmills as soon as they were available. Gard recalls that they moved out to the Clayton, N.M., area at a time when there was quite a bit of rain every year. She does not recall any talk of drought except for the one in the 1930s

The place her grandfather purchased already had a house on it, but most people erected simple houses that were often referred to as "claim shacks." She recalls that people built what they could get by with depending on the amount of money they had to purchase lumber.

Gard's family did not get electricity until the late 1940s; prior to that they used kerosene lamps. At some point in time she says they had some that were run with gasoline, but most people were afraid to use those because of the threat of explosion. Kerosene was much easier to operate and to take care of.

Her father never did farm much after they moved back to New Mexico. She recalls that there were shipping pens on the southwest corner of Clayton, and a lot of ranchers drove their cattle into those pens to await transportation by rail to Denver or Kansas City. Most of the cattle shipped out of the Clayton area went to Denver, she says.

She does not recall her father ever borrowing money from a bank. He traded cattle and horses, and if he borrowed any money it would have been from her grandfather who also lived in Clayton. If her father heard that someone had cattle for sale, he would go to look at them and make an offer if he was interested. She remembers that her father would often take cattle to the auction barn in Clayton if he felt that he could get more money for the cattle than he had paid for them. He would often keep some of the cattle through a season and then sell them.

Gard's mother had a big garden and they would can a lot of vegetables in the fall. When pressure cookers became available, the extension service taught the women to process fruits and vegetables to have over the winter. In later years her father built a small slaughter house down the road from their home and would butcher and sell beef to a few grocery stores in the area.

Leisure activities as a child included playing games and going down to the creek. When the creek was dry they would play in the sand, and when it had water in it there was a spot deep enough for a swimming hole.

She recalls the terrible dust storm of 1935. She recalls that it was the Sunday before Easter and that it was a warm afternoon. Her sister had a few friends over at the house, and they had gone for a walk in the pasture. Gard recalls hearing the honking of the horn of her father's car. He had been in town and was

driving fast and honking his horn. The girls started back to the house before the storm hit. She says that her mother had to light the kerosene lamps because it was so dark. She describes the dust as being "really fine, and it seemed to come in through all the cracks in the house." She says that she was frightened that the end of the world had come. The dust invaded the air in the house. She does not remember how long it lasted, but knows that there was a lot of cleaning up to do.

Her best memories of growing up on the ranch are the riding horses and the cattle.

TAPE ONE, SIDE B:

When asked if she recalls any hardships, Gard says that she was the sixth child in the family, so by the time she got old enough to be aware of hardships things were already under control. Their closest neighbor was about a mile away, and one of her cousins lived about a mile and a half away.

She remembers that there were some people who moved out of the area after the Dust Bowl, but she does not remember seeing any "Okies" looking for work in the area.

The Fourth of July rodeo was always a big event in Clayton, and that was the only time that they came to town on horseback. Gard still attends the rodeo every year.