

**NEW MEXICO
FARM & RANCH
HERITAGE
MUSEUM**

**ORAL HISTORY PROGRAM
INTERVIEW ABSTRACT**

CONSULTANT: Keller Davis

DATE OF BIRTH: September 24, 1946 GENDER: Male

DATE(S) OF INTERVIEW: May 26, 2003

LOCATION OF INTERVIEW: Keller Davis residence

INTERVIEWER: Ramona L. Caplan

SOURCE OF INTERVIEW: NMF&RHM X HSR _____ OTHER _____

TRANSCRIBED: Yes: June 14, 2004

NUMBER OF TAPES: Two

ABTRACTOR: Ramona L. Caplan

DATE ABSTRACTED: August 30, 2004

RECORDING QUALITY (SPECIFY): Excellent (a few inaudible words)

SCOPE AND CONTENT NOTE: Reviews parents' arrivals (1930s) and lives. Mostly focuses on Keller's career as a forage farmer and working at the Coronado Cattle Company. Today works on an all-natural beef project and interactions with racehorse industry. Was a charter member of the N.M. Farm & Ranch Heritage Institute and helped lobby for legislation that created the Museum.

DATE RANGE: 1934-2003

ABSTRACT (IMPORTANT TOPICS IN ORDER OF APPEARANCE):

TAPE ONE, SIDE A:

Talks about photographer Harvey Caplan, who took photos of New Mexico and did images for Resistol/Stetson Hat Co. Identifies men in one Caplan photo of cowboys branding on a Stetson box.

Reviews parents' history. Both raised in Tennessee, came to New Mexico in 1930s. Discusses their respective health problems at the time. Mother worked as a teacher. Dad worked in agriculture (hogs, chickens, cattle) and also sold real estate and insurance.

Describes the ranch (Davis Farms / Coronado Cattle Co.) and Garden Heights Addition subdivision. More details on his youth and parents' work. Converted Bowers Dairy into chicken houses. When 6-7, accompanied mother on egg route, filled trunk of old car with eggs. Eggs, chickens were inspected/graded, but not regulated like today. Started with chickens, then sows, raised hogs, registered sows, sold purebred breeding stock. Sold butchered hogs to Schwartzmans Packing Co.

Dad had wet-waste garbage contracts for several military facilities and businesses in Albuquerque. Discusses lack of rules and what they did with the garbage.

TAPE ONE, SIDE B:

Talks about how he started driving a tractor at age 6.

City purchased Davis Farm in 1960 for sewage treatment plant site. Then leased land from Sandia Indian Reservation. Discusses crops grown on that land, including ten acres farmed by teenage Keller. Sweet corn, turnips. Dad grew pinto beans, alfalfa, oats, and hay. Both sold forage to dairies or fed to their hogs.

First attended Menaul High School, but they had no FFA program. Switched to Valley High School to take FFA and graduated 1965. Attended New Mexico State until received induction papers in 1966. Dad died in 1967, discusses deferments and eventually did not serve. Took over the farm, but phased out the unprofitable hog business.

Discusses other changes in farm and the introduction of cattle in the late 1960s. Details on raising cattle, butchering.

Reviews rise of dairies in Bernalillo County in the 1970s-80s. Raised oats and alfalfas, sold almost all of it to McElhany Dairy. Discusses Dudley Price's massive dairy operation.

Decided to quit agriculture and turn back the Indian lease. Develops Coronado Cattle Co. in late 1980s, buying Holstein bull calves from dairies. Details on how he fed them out. 1992 sees major changes in local dairies and his cattle operation. Bailed out before cattle market crashed in 1993. Quit farming operations in 1997.

Reviews rise of horse market as the dairies phased out. Discusses transition of major dairy operators, including McElhany's, Thatchers, Price's Dairies due to vertical integration, and urbanization. Also discusses Rocky Langley's Roswell operation, Butch Zenns, Key & M Farm, and Jordy [sp?] Farm.

Mother died in 1994. Sold land to settle estate, and sold farm to developers in 1999. Talks about J. C. Schwartzman as a mentor. Talks about hay prices and costs.

TAPE TWO, SIDE A:

Tells of selling wheat in September 2002 for \$5.25/bushel. The following week wheat dropped under \$1/ bushel. Was lucky. Other times had bought high and wished he could have gotten rid of it.

Was invited to attend the first meeting about creating a farm and ranch museum. Bill Stephens was getting idea started, promoted it to get our history written. All agreed it was a good idea but would take money. Stephens arranged with New Mexico State to store old farm equipment and antiques. Was proud to have been an original part of it.

Middle Rio Grande Conservancy District supplies his irrigation system. Was active with Assessment Payers Association. Reviews history of Conservancy District, their work developing irrigation and drainage systems and flood control. Talks about changes to Bosque before and after 1972 construction of Cochiti Dam. Before was flush, feast, and famine. After, in-stream flow. Bosque built up since then. Talks about old erosion control efforts before dams and flood control.

Concerns about lack of channel maintenance in recent years and possible causes for future floods. Talks about "slug of silt" near Los Lunas from Tonque Draw in 1970s thunderstorm. Silt slowly moving down river, needs good flush to carry it out farther. Environmentalists' obstructionist attitude bothers him. They want natural now; can't have natural now, got to manage river. Silt must be kept flowing. Too regulated now, too many lawsuits. Ought to get started now, get lawsuit through court system, and get problem solved.

Discusses changes on West Mesa, Rio Rancho, Paradise Hills, Taylor Ranch in the last thirty years. Talks about rotational irrigation during 1960s drought. Hard to make a profit. Water laws are so regulated. Discussed need for water hydrology engineering programs.

Reviews family life. No children, three dogs, married twenty-three years (m. 1980). Wife is Executive Director of the New Mexico Horse Breeders Association. She grew up on a farming ranch near Roswell, graduated from Goddard High School and University of Arizona. Worked at Santa Fe Downs, New Mexico Racing Commission, and the breeders association (since 1991). Administers purse funds, breeders economic incentive awards paid to New Mexico breeding farms and breeders. Money comes from racetracks and incentives for New Mexico horse breeders.

Talks about changes brought by slot machines, problems for Pojoaque Indians operating Santa Fe Downs. Had been as successful as Ruidoso Downs. Talks about old track at Raton, possibility of new tracks there and at Hobbs. Most horse breeding farms are in rural areas and need tremendous amounts of alfalfa, which would help hay farmers, ranchers, and farms. Was selling hay \$4.50-6/bale. Now \$6-8 since he quit farming. Supply and demand, tremendous increase in dairy and horse industries drove prices up.

Talks about work at his old operation. Had twelve workers. Gives details about typical schedule preparing for and feeding calves.

TAPE TWO, SIDE B:

Continues discussion of milk feeding for calves. Used different types of powdered milk, grain, and forage. Hi-Pro Feeds came every other week to leave medicines. Did his own vet work, had certain diseases and problems each season. Always adapting to changing programs and weather. Particular problems posed in 1998, wettest year.

Talks about changes for small farmers. Used to evolve with environment and natural changes. Little family farm—chickens, pigs, cows/goats, own milk, and cured own bacon/hams—will never come again. Discusses dominance of Tyson Foods in chicken, shrimp, catfish, lamb, pork, and beef. Farmers have become serfs. Concerned what will happen if Tyson becomes so big it collapses or if a food-borne disease in one segment affects all. Briefly reviews organic foods produced and sold regionally.

Discusses current project working with producers and developing a new distribution system. Discusses example of Valencia County rancher. Wants to sacrifice some efficiency in industry to provide natural/normal product. Would sell direct to consumer for family freezer: steaks, hamburger, brisket, and ribs—rainbow of cuts. Then to restaurants [steaks], JB's BBQ [ribs], hamburger joints. Develop a market and create a sustained supply. Restaurants push prime rib, not premium loins—tenderizing lower-cost cuts and calling it prime rib.

Suggests others that should be interviewed. J. C. Schwartzman of Schwartzman Packing. Another packer here, Jess Karlar; Jewish packer, did no pork. Schwartzman did beef, pork, lamb. In the old days, Schwartzman Packing Company had “Hit me easy, I'm full of baloney” on all their delivery truck, sold Coronado Brand baloney and bacon.

Deals with Cabezon Cattlemens Association now. Cabezon Wilderness Study going on, people who lived here 2-300 years. Concerns about Wilderness Alliance mission and goals, need for people on land to take care of it. Other possible interviewees: Rusty Sandoval, R.W. Johnson.

Talks about Frank Bond Company, used to be sheep and wool warehouse, now moving company. Had owned the Valles Grande for range. Wintered near Rio Rancho near King Brothers ranch.

Reviews local controversy about preserving the petroglyphs (west side of Albuquerque). There were sheep-shearing pens where Ladera, Saint Pius [X] High School is now. Sheep herders brought sheep in spring to area by volcanoes; water, windmills up there. Waited their turn to bring sheep into shearing house, seldom crossed river. No electric shearing then. Herders bored, sat up on rocks watching sheep, nothing else to do, made those etchings on rocks. Believes very few petroglyphs were made by Indians, most were made by Mexican/Indian herders. But not the petroglyphs by Rio Puerco. These are stories he heard from sheep herders and old cowboys.

Trying to buy three acres south of him, then would be surrounded by reservation on three sides. From his place can see mountains east & west.

[Note: An article about Keller Davis was published in *New Mexico Stockman*, specific issue unknown.]