



ORAL HISTORY PROGRAM
INTERVIEW ABSTRACT

CONSULTANT: Armon T. Austin

DATE OF BIRTH: February 25, 1919 GENDER: Male

DATE(S) OF INTERVIEW: August 2, 2007

LOCATION OF INTERVIEW: Home of Armon and Margaret Austin

INTERVIEWER: Gail D'Arcy

SOURCE OF INTERVIEW: NMF&RHM ____ OTHER Cedarvale History Project

TRANSCRIBED: No

NUMBER OF TAPES: Two

ABTRACTOR: Donna M. Wojcik

DATE ABSTRACTED: August 21, 2007

RECORDING QUALITY (SPECIFY): Good

SCOPE AND CONTENT NOTE: Early rural living in the Estancia Valley area of New Mexico

DATE RANGE: 1919 - 2007

ABSTRACT (IMPORTANT TOPICS IN ORDER OF APPEARANCE):

TAPE ONE, SIDE A:

The tape begins with in the middle of a discussion regarding the federal government payments to farmers to not plant crops. Taped is turned off at consultant's request.

Interview session begins with family genealogy. Great-grandfather was born in Kentucky and lived in East Texas before homesteading in Cedarvale, N.M. Armon's father was born in Leonard, Texas and was twenty-five years old when he arrived at Cedarvale. Originally his grandfather, father, and two uncles traveled to Cedarvale area in 1916 via Taos, N.M. They found a nice piece of land with a squatter's cabin on it. This 640 acres was purchased from the owner who lived in Lucy, N.M. Grandfather had to apply for the homestead rights. The family then returned to Texas, loaded up their household items, and transported them on the Santa Fe rail. The train route at that time was through Lucy, Willard, and then into Belen.

More family history is reported. After the initial 640 acres was purchased, Armon's grandfather and sons homesteaded more property. In 1942 Armon bought 320 acres that his grandfather had homesteaded on. He shares the story of the time when he helped his father plow the fields. His father had traded a pair of binoculars for a gray horse, and Armon rode the sled pulled by the horse. He got tired of riding the sled ahead of his father so he wadded up the lines and rode on the horse. His father got him off the horse and back onto the sled, telling him that he would do a better job if he rode the sled. Armon did not see any difference, so he got back up on the horse. His father stopped him again and told him that the horse could throw him and then run over him with the "knifer"; he also commented that he did not have the money to buy a casket. Armon rode the sled until noon, and then rode the horse again. His father eventually sold the horse for ten dollars. The new owners of the horse got thrown when they tried to ride it. Armon's father explained that the horse had been a rodeo horse and would buck if it was saddled. The reason Armon did not get bucked off was because he had not used a saddle.

Armon describes the town of Lucy. It had a school, depot, blacksmith, justice of the peace, two stores, post office, and gas station. There was also a ladies' auxiliary there. Now the town of Lucy is mostly vacant homes. Armon was born in Lucy on a snowy night in February 1919. The doctor had come from Willard by train, and Armon's dad had sledged him to the house where Armon was born.

Armon remembers the drought in 1923 and recalls that people left the area to find work. Armon's family went to Clovis in search of work, while the grandparents stayed at the homestead. Armon's brother died in Clovis after being poisoned from tainted Vienna Sausages at the age of two. While the entire family ate the sausages, his brother had died after eating one bite. He is buried in Clovis.

TAPE ONE, SIDE B:

The family lived in Clovis until 1928, when they returned to the Cedarvale area. They traveled in a Model T, pulling a trailer loaded with household goods. The roads were very treacherous, and climbing the Caprock of Post, Texas was very steep and difficult. [Details regarding this trip are questioned, as Post, TX is not along the way from Clovis to Cedarvale.] Armon recalls that he and his mother were pushing the car up the hill when a man came along in a truck, offering to tow them up the hill. Armon was nine years old at the time. After their return to New Mexico, the family never left. In 1928, crops were just coming up when a hailstorm knocked the crop down. His father planned to return to Texas to work in the [cotton] gin there, but his mother told him that they were either staying in New Mexico or going back to Texas and never returning to New Mexico. His father decided to stay in New Mexico.

Armon recalls that folks would go to Belen or the copper mines in Hurley in search of work during those drought years. There was a bumper crop in 1929.

The family grew corn, beans, and a little wheat. Beans were transported from Cedarvale to Duran by wagon and team. Armon recalls that his father sold his first crop of beans to a company in Duran.

Armon describes the family home. It consisted of two rooms: a 10' X 16' and a 16' X 16'. Water was hauled from the McGilroy Ranch. The family kept a barrel in the kitchen for drinking water; Armon recalls that it would freeze in the winter. Armon's father built a tank for hauling water and set it on the wagon. They dipped water into buckets and dumped the water into the haulin' tank. They had to pay for the water. Often his father would swap pasture grass to the seed man in exchange for water. The seed man was a sheep rancher and ran two bands of sheep (2500 sheep per band) on his land.

A story is told off tape, then the tape recording resumes. Armon recalls that they had milk cows. The family supported itself by selling corn and beans. He remembers that his mother put food up in canning jars. They raised hogs, and meat was often hung on the north side of the house or wrapped in a tarp. They raised chickens and traded eggs and cream for groceries. Staples of coffee, sugar, and flour were purchased. His mother would use fifty pounds of flour every three weeks. Armon comments that they got more bags back than people get when they spend one hundred dollars today. He remembers his mother separated the milk and cream to churn into butter.

Armon says that farming is not work. He says it is just twenty-four hours a day steady. He has suffered health problems, but believes that God will take care of it. The tape is turned off and restarted.

Armon tells the story of the time his father asked him to dig out a post that was in the field that was being plowed. Armon had not made much progress in the morning, so after lunch his father told him to take his water jar with him because he would not be returning to the house until the post was out. Armon says it did not take him long to dig up the post, since he did not want to stay out in the hot sun for long.

The consultant's mother had gallbladder problems; after Armon was born she needed to have surgery. She and Armon took the train to Woods County, TX, where his uncle [mother's brother] lived. His mother had the surgery, and his aunt nursed him while his mother recovered. His aunt had a girl the same age as Armon, so she nursed them both.

Skimmed milk was often fed to calves once the cream had been taken off. The tape is briefly turned off. In the early years, Armon recalls that railroad workers would often throw coal off the train as it went by so that poor families could use it in the winter.

Prior to 1928, the family went to town by team and wagon, but that year his father purchased a Model T. In 1930 his father traded horses for a Garrett [unknown] car, which he had purchased in Albuquerque. Most trips to town were on Saturday, but they didn't go every week. When asked what they did for fun, he recalls that they had picnics, attended ice-cream socials or met for games. Often they would meet for singing conventions. These events were held at different houses throughout the area.

The local church, Center Valley Church, began as a community church. Several of the prominent families in the area were Baptist, so it eventually became a Baptist church.

The town of Progresso was the territorial capital of New Mexico [misstated: Progresso was the county seat for Torrance County from March 1903 to February 1905]. He says that in those days it seemed that the county seat was wherever the toughest people were. The interviewer recalls hearing a story that men

from Estancia came to Progreso, removed all the records, and moved them to Estancia because they wanted it to be the county seat.

The railroad was taken out of service in the Estancia Valley area in 1930. Willard was the major stop for settlers arriving by train because they could get horses and wagons from the livery stables; they also could get the lumber and supplies that they needed. In the early years in the Estancia Valley, the grass was good and there were plenty of buffalo.

Armon comments that today “We’re getting too sophisticated and educated to know your neighbors.” The tape is stopped and restarted, and there is a very brief discussion of chivalry.

TAPE TWO, SIDE A:

The tape begins with the interview in progress. The consultant tells the story of his appendicitis attack, and immediate surgery in 1952 or 1953. Tape is paused.

Armon tells the story of how he met his wife, their courtship, and their marriage. He recalls that her father wouldn’t let them marry until she had finished school and had her diploma. The tape is turned off and restarted.

The consultant, his wife, and the interviewer spend time looking at photographs of the church and baptisms. The tape is stopped and restarted, and Armon tells the story of the time he worked at the Estancia Hotel. After a run-in with a store owner about the return of an unused saw that had been purchased by the hotel owner, his father’s advice was to not take anything from anyone. He had said, “If you don’t go back to the store and whoop him, I’ll whoop you.”

There is a brief discussion about families in the area.

TAPE TWO, SIDE B:

The consultant continues the discussion of families in the neighborhood, and the names and location (east, west, south or north) of their land is given. The following family names are mentioned (in order):

Plant	Dominic	Gottley	Harris	Morris	Hawkins
Garrett	Powers	Bayoff	Williams	Carella	Luna
Wright	Rhodes	Osborne	Harper	Brown	Mitchell
Maiz	Campbell	McCloud	Jones		

The discussion continues to the end of the interview.