

**NEW MEXICO
FARM & RANCH
HERITAGE
MUSEUM**

**ORAL HISTORY PROGRAM
INTERVIEW ABSTRACT**

CONSULTANT: Druella Wilbanks

DATE OF BIRTH: May 28, 1940 SEX: Female

DATE(S) OF INTERVIEW: May 23, 1996

LOCATION OF INTERVIEW: Wilbanks residence, Rural Maljamar, New Mexico

INTERVIEWER: Jane O'Cain

SOURCE OF INTERVIEW: NMF&RHM x OTHER _____

TRANSCRIBED: Yes: April 11, 1997

NUMBER OF TAPES: Two

ABTRACTOR: O'Cain

DATE ABSTRATED: September 22, 2000

QUALITY OF RECORDING (SPECIFY): Good

SCOPE AND CONTENT NOTE: Personal and family history of Taylor family, homesteaders in eastern New Mexico in 1907. Discusses the consultant's involvement with the Cowbelles, including her role as state president of the organization, and her duties as a member of the New Mexico Farm and Ranch Heritage Foundation board of directors.

DATE RANGE: 1907-1996

ABSTRACT (IMPORTANT TOPICS IN ORDER OF APPEARANCE):

TAPE ONE, SIDE A:

The consultant was born in Artesia, New Mexico, on May 28, 1940. She was reared in the home she presently occupies on the family's ranch near Maljamar, New Mexico. She attended public school in Lovington, New Mexico, and graduated from high school in 1958.

The consultant's great-grandfather, J. L. Taylor of Midland, Texas, arrived in New Mexico to homestead in the southeastern part of the state in 1907. The Taylors raised both cattle and sheep. The Wilbanks remained in the sheep business until 1986-87 when they sold their herd. They went out of the sheep business because of coyote predation, which became more of a factor with changes in the law pertaining to trapping coyotes. The family originally went into the sheep business when her grandfather, Dru Taylor, took some sheep in payment of a debt.

She discusses the vegetation on the ranch, stating that cattle will eat shinnery oak, but only after it has bloomed (it is poisonous before that).

The consultant discusses the difficult economic times being experienced by cattle ranchers in 1996. New Mexico is experiencing drought conditions, and the cattle market is very depressed. She remembers the drought of the 1950s. It did not have a serious impact on her; she states that it was her parents' problem then and not hers. She does remember some of the cattle getting so weak that they had to be "tailed up" in order to get them to eat.

Wilbanks married in 1959, but she and her husband did not move to the ranch until sometime in the 1960s when her father approached them about coming to work for him. Her husband had been working in the oil business. (Her husband's family, the Wilbanks, came to New Mexico to work in the oil fields in the Maljamar area.) Their decision to return to the ranch represented a sacrifice in terms of the salary they could earn in comparison to Mr. Wilbanks' earnings in the oil field, as well as the adjustment related to "working for your parents." Neither of the consultant's sisters were interested in ranching, consequently she felt that if she and her husband did not return the ranch might have been sold or leased.

As a girl, she remembers being a "tomboy" and specifically recalls "neighboring" with other ranchers when they were branding and working cattle. She also remembers going out with ranchers from the area on "coyote hunts."

She discusses at some length changes that have occurred in family and social life of ranchers during her lifetime.

TAPE ONE, SIDE B:

She describes the parties held in Maljamar at the recreation club provided by the oil company when she was a girl. They also had "Sandhill" parties attended by children from surrounding communities. She believes that things were more difficult in her mother's generation than her own. The consultant describes attending the Open Range Cowboy's Association in Lea County. It is difficult for her to believe that her history is significant in comparison to her mother and father's experiences.

As a youngster in high school, Wilbanks managed the small general store in Maljamar. After the Wilbanks returned to the ranch she worked for a few years at the Maljamar post office. However, after her three children started school in Lovington much of her time was spent in driving them to activities.

The consultant discusses the history of the town of Maljamar (named for the three children of an oil executive). It was a busy place at one time, because the oil companies built “camps” where the oil workers lived (none of these camps are extant). When cars and roads became more reliable it was possible for the oil workers to live elsewhere and drive to work. Wilbanks was given plans for the camp housing, but has been unable to locate any photographs of the camp or of Maljamar in its heyday.

She discusses her involvement with the Cowbelles’ organization that culminated in her serving as state president in 1987. Her theme during her presidency was “Preserving Our Heritage.”

TAPE TWO, SIDE A:

She feels the role of the Cowbelles is to “stress the importance of the beef industry,” and to “go against the people that are fightin’ the beef industry . . . you’ve got to be prepared for ‘em . . .”

In addition to being a member of the Open Range Cowboys Association, she is also a member of the Lea County Cowboy Hall of Fame. She has been a board member of the New Mexico Farm and Ranch Heritage Museum (hereafter Museum) since 1994 when she was nominated by her daughter’s father-in-law, Earl Ray Forehand, then Foundation board president.

Wilbanks first learned about the Museum when Dr. Bill Stephens spoke at a state Cowbelles’ meeting. At the time, she had “mixed emotions” about the Museum because she understood that if your farm or ranch was designated a heritage property tourists would come to visit and tour the ranch. She also thought that there might be expectations regarding donating of money. She feels that fund raising in her area might be difficult as many people support the Lea County Cowboy Hall of Fame and prefer to keep donations local.

She believes it is very important that the Museum documents the history of ranching in New Mexico, and provide books for visitors to the Museum on the history of New Mexico ranches and ranching families. She is also concerned that artifacts accepted into the collections are New Mexico-related. She believes that word-of-mouth advertising will be an important factor in the success of the Museum, and would be concerned if the visitor was “disappointed” after their visit.

The consultant feels that board members should be actively involved in the day-to-day operation of the Museum, perhaps volunteering a day or two in the gift shop every few months or in doing demonstrations.

TAPE TWO, SIDE B:

She discusses again her concern that history is being lost, and shares historical photographs of her family. [These photographs have been duplicated and are held by Rio Grande Historical Collection, New Mexico State University, Las Cruces, under the accession name Holeman.]