



ORAL HISTORY PROGRAM
INTERVIEW ABSTRACT

CONSULTANT: Adair Merrell

DATE OF BIRTH: March 25, 1927 GENDER: Male

DATE(S) OF INTERVIEW: August 5, 2000

LOCATION OF INTERVIEW: Merrell residence, Cotton City, New Mexico

INTERVIEWER: Mollie Pressler

SOURCE OF INTERVIEW: NMF&RHM OTHER

TRANSCRIBED: Yes: March 2, 2001

NUMBER OF TAPES: One

ABTRACTOR: Sylvia Wheeler

DATE ABSTRATED: April 27, 2001

QUALITY OF RECORDING (SPECIFY): Good

SCOPE AND CONTENT NOTE: Prisoners of war from Camp Lordsburg, and a branch camp in Duncan, Arizona, were transported by Merrell and his father to area farms and ranches.

DATE RANGE: 1944-1945

ABSTRACT (IMPORTANT TOPICS IN ORDER OF APPEARANCE):

TAPE ONE:

In 1944, Merrell's father, Orison, began transporting prisoners of war (POW) from Camp Lordsburg to Virden area farms (a distance of thirty-five miles). In 1945, he started transporting POWs from a POW branch camp at Greenlee County Fairgrounds in Duncan, Arizona. He would transport thirty to forty prisoners every morning and be accompanied by guards.

The war was nearly over, but the POWs were willing to work, to stay busy. They picked and hoed cotton, potatoes and onions. They got acquainted with the farmers and their labor was needed. POWs brought their lunches. They were German POWs. He says they were not told not to talk to them.

Hauling was their family's business; thirty-five miles an hour was top speed, the roads were narrow. Farmers paid his father and him for transporting the POWs through the Duncan Valley Potato Growers Association. He also hauled produce.

POW labor came before the Bracero program, though some Mexican American families in Virden worked side by side with the POWs. Farm boys were let out of school in the afternoon to pick cotton in 1943, but not with the POWs.

The camps were well administered. He joined the service in 1945; upon his return, his father purchased many items from the then demobilized camp. Later Merrell bought a building from an Arizona Air Base, moved it to Duncan, and lived in it. He recalls no incidents from the POW camp, but feels the POWs were very helpful to agriculture.