

NEW MEXICO
FARM & RANCH
HERITAGE
MUSEUM

ORAL HISTORY PROGRAM

INTERVIEW ABSTRACT

CONSULTANT: F. Roe Lovelace

DATE OF BIRTH: March 5, 1938 GENDER: Female

DATE(S) OF INTERVIEW: October 29, 2007

LOCATION OF INTERVIEW: Farm and Ranch Heritage Museum, Las Cruces, N.M.

INTERVIEWER: Donna M. Wojcik

SOURCE OF INTERVIEW: NMF&RHM X OTHER_

TRANSCRIBED: No

NUMBER OF TAPES: Three

ABTRACTOR: Donna M. Wojcik

DATE ABSTRACTED: November 14, 2007

RECORDING QUALITY (SPECIFY): Good

SCOPE AND CONTENT NOTE: Sheep and cattle ranching in southern New Mexico

DATE RANGE: 1894-2000

ABSTRACT (Important Topics in Order of Appearance):

TAPE ONE, SIDE A:

The interview begins with her family's background and their arrival in New Mexico in the late 1800s. Lovelace's grandfather, W.R. Lovelace Sr. began his sheep business at age sixteen. He worked as a shepherd in Midland, Texas, and arranged to take sheep as payment for herding. In 1894 he moved to New Mexico and purchased his first ranch, the Malpais Ranch, at White Oaks. He was impressed with Lincoln County and the fact that there were no bad weeds for sheep. W.R. Sr. and his brother, Morgan, also bought a ranch near Claunch, which they called Dulce Ranch. Both ranches ran cattle and were approximately 35 sections each. W.R. later bought Morgan out. In 1896 the Headquarters Ranch was purchased. On its 125 sections W.R. built a home. This sheep ranch was open land consisting of mostly deeded land, although there was some state land included.

The Headquarters ranch was made up of cedar and piñon trees on the west side and flats on the east. The flats were good for sheep because there were no trees for the coyotes to hide behind. The ranch was at 6,500 feet elevation. Lovelace's father, W.R. Lovelace Jr., and his wife Frances, a concert pianist, lived in Arizona in a one room hogan [a Navajo Indian dwelling constructed of earth and branches and covered with mud or sod] with a window.

In 1934 W.R. Sr. moved all the sheep and cows from the ranches to Arizona because of drought. W.R., Jr. was in charge of the cattle, and Navajo herders cared for the sheep. W.R. Jr. returned to the Malpais Ranch and lived there until 1940, when he built a California-style adobe home with a red tile roof on land located five miles south of the Headquarters. He named it Monte Alto. This was the home Lovelace grew up in.

After W.R.'s death in 1965, Lovelace would go to the ranch during the summer. She would work as a ranch hand, marking lambs and branding. Her brother, Holt, was running the ranch. When Lovelace was growing up at Monte Alto, she managed a herd of dogie lambs that had been rejected by the ewes, often feeding 30-35 head three times a day. She kept the dogie ewe lambs and started her own herd. Her father eventually traded her herd for Angus cattle. He felt that Angus cattle were better than Herefords because they did not have any problems with cancer eye, bad bags, or birthing. He eventually replaced all the Herefords with Angus cattle.

When asked if ranchers can run sheep and cattle on the same land, Lovelace replied that they could as long as they are not overgrazed. Ranchers can run 5 sheep to 1 cow. Cattle eat the longer, heavier, and courser grasses, while sheep only eat the fine grass and never eat it down to the ground. The ranch terrain was suitable for both cattle and sheep. Cattle prefer the timbered areas that offer protection from winter storms. Sheep prefer the flats, where they can get into the natural limestone sinkholes to get out of the rain.

There was no natural occurring water. The Lovelaces had fourteen windmills to maintain in addition to the dirt tanks and piped water to the pastures. When there was no wind, they used diesel pump jacks. The shallowest well was 425 feet deep and the deepest was 920 feet.

Sheep will not drink dirty water or eat coarse grass or coarse hay. Fine stem hay from Roswell was fed to the sheep. In the winter months, cotton seed cake was a mainstay. The water tanks were cleaned with Clorox [bleach], and coffee cans were used to skim off the algae.

Shearing was done under a tarp, to protect the wool from excess dirt. In 1956 W.R. Jr. built a barn at Hasperos with a cement floor. Hasperos was located in the center of sheep country. At first, the barn floor was rough, causing the wool to get caught. They solved this by holding a barn dance, which wore the cement smooth.

There is a discussion regarding the shearers. There was one man in charge of all the individual herds, and one herder was responsible for 300-400 sheep. The herders slept in canvas tents. Haulers delivered wood and water to each camp with wagons and burros.

The Lovelace ranches maintained a commissary which provided clothing, shoes, food, and other supplies. Single men working on the ranches had all their food supplied to them. A basic shopping list consisted of pinto beans, potatoes, canned tomatoes, canned beans and corn, eggs, and onions. The men usually made their own tortillas.

TAPE ONE, SIDE B:

W.R. Sr. would often trade land for wagons and mules. Once he had the deeded land from the homesteaders, he would drill a well. In all, he held approximately 36,000 acres of deeded land, 34,000 acres of BLM land, and 19,000 acres of State land.

Cows from the Malpais and Dulce ranches were worked at the Headquarters. Lovelace recalls her mother bringing lunch for the cattle train from Malpais and Dulce as they crossed the railroad tracks at Tecolote.

Lambing corrals were built at three locations, giving the ewes a safe place to lamb. W.R. Jr. found that if the ewes were left alone to lamb as nature intended, the lambing percentages increased. Lovelace used the Farmer's Almanac to determine what time of year to shear the sheep. She would figure out when the Easter storm would be and shear after the storm. Easter storms were always ice storms; without the wool to protect them, the sheep would die. The ranch sheared about 50,000 pounds of wool per year. Twenty shearers could do the whole herd in a week. The wool was put into large sacks and trucked to Roswell, where the buyers would come. The Lovelace herd was mainly Rambouillet sheep. Buyers would examine the wool, grade it, and make a bid for it.

Electricity and telephone lines to Monte Alto and Headquarters were installed in the early 1950s. Lovelace's mother served on the Rural Electrification Association board. There were six parties on the original phone lines. In the 1980s electricity to the ranches came from the Eastern New Mexico Co-op.

A typical round of work is discussed. At the time of shearing, sheep were de-ticked and tagged. Each pasture had a specific tag color. After lambing in May, the sheep were marked, which included castrating, stamp branding, earmarks, and docking the tails. The tails were saved and counted so they knew how many head there were. There were never any problems with rustling. Once the work with the sheep was done, it was time to castrate, earmark, vaccinate and brand the cows and calves. Shipping occurred in late October/early November, which was the end of the fiscal year. The ranch bookkeeping got all messed up after the government said that the fiscal year could only end on December 31. At the time of shipping, the steers and heifers that would be sold were separated from the rest.

The Angus cattle were eventually crossed with Brahman bulls to produce Brangus cattle. At the time the ranch was sold in 1992 the whole cattle herd was Brangus. Angus bulls became too expensive.

TAPE TWO, SIDE A:

Buyer representatives would come to the house to see the cattle and would contact the buyers. Lovelace recalls one rep that would just call and ask how many she had for sale because he already had an interested buyer. Money was made pound for pound across the scale. When W.R. Jr. was running the ranch, he did everything by wire. He would drive to Corona, send a wire to the cattle or wool buyers, and would wire the banks for loans.

The sheep were moved by truck. Lovelace's brother improved the roads so that the trucks could go down to Hasperos where there was a weigh scale. Caliche was put on the roads to harden them.

Prices fluctuated from year to year despite the fact that operating costs continued to increase. Usually only enough money was made off the sale to keep going for another year. It was necessary to apply for credit every year, but the loans would be paid off each year and the cycle would start all over again.

In 1973 there were severe losses due to weather. The sheep had been sheared before the Easter storm and 700 ewes in the corrals were lost; many in the pastures were also lost. It was this event that caused Lovelace to refer to the Farmer's Almanac each year to pinpoint the time of the Easter storm before the sheep were sheared.

Planes were used to hunt coyotes, with the doors wired open for easy shooting. They were also used for rounding up cattle. Planes were never used for rounding up the sheep because they are too skittish. Neighbors often helped each other to hunt for coyotes.

There were no toxic plants on the ranch due to the high elevation; however cockleburrs and burdock weed were troublesome to ranchers. During the winter months cattle and sheep ate winter fat, a relative of the sage plant, which helps the animals put on fat. There was good grass cover on the ranches. Gamma grass is a favorite of the sheep.

The Bureau of Land Management instituted a sheep rotation program, in which ranchers were to rotate their sheep in the middle of the lambing season. Lovelace tried it one year, but never rotated after that because the lambs were being separated from their mothers at a critical time. Moving the sheep to unfamiliar pastures meant that they were unfamiliar with safe hiding places from predators and weather, and caused a lower calving rate for cattle.

Lovelace worked with government agencies on various projects but was not always agreeable to them. One such project was when state land acreage was opened for hunting. Lovelace had to move the cattle to the flats during the hunting season so they would not get shot at. She recalls that there were 956 hunters wandering the ranch on the first weekend of hunting season and that she had no control over them being on her land. In the beginning the rancher had to pick up all the garbage and beer cans that were left on the ranch. Ranchers are now paid one cent per acre to feed and water the deer to keep them on the land for hunting.

TAPE TWO, SIDE B:

Lovelace recalls that her father brought elk from Yellowstone, Wyoming to the ranch and kept them fenced in. He fed them tobacco, which was good for killing worms. After the elk were released, they migrated to the Capitan and Gallinas Mountains, which they were better suited for. Her father also brought Mouflon sheep that bred with neighbor's sheep. Lovelace recalls that they had to buy a lot of mixed lambs that year from the other ranchers. Pheasants were also raised and released on the ranch. She tells the story of the fire in the Capitan Mountains, and how she had held Smokey Bear, the young cub rescued in the fire.

Vegetable gardens were planted for their own consumption. Her father had planted rye pasture one year, but it was a flop due to lack of rain. At the Malpais Ranch, alfalfa was planted because there was a good well. The attempts to farm the land were not successful, and after the round bales of alfalfa broke down and deteriorated and the well caved in, farming was abandoned.

Lovelace recalls that the only chores that she had when she was visiting on the ranch was feeding the doggie lambs. W. R. would kill one of the two lambs that a ewe would have, thus producing one good lamb and increasing the profit. Lovelace was upset when she heard this, so she offered to raise the second lamb. This was how she got started raising lambs.

Lovelace does not recall any community events as a child, but as a ranch owner, she held barbeques. The family spent major holidays together. Branding and roundup were events where everyone participated in one form or another.

The nearest doctor was in Carrizozo. She recalls that the ranch kept snakebite kits on hand, but she does not recall that they ever had to use any. No cemetery was nearby, so ranches often dug graves on their own land. The Cattle Growers Association and the Wool Growers Association were not supportive of the Burial Grounds Act regarding archaeological digs for ancient Indian burial sites on their ranch land.

Lovelace recalls that a typical breakfast consisted of oatmeal, eggs, bacon, and toast. Her mother started the hot lunch program at the Corona School. She remembers Lovelace recalls that lunch was generally a lighter meal such as soup and a sandwich. Supper meals were hearty; a typical Sunday meal was roast, salad, potatoes and vegetables, or steak with baked potatoes and vegetables.

The family had its own chickens, and Lovelace collected the eggs every day and picked vegetables from the garden. Her mother canned a lot of vegetables. After they purchased a freezer, she froze the vegetables. Leisure times were far and few between, and spare time was spent cleaning house, going on picnics, or going to rodeo. During the war years they did not get out much.

Lovelace discusses how she met her husband, Louis, and talks about his family's Basque heritage. She says that Louis taught her a lot about sheep ranching. Her father was the Racing Commissioner, and owned race horses. Her mother really loved horse racing.

TAPE THREE, SIDE A:

Lovelace opens with a discussion of the Roswell lights. The family had been traveling home from Corona when her parents saw a large, bright light in the sky in the direction of Roswell. Her father went out the next day to find the spot where he thought the light had been. Although the military reported it was a weather balloon, her father disagreed and said that it had been too bright to be a weather balloon.

She discusses the Trinity Site atomic test. She recalls that the government had quietly gone around buying up cattle from areas around the bomb site because many of the cattle had white radiation burns on their hides. Trenches were dug, and the cattle were killed and buried in the trenches.

After the ranch was sold in 1992, Lovelace traveled around the world and worked with the Commission on Indian Affairs, lobbying for such things as water rights. She enjoyed seeing the native cultures in the countries she visited. In 1998 she sold her home in Santa Fe and moved to different places in the eastern United States. She recalls the day she met Dr. Bill Stephens and states that she was one of the first to donate items to the Museum.