



**ORAL HISTORY PROGRAM**  
INTERVIEW ABSTRACT

CONSULTANT: Jupe Means

DATE OF BIRTH: April 20, 1916 GENDER: Male

DATE(S) OF INTERVIEW: February 20 & 21, 1996

LOCATION OF INTERVIEW: H Bar Y Ranch, Buckhorn, New Mexico

INTERVIEWER: Jane O'Cain

SOURCE OF INTERVIEW: NMF&RHM\_\_x\_\_OTHER\_\_\_\_\_

TRANSCRIBED: Yes: January 14, 1998

NUMBER OF TAPES: Five

ABTRACTOR: Jane O'Cain

DATE ABSTRATED: March 28, 2001

QUALITY OF RECORDING (SPECIFY): Good. Occasionally the table would be bumped, causing the microphone to reverberate.

SCOPE AND CONTENT NOTE: History of the H Bar Y Ranch in western New Mexico. Weather conditions, improvements to the ranch (roads and water pipelines), changes in technology that improved efficiency, domestic life, and personal history. Also discussed was the consultant's ranch in Estancia, New Mexico, and his ranching business in California. Tape Five briefly details the consultant's involvement in founding the New Mexico Farm and Ranch Heritage Museum.

DATE RANGE: 1916-1996

## **ABSTRACT (IMPORTANT TOPICS IN ORDER OF APPEARANCE):**

### **TAPE ONE, SIDE A:**

The consultant's grandfather purchased two western New Mexico ranches in 1916 when they "droughted out" in Texas. A book was written about one of these ranches, *The H Bar Y History* by Laura Cotton. In 1919, Means's parents moved to Buckhorn, New Mexico, to "take charge" of the H Bar Y Ranch where the consultant currently resides. The buildings on the ranch were constructed of adobe bricks. The present-day ranch house has been remodeled at least twice, his father made \$60,000 worth of improvements, while he and his wife, Genie, completed a \$40,000 remodel of the home.

He describes how his paternal grandfather got into the ranching business in 1880 in San Saba County, Texas, and gives a general family history. In 1940, Means's father and his Uncle Sam divided the H Bar Y Ranch.

Means discusses early memories of the ranch; he was three years old when the family moved there. He remembers it as "wild out here. Wild horses, wild cattle, wild men, everything, when we first came."

The ranch was not fenced until the Taylor Grazing Act was passed in 1934. Prior to fencing the ranch, H Bar Y cowboys gathered cattle as far away as Arizona. They were also on the lookout for cattle thieves, although this is a topic that the consultant does not wish to discuss.

Forage for cattle on the H Bar Y includes sideoats grama, blue grama, and hairy-top grama grass. At his ranch at Estancia there was "just that old salt grass." The Means raised primarily Hereford cattle in the early days. Means's grandfather would say, "Give me a flat ranch and a Hereford cow."

Means was educated at home for three years, taught by his mother's cousin from Texas. Following that his mother took a position teaching school in El Paso, and he and his sister attended school there. Following high school, Means attended the New Mexico Military Institute in Roswell, and then a university in Arizona. A highlight of this period in his life was playing polo, which he describes in some detail.

### **TAPE ONE, SIDE B:**

He continues to discuss polo, and the qualifications of a successful polo player: riding skill, teamwork, and ability to "hit the ball." In addition to the college teams, many ranches in western New Mexico also fielded teams. Polo was a worldwide craze in the 1920s and 1930s.

The consultant was surprised when his father told him that he would be going to college. There was little money in 1934, because of the Depression and drought.

He considers the drought year of 1995 to be the most severe drought he had ever experienced. He compared it to 1925. In 1925, as a boy of nine, he remembers riding with his father, who carried a pistol to shoot the cattle that were slowly dying. They lost 9,000 cattle that year. One of the ranch employees told the consultant, "You could walk up that canyon for one mile and not step off a dead cow."

That experience made such an impression on him that he worked to develop a permanent water source accessible to cattle on all parts of the ranch. He describes having water wells drilled and a woman successfully witching for water. Eventually, nine wells were dug on his and his uncle's neighboring ranch. He describes the drought years of the 1950s when a water pipeline "just saved the ranch."

Means then described the drought years on the H Bar Y: 1925, 1934, 1946 (that year only), 1954, 1955, 1956, 1964, and 1967. However, 1995 was a very bad year. He has kept a record of rainfall on the ranch since 1963.

In 1928, Means's father sold a thousand cows and calves, raising enough money to satisfy their creditors. Means states, "that was the year that saved us." His father borrowed money from the bank in Silver City, from the Production Credit Association, and "from an oil man down in Texas." It was difficult to obtain credit in those years.

In 1951, the consultant's mother died, and his father retired and moved to Albuquerque. Means took over management of the H Bar Y Ranch and was paid \$3000 a year to manage it.

Prior to this, Means purchased a ranch near Estancia, New Mexico. He was attracted to the ranch because it had plentiful water and grass. When he purchased the ranch, he placed himself on a strict budget of \$145 a month to cover groceries, clothes, kerosene, propane, and any additional labor he needed to hire (a local boy worked for him for a dollar a day). At the end of three years and ten months he had paid off the note for the ranch. The time period was from 1943-46. The cost of the ranch wasn't exorbitant; the land cost \$5 per acre.

They did not experience dry years on the ranch at Estancia until 1948 and 1949.

#### **TAPE TWO, SIDE A:**

Clarified that the type of browse that grew on the ranch at Estancia was chamizo. Chamizo grew on a third of the ranch.

He raised sheep as well as cattle on the Estancia ranch. He had sheep for four years, and they were profitable. He hired herders initially, but when some difficulties arose with the herders, he decided to build sheep-proof fence. Once the pastures were fenced, the ewes had their lambs out in pastures, however, they still required careful supervision as it was possible for them to get over on their backs and not be able to get up.

Means also tried farming (alfalfa and grains) at his ranch at Estancia, but when he started losing money on the venture he "shut her down." He goes on to explain his thinking, "I'm thirty-five years old and I know just enough about a cow now to really go to learning more about a cow. . . . if I have to . . . wait another thirty-five years to learn how to be a farmer, I'm gonna be an old bugger. We better just cancel this farming."

He discusses farming and ranching on the land they leased in California. He believes that having the land in California saved their businesses in the drought years of 1956.

In addition to the H Bar Y Ranch, the ranch at Estancia, and their agricultural enterprises in California, the Means also purchased a ranch near Crownpoint, New Mexico. Although they had ranch managers for these properties, the stress took its toll on the consultant and he eventually lost his fingernails.

Means describes how his father added to the ranches in western New Mexico beginning in 1919 through utilizing the Homestead Act, "We'd have cowboys homestead this section, cowboy homesteaded that one, and Aunt Florence would homestead this one. You know . . . the better land."

Describes severe winter weather experienced at the ranch at Estancia; he believes that a particularly bad year was 1948. In 1967, they had to bring in Caterpillars to the H Bar Y in order to get feed to their cattle.

### **TAPE TWO, SIDE B:**

Continues to describe the winter of 1967 on the H Bar Y Ranch. (The H Bar Y Ranch runs seventeen miles north to south. When the ranch was divided between his father and uncle, it was divided "lengthwise.")

Discusses placement of line camps and improvements made to them.

The consultant talks at length about the various methods they used to generate electricity. Details how they finally got electrical lines into the ranch. He tried to work with the people of Mule Creek to get electricity to their homes, however, a few of them were unwilling to pay the fee to have the electricity hooked up. It was 1962 when the H Bar Y got electricity.

Getting enough water at the H Bar Y headquarters for domestic purposes was difficult. Finally in 1960, a well was dug that provided ample water for all the houses at headquarters.

Means remembers driving the cattle to railheads in Silver City, Duncan, Arizona, or Lordsburg in the fall. The drive to Silver City was fifty-two miles. He also remembers their using "bobtailed" trucks to truck the cattle to markets beginning in the late 1930s. Highway 180 was blacktopped in 1937 or 1938. He describes their present-day marketing to cattle buyers.

### **TAPE THREE, SIDE A:**

Continues discussion of cattle buyers that purchase their cattle. Occasionally they will sell cattle through an auction market. He believes that the local auction markets have had a significant impact on ranching, and believes that there is now no excuse besides poor management for the cattle "die ups" that were experienced in the past.

Means describes other management decisions that have impacted his ranch. He works on a strict budget, and plans for maintenance and improvements to the ranch when there are "good years."

He states that the cost of labor has increased, but believes that he needs the same amount of labor now that would have been needed during the period of time his father was managing the ranch. Discusses fall and spring work. They have a neighbor who sometimes works for them, but they pay him wages. He explains the placement of their brand and the brands they use.

Means describes other cooperative work with their neighbors.

Another innovation in ranch management has been the advent of steel fencing posts. He discusses why steel posts are a vast improvement over wood posts. Another big improvement on the H Bar Y Ranch has been building roads between various areas on the ranch. This increases efficiency, as ranch hands can now pull trailers to more isolated areas of the ranch that they formerly would have had to ride to on horseback.

### **TAPE THREE, SIDE B:**

Means does not believe in giving his steers growth hormones. In the spring he vaccinates his cattle, but that is all he does. He is marketing black baldies now, as that is what buyers prefer.

### **TAPE FOUR, SIDE A:**

The interview continues on February 21, 1996. This tape deals with activities of daily life. In his father's time managing the H Bar Y Ranch, they "furnished all the food for everybody that worked on the ranch." (Means no longer follows that policy.) The family raised hogs and chickens. They had their own smokehouse to produce bacon and ham. Beef was eaten in the winter when it was possible to preserve it through freezing.

For a few summers during the 1930s the Means family operated a "dude ranch."

His mother treated many accidents at home; they were fifty-some miles to the nearest doctor. "Horse wrecks" were a common occurrence, and could be serious, he recounts one episode in which a ranch hand was in a coma for three days as a result of being thrown from a horse.

Washing clothes was a family affair with each family member having their specified chore. They washed clothes every two weeks.

Means had one sibling, a sister Flora Eloise, born in 1914. Although she could ride and work with the cattle, most of the time she helped in the house with ironing, cleaning, and cooking. Means can also cook some, but not "complicated cooking."

He was taught to ride at age three, and by age four he would ride with his father all day.

The consultant describes "ranch rodeos" where the ranch hands would compete among themselves. However, many times the horses were not well trained when they were given to the hands to ride, and consequently "we had a horse . . . pitchin' with us every day during the summer." Each hand would have five or more horses on their string. One ranch hand remembered that when he arrived on the ranch in 1921 there were 121 horses in the H Bar Y remuda.

Describes shoeing a horse. That was a skill that each ranch hand was expected to know, and it was also turned into a friendly competition.

#### **TAPE FOUR, SIDE B:**

Means discusses some of the family's philosophy: not to complain and not to say they were tired. The family bought many books and established a library. His father also enjoyed poetry, and both his parents played musical instruments. They enjoyed singing and dancing.

Means describes his courtship of his wife Genie (married in 1949, his second marriage).

He discusses his feelings about the future of ranching. He believes producers must become united, must advertise, and research. Means gives additional information about his father's philosophy on ranching that has been meaningful to him.

#### **TAPE FIVE, SIDE A:**

This tape describes the consultant's involvement with the establishment of the New Mexico Farm and Ranch Heritage Museum. Dr. Bill Stephens, whom the consultant had known for years, discussed the concept of an agricultural museum with him over a period of several years. Although, he was not actively involved with Foundation meetings, he supported the concept of the Museum with financial contributions. He recognizes the work of Dr. Bill Stephens, Dr. Gerald Thomas, and Lana Dickson in bringing the Museum into being. He believes Dr. Stephen's role should be recognized in a substantial way at the Museum.