

NEW MEXICO
FARM & RANCH
HERITAGE
MUSEUM

ORAL HISTORY PROGRAM
INTERVIEW ABSTRACT

CONSULTANT: Tom Mobley

DATE OF BIRTH: November 29, 1937 GENDER: Male

DATE(S) OF INTERVIEW: May 28, 2008

LOCATION OF INTERVIEW: Farm and Ranch Heritage Museum

INTERVIEWER: Donna M. Wojcik

SOURCE OF INTERVIEW: NMF&RHM OTHER _____

TRANSCRIBED: No

NUMBER OF TAPES: Two

ABTRACTOR: Donna M. Wojcik

DATE ABSTRACTED: June 4, 2008

RECORDING QUALITY (SPECIFY): Fair- some portions of interview are very faint

SCOPE AND CONTENT NOTE: Cattle and hay production in southern N.M.

DATE RANGE: 1915-2008

ABSTRACT (IMPORTANT TOPICS IN ORDER OF APPEARANCE):

TAPE ONE, SIDE A:

Mobley's great-grandfather Noah traveled to New Mexico from Missouri [Mississippi] in the late 1800s. Mobley's father was born in Capitan in 1915. Not much is known of the history of his great-grandparents. Mobley's relatives worked as laborers on farms and ranches. His father and grandfather were both working on a farm in Artesia at the time of Mobley's birth.

Mobley's interest in ranching began in high school when he was in FFA (Future Farmers of America.) He graduated from high school in 1956, attended New Mexico State College and graduated in 1961. After he married his wife Ann [nee Hille], he moved to Amarillo and worked for the Asgrow Seed Company. In February 1962 they returned to Las Cruces to takeover operation of his in-law's Hille Ranch north of the Jornada Experimental Range. Mobley admits that he knows more about his wife's family than he does his own. Both his grandfather and father died shortly after he graduated from NMSU, and he didn't have a chance to talk to them about his family history.

He worked on the Hille Ranch for two years, and worked for the Federal Land Bank from 1964 to 1970. He worked at First National Bank from 1970 until retirement in 2003.

A family partnership between Mobley and his in-laws was formed in 1987; they operated together for approximately five years, and then dissolved the partnership. By that time [1997], he had accumulated his own net worth, purchased a ranch in the Los Uvas Mountain area, and operated the ranch on weekends, nights, and holidays while still working at the bank. He now runs the ranch full-time. He raises commercial Brangus cattle, [using bulls] which have been purchased mostly from NMSU, which continues to improve herd quality.

His ranch is approximately 8400 acres, made up of deeded, state, and federal land. Designating ranch lands as a permanent wilderness, wilderness study areas, or as Range Land Preservation areas is still a very controversial subject amongst ranchers. Mobley feels that if roads have already been established in these areas prior to designation, then they should not be called a wilderness area.

Changes in weather have not significantly impacted his ranching business. Although we have had below normal rainfall, with the exception of 2006, he has not had to reduce his herd numbers to the extent that other ranchers have. Some ranchers have had to reduce by fifty percent, but he has never had to reduce more than one third of his permit total of 150 head.

He discusses his ranch operation, weaning, replacement heifers, terrain, fencing and water supply. He currently has four wells on his ranch. He runs two deep wells (150 ft. and 250 ft.) by windmill, and two shallow wells (70 ft.) by solar. He feels that the solar works quite well, that installation costs are comparable, and that solar is cheaper to run on shallow wells. He likes the fact that he does not have to climb a tower to fix them. Although wind power is free, when weather is the hottest and the cows are drinking the most, we have the least amount of wind. His wells have not been dry since he has owned the ranch.

Labor is always an issue on the ranch. Most ranches can afford to pay a living wage but not what can be earned at other jobs. It is hard work in uncomfortable weather conditions and does not attract a lot of people. The days of "all horseback" are gone, Mobley says, and the cowboy way of life will always be changing. He no longer uses the "pen, rope, drag, brand" system of branding, preferring to use calf tables, which means easier work and requires less labor.

He is concerned about population pressures, which make it more difficult to operate ranches. "Everyone wants to live out of town so they can do their own thing." There is a brief discussion about the preexisting buildings on the ranch.

TAPE ONE, SIDE B:

The discussion of preexisting buildings on the ranch is continued. There are also two hand-dug wells located on the ranch, which Mobley would like to keep intact and protected. He has located all of the patents and titles for his ranch and would like to do a history of the ranch in the future. He has named his ranch "Sierra Alta Ranch" because the Bureau of Land Management calls it the Sierra Alta allotment. He discusses the fencing and discusses a typical yearly round of work.

Marketing the cattle has been a challenge since the closing of the Deming Livestock Auction. The nearest auction facilities now are in Roswell, Belen, or at Wilcox, Ariz. Each of these is about 200 miles distance from Las Cruces. Now instead of taking a few cows to auction, Mobley waits until he has a full trailer. The cattle market fluctuations are influenced by continued pressures from population, which in turn reduces the amount of land available to run cattle, thus reducing the cattle herd numbers.

Mobley feels that all ranchers have some losses due to toxic vegetation, disease, and /or predation. The heavy rains of 2006 sprouted an increase in the growth of pea vine, a form of locoweed. He lost two bulls and eight cows; he took another twenty cows that showed signs of being on the weed back to the farm to nurse back to health.

Working with government agencies and programs can be "as hard as you make it," says Mobley, who has not had any problems working with them.

Mobley was raised on a cotton/alfalfa farm in Artesia. He has three brothers, and the four of them were all born in the same house. Their grandparents raised them. There is a brief discussion about when he met his wife.

TAPE TWO, SIDE A:

Mobley met his wife while he was attending college. After graduation, he worked in San Antonio, Tex., but it was too far to drive to maintain a relationship with Ann, so they married and moved to Amarillo.

While at NMSU he majored in agricultural education. When he was a sophomore, however, he changed his major to agronomy. Although his degree specialty was crops, his interest today is livestock. He says that his education did not have a lot to do with his career.

In 1962 Mobley decided that he wanted to be more than a ranch hand. It was at this time that he went into banking as an agricultural loan officer. He discusses his three children.

The twenty-acre farm was purchased in 1972, and the construction of a home there was completed in 1973. His main crop is alfalfa, but he has done some joint venture crops (lettuce, chile, onions, cotton) with Denny Calhoun. Mobley is the first to admit that he is "not a farmer."

Mobley continues discussing his children; where they went to school, what degrees they hold, and what they are currently doing.

The Governor appointed Mobley to the Museum Board of Directors. The Museum's second Director, J. Edson Way, resigned the year that Mobley was appointed. Mobley served for one term and was reappointed for a second term. When Governor Richardson took office, he requested that all board members in all divisions resign and reapply. Mobley did as requested but was never reinstated to complete his second term. "It was all politics," says Mobley. Museum Board members can only be removed for cause, he contends, subject to Senate approval. Governor Richardson did not follow this.

Mobley feels that the Board of Directors has served the Museum's best interest and feels that legally the Board has a lot of autonomy (right to self government). He believes that they have exercised that authority quite well. It is his opinion that the greatest difficulty the Board of Directors had was in the

early stages of development. The original intention was for the museum to be privately owned and funded entirely by private donation. Although there was good representation, they were not able to raise enough money to build, and a bill was carried in the Legislature to fund construction. There were some control issues when original volunteers that made up the first Institute became the Foundation Board, as others were appointed to make up the new Museum Board of Directors. These issues were never completely resolved until Mac Harris was hired as Museum Director, thus defining the Museum Board and the Foundation Board.

One of the more significant issues that impacted the Museum was when J. Edson Way was appointed to serve as Officer of Cultural Affairs while still serving as the Museum Director. The original plan was for Way to return the Museum after one term, but he was reappointed. The Museum Board felt that he could not effectively address the day-to-day issues of running the Museum while in Santa Fe and asked him to choose between the two positions.

There is a brief discussion about building development and the acquisition of the historic Rio Hondo Bridge.

TAPE TWO, SIDE B:

Mobley feels that the best decision made was in regards to the design and size of the building. It is “fitting for the purpose and suitable for growth.” Dealing with political red tape is often frustrating and patience is always needed. Overall, the Museum is a success. He worries about costs and has concerns about visitation and the fact that we should be self-supporting. He feels that we should not set entrance fees too high so that we can draw people to the facility.

The “guard shack” is a mental deterrent to visitors, he says, and should meet its demise via bulldozer. Membership programs should offer more and be pushed harder.

The interview concludes with a discussion of a civic center in Las Cruces and recommendations for prospective interviews.