



ORAL HISTORY PROGRAM
INTERVIEW ABSTRACT

CONSULTANT: WanaBeth Schalles / Archie Lackey

DATE OF BIRTH: 9-20-1934 / 10-25-1938 GENDER: Female / Male

DATE(S) OF INTERVIEW: December 15, 2007

LOCATION OF INTERVIEW: Schalles home in Mountainair, N.M.

INTERVIEWER: Ramona Caplan

SOURCE OF INTERVIEW: NMFRHM_____ OTHER Cedarvale History Project

TRANSCRIBED: No

NUMBER OF TAPES: Three

ABTRACTOR: Donna M. Wojcik

DATE ABSTRACTED: January 16, 2008

RECORDING QUALITY (SPECIFY): Good.

SCOPE AND CONTENT NOTE: Rural living in Cedarvale, N.M. area.

DATE RANGE: 1934-2005

ABSTRACT (IMPORTANT TOPICS IN ORDER OF APPEARANCE):

TAPE ONE, SIDE A:

[NOTE: Both consultants were interviewed at the same time. Also present: Gail D'Arcy. The voices of the spouses can be heard in the background.]

The interview begins with personal information and family genealogies. Schalles' relatives, the Fox family, came to Cedarvale in the early 1940s to visit relatives who lived in the area, then moved there in fall 1944. She attended the Cedarvale School, which had classes from kindergarten through 8th grade. Fred Lackey drove the Cedarvale school bus, and Lewis Vick drove the school bus that transported students who attended Corona High School (grades 9-12).

Schalles recalls that the Cedarvale School was the site of boxed suppers, dances, basketball games, and other community events. An interdenominational church was also held there. She recalls that teachers were strict in those days; one form of punishment was to stand with your nose to the blackboard.

Lackey believes that there were less than sixty students in the 1940s and that the numbers declined as time went on. He says that the school building was completed in 1944. D'Arcy says that construction on the school began in 1917. Lackey recalls that there were only two teachers for approximately sixty students, and that the teachers each took half of the students.

Residents of Cedarvale began leaving the area in the years after 1940, when the area began getting dry. Schalles recalls that she once asked her father why the people left Cedarvale. His answer was, "Honey, they starved out. They ran outta beans." Overall, the drought had a huge effect on the economy of Cedarvale.

Lackey remembers that prior to 1940 the Cedarvale School had kindergarten through 12th grade. When the school was eventually closed, all the students were bussed to Corona. Lackey's father was a rancher. The ranch was located seven miles from town, and Lackey and Schalles were neighbors. In the years between 1944 and 1954, the Cedarvale School was the center of the community. Each year there was a Christmas play. The town had a "town team" that competed in basketball games with other towns in the area. The team was made up of older players, and Lackey believes that these players were about twenty-five years old. He recalls that the Globetrotters came to play the Cedarvale Town Team. He states that there were a lot of Globetrotter teams formed throughout the United States and that they played for entertainment rather than serious basketball. The Cedarvale School also had a grade-school basketball team that played other schools in Torrance County.

Lackey says that the school curriculum was very rigid and recalls that memorizing multiplication tables was required. His teacher informed his parents that he was not doing very well with his tables, so his father would get him up at 6 a.m. and take him out to the barn with him when he went to milk the cows. Lackey recalls that he would sit on the fence in the barn and his father would drill him. He says that he did learn his tables that way. Both Lackey and Schalles recall that 4-H was one of the extracurricular activities available to students. Lackey learned to bake, and Schalles took cooking classes, although she really wanted to raise an animal.

TAPE ONE, SIDE B:

The discussion of 4-H continues. The Fox family members could not afford to take any 4-H classes besides cooking. Schalles was not permitted to take part in the sewing club because she was left-handed

and therefore did it “backwards.” Neither Schalles nor Lackey recall any parents involved in school, and Lackey states that there was no such thing as teacher’s aides.

Schalles recalls that there were several grades in one classroom, and that students from one grade level would often have to be quiet while other grades were reciting lessons. There were no art or music classes, and she feels that she missed out by not having these available. Today, Schalles is an accomplished artist. [Schalles has made Christmas decorations that hang in the White House.] In the days that Schalles and Lackey attended school, all students were required to speak English because speaking Spanish at school was “considered rude.” Hispanics learned English quickly. The Cedarvale School was equally split between Anglo and Hispanic students. Schalles states that Spanish language classes were offered in high school.

After the Cedarvale area dried out, the Fox family moved back to Texas. Her father died in Texas, and in 1948 her mother moved the family back to the Cedarvale area. Schalles says that her maternal grandfather was murdered in Oklahoma in 1918, and as a result her mother was raised in hardship and knew how to work, so it was easy for her to move the family back to Cedarvale and pick things up where they left off before her husband was killed.

Schalles tells the story of the “old, ugly cow” that her mother bought, and how her mother built a herd of her own. She says that her mother did well and her calves were sold at a higher weight than calves sold by any male rancher in the area.

Most of the school students came from farming and ranching backgrounds. Schalles recalls that her typical lunch for school consisted of a pint of milk and some biscuits. Meat was rarely taken, and fruit was not an option. Lackey recalls that a hot lunch program was started when he was in fifth grade. The cost for the meal was fifteen cents. Mrs. Abeyta was the cook and also planned and served the meal to the students. He believes that there must have been some state supplementing because fifteen cents would not have been enough to support the program. Lackey says that he and his brothers always ate the hot lunch. Breakfast provided by the school was never heard of.

Lackey recalls that children would skip school and play in the two empty bean warehouses in town. There were only a few local businesses in the late 1940s. Inez Livingston had a combination post office/store. Lackey believes that she had living quarters in the back of the post office. The McCloud’s had a store with a hand-pump gasoline station.

Schalles believes that the Cedarvale School closed in 1958. D’Arcy would like to see the school restored, and says that “some areas don’t have roofs.” She would at least like to have the gymnasium preserved because “it has beautiful beams.” She states that the gym was the location of the graduation ceremonies, pie suppers, dances, and box suppers. Lackey responds that the box suppers were not pleasant because “you were forced to bid on a girl’s box even if you didn’t want to eat with her.” Schalles says that the boxes were decorated up to look pretty. The hope was that no one would guess it was your box except the person you wanted to share it with.

D’Arcy says that the quilting club used the school as early as 1916, and recalls going to the school for the quilting club when she visited her grandparents. Everyone made beautiful quilts, she says. Schalles states that her children still used quilts that were made by that club.

Lackey currently lives on the original family property located seven miles south of Cedarvale. After being away from the community for over thirty years, he and his wife returned to Cedarvale in 2005. D’Arcy talks about the Cedarvale reunion which is held there every two years. Schalles left Cedarvale in 1952, but her mother continued to live there until 1980.

TAPE TWO, SIDE A:

Lackey graduated from Corona High School in 1955. He left after graduation to attend the University of New Mexico and attended there for two years. He got a job at Sandia Labs as a file clerk. He became an ozalid operator [a machine or process for producing positive prints made directly from original drawings or printed material and developed dry in the presence of ammonia vapor] and later became a math analyst. He recalls that most of the students left the area after graduation. Most area families had small farm or ranch operations.

He remembers that most people made do with what they had. His family's farm was approximately eight hundred acres, which was not enough for his father to make a living from. It provided beef to eat, and the garden provided vegetables for the family, but that was all. His father was forced to go as far as Colorado to find work as a carpenter. Most families in the area had to supplement their income. When rain was plentiful, the farms and ranches were self-sustaining. The drought in the 1940s caused hardship in the area. The Estancia Valley did well because they had irrigated land, but the Cedarvale area was dependent on rainfall. The Estancia Valley pumps water from the aquifer; however, the levels have been steadily dropping for many years. Lackey says that if you were to plant a hundred acres in beans today you would be laughed at. Lots of rain is needed in June, July, and August, and "we just don't get it."

When asked how Mountainair has survived when Cedarvale phased out, he replies that it is nothing like it used to be. There are only a few families left in Cedarvale. Corona and Mountainair still have businesses because they have the ranchers in the area. No one is farming beans anymore. Mountainair also has income from tourism, in particular the art community, and the Shaffer Hotel draws people in. When smaller towns like Willard and Cedarvale phased out, people gravitated to Mountainair and Estancia.

Today, Mountainair and Corona have the railroad in common. Highway 42 was built on what used to be the old railroad spur. It was on this spur that farmers took their products to market. This was before Lackey's time. Lackey feels that Cedarvale may have survived had it not been for the drought. The poor cash economy forced people to go where the money was. Cedarvale could not draw water from the aquifer because it was too expensive to pull the water that far. Costs to do so would exceed the profit. As a result, residents went where the water and the money was. They were not forced to live in the area and eke out a living, so they moved where it was easier for them.

An unknown speaker states that old-timers say that "we should never have put a plow to this land." Once the droughts came, the land was reduced to powder. The land was cleared of cedar and juniper trees, which were then salvaged for use as fence posts. Lackey says that the barbed wire came in what is known as 80-rod rolls. Each roll consisted of ¼ mile of wire and weighed sixty pounds. He explains that the wire was rolled out to the ¼ mile mark, cut, and then attached to the individual fence posts. This process was repeated until the desired strands of wire were strung. Most fences had four strands. A five-strand fence was considered a really good fence. Wiring a fence was a lot of work.

The interview concludes with a discussion of the ornaments that WanaBeth Schalles made for the Blue Room at the White House.

TAPE TWO, SIDE B: Blank.