

**NEW MEXICO
FARM & RANCH
HERITAGE
MUSEUM**

**ORAL HISTORY PROGRAM
INTERVIEW ABSTRACT**

CONSULTANT: Benjamin "Benjie" Segovia

DATE OF BIRTH: November 11, 1956 GENDER: Male

DATE(S) OF INTERVIEW: May 7, 2014

LOCATION OF INTERVIEW: NMFRHM

INTERVIEWER: Leah Tookey

SOURCE OF INTERVIEW: NMF&RHM

TRANSCRIBED: September 23, 2014

NUMBER OF TAPES: Three

ABTRACTOR: Donna M. Wojcik

DATE ABSTRACTED: September 25, 2014

RECORDING QUALITY (SPECIFY): Good

SCOPE AND CONTENT NOTE: Segovia's father worked on Stahmann Farms. Benjie recalls life as a child, growing up on Stahmann Farms, and gives insight into the everyday life, the treatment of the workers, and his feelings regarding the pecan industry at Stahmanns.

DATE RANGE: 1956-2014

ABSTRACT (Important Topics in Order of Appearance):

TAPE ONE, SIDE A:

The interview begins with the Segovia family history. Benjie was born in the Hotel Dieu hospital in El Paso, Texas. The interviewer gives some background information on the history of Stahmann Farm, covering the initial purchase of land in 1926 and subsequent property that was added to the Farm in later years. Initially Stahmanns did not have a specialized crop. They grew cotton, alfalfa, lettuce, onions, cantaloupe, and sugar beets. The first pecan trees were not planted until 1932. Stahmann traded a man a vehicle (to replace the man's broken buggy) in exchange for 6000 pecan seedlings. Over the years Hereford cattle and Rambouillet sheep were added to the Stahmann enterprise. In 1948 geese were introduced on the Farm. The geese weeded the fields and provided fertilizer. Goose quills were sold to pen factories, the meat was sold, and the down was shipped for pillows. In 1955 Stahmann added chickens for eggs and fertilizer. Stahmann once said that "Poultry manure is worth five times as much as that of cattle. It's rich in enzymes, antibiotics and vitamins." By 1977 the geese and chickens were gone and Stahmann began to focus his energies on the pecans.

Benjie's father was a part of the Bracero program which began in 1942, a migrant worker program where Mexican farm workers were hired for fixed periods of time. His father was able to get permanent employment because he was a good worker.

Stahmanns provided individual housing for workers and their families, although each unit shared a common wall, and there were communal restrooms with showers for both men and women. While his mother stayed home while the children were younger, she was also able to find work in the pecan processing plant. Benjie recalls his father told his children to be respectful of the property and equipment because they were "dealing with my termination." He witnessed the advances from hand-picking to mechanical picking.

Benjie describes Deane Stahmann as being a very caring person, with a very good heart. He recalls that there were a variety of jobs for the workers because there was work in the pecan harvest, the pecan nursery, woodshop, plumbing division, warehouse division, mechanics shop and when there were geese and chickens there was the slaughter facility.

TAPE ONE, SIDE B:

Benjie recalls that Stahmann understood the family structure, and understood his employees. "He was a very understanding man." Stahmann was a staunch believer in providing a stable labor force and the Farm became a self-reliant community with machine shops, blacksmith shops, an electric light plant, a school, a store, and a medical clinic. Benjie describes the procedures for shopping in the store. There were conditions and controls set in place to prevent the workers from going into too much debt from using credit in the store. Worker's wages were paid in cash, which workers signed for at the payroll office. Your wages and the amounts you spent at the store were calculated on your wage envelope.

Housing changed as the Segovia family grew in number. Walls were knocked out and additional rooms were added. He recalls that eventually plumbing was put in the individual residences and the communal restrooms were no longer used. He discusses the benefits program, which included a pension plan, profit sharing program and paid vacations. Vacations were earned after working there for a year, but you were eligible for the pension plan after working for three years.

Mr. Stahmann's strategy of providing permanent housing, good benefits, and a share in the Farm profits was a way to ensure that he had a constant labor force without a lot of turnover. It was a way to keep loyal workers. Year-round employment meant that migrant families were "bettering themselves, providing opportunities for their offspring." The grafting process is briefly discussed.

The Stahmann Farms consisted of eleven small rancheros or communities: Palmillo, Oeste, Sur, Norte, Rincon, Ojito, Plaza, Lomas, Esperanza, Cristo and La Fe. The Segovia family was located at Lomas.

TAPE TWO, SIDE A:

The discussion of the eleven rancheros continues. Benjie describes the operations on each of these small rancheros. He recalls his childhood job picking cotton, and how he hated it because the snakes would coil around the base of the cotton plant. Workers could have small gardens if permission was granted in advance.

School days and education are discussed. He recalls that his mother would often say, "My desire is to watch all my children graduate from high school." His parents encouraged him to find an occupation that would enable him to be a contributing member of the family unit, but it didn't matter what that job was. He recalls that there was a traveling priest that would perform Mass on a rotation at each of the small rancheros.

Benjie recalls that Stahmann Farms always held "a heck of a harvest festival." He discusses other festivals and holy days.

TAPE TWO, SIDE B:

Social life is briefly discussed. As a child Benjie had fun with his friends playing in the sand, swimming in the canal ditch, hunting rabbits, lizards and snakes, and sifting through the junk yard for items to build things with.

Working and living at Stahmann Farm taught him a lot. His work ethic he got from his parents, he says. Much has changed on the Farm over the years. Gone are the housing units, and the pension plan was discontinued when it became too expensive. International competition has now affected the market for pecans.

Childhood chores are discussed. Benjie recalls that some of his chores were washing the car, feeding the family's rabbits and chickens, cutting the weeds along the irrigation ditch, and picking up the pecans that were on the ground.

Meals are briefly discussed.

TAPE THREE, SIDE A:

Benjie recalls that his parent's had to struggle to make ends meet and says that his dad was "a very honest, an honorable man. He would work on the farm, and then he would work at other orchards . . . he had a reputation of being a very good nursery man, one of the best."

Benjie shares an emotional story of how his father paid for unexpected events such as the time his father had an accident, and the funeral services for family members.

He discusses his early employment history, attending NMSU, the Worker Protection Standard, and the various positions he held in the Department of Agriculture. He discusses his current job at the New Mexico Farm and Livestock Bureau.

TAPE THREE, SIDE B:

The interview concludes with a discussion of his role in the Collegiate Farm and Livestock Bureau at NMSU and the challenges facing agriculture today.