# NEW MEXICO FARM & RANCH HERITAGE MUSEUM

## ORAL HISTORY PROGRAM
### INTERVIEW ABSTRACT

CONSULTANT:                              Keith Willett Avery

DATE OF BIRTH:              December 2, 1921              Gender: Male

DATE(S) OF INTERVIEW:              June 13 and 16, 2000

LOCATION OF INTERVIEW:              Spear K Ranch, Roswell, New Mexico

INTERVIEWER:              Marcie Palmer

SOURCE OF INTERVIEW:              NMF&RHM___x __OTHER_____

TRANSCRIBED:              Yes:  June 12, 2001

NUMBER OF TAPES:              Three

ABSTRACTOR:              Marcie Palmer

DATE ABSTRATED:              July 11, 2001

QUALITY OF RECORDING (SPECIFY): Good.

SCOPE AND CONTENT NOTE:  Details life history of Western artist, Keith Avery.

DATE RANGE:              1916-1996

# ABSTRACT (IMPORTANT TOPICS IN ORDER OF APPEARANCE):

## TAPE ONE:

Keith Willett Avery graduated from Lansing Central High School in June 1939. (His father was a photographer, one of the inventors of color photography, and contributed to the invention of the Argus camera.)The summer after graduation Avery punched cows for Landini and Shendel Cattle Company at Piñon Mesa in the Colorado National Monument near Grand Junction. In the fall he worked at Hiawatha Sportsman's Club leading tours on horseback.

The consultant studied art with many of the prominent artists of the day and during the summer he continued to lead tours for the Hiawatha Club.  He was drafted into the military service and studied radio operations, codes, and mechanics.  His work was top secret and he worked on sea schematics and cutaway drawings, identification of Finder Fold, Air to Surface Vessels, and Ground Control Approach.

While in the service in Florida he won a "bronc ridin" competition. The local American Legion Commander asked his base commander if he could continue to ride in rodeos, and it was arranged that he would work a shift from 6:00 p.m. until midnight in order to be available for rodeos. This continued throughout WWII until Germany's surrender.
> Following his discharge from the service he worked at many different jobs and continued to compete in rodeos.  In 1949 or 1950, he was hired as the foreman and trainer on a ranch north of Carrizozo.  His wife Carol was hired as cook and housekeeper.  In 1951, he was hired as an artist for the Extension Service at New Mexico State University.  He started college and graduated in 1955. That year one of his paintings won the Santa Fe Art Show.

## TAPE TWO:

Theodore Vanzalen and Peter Hurd were the two of the judges at the Santa Fe Art Show in 1955.

Following graduation from NMSU, Avery moved to the Orm Ranch at Verde Valley, Arizona. He taught agriculture at the Judson School in Scottsdale, Arizona, from 1955 to 1959.  From there he was hired as the Alumni Director and Director of Pre-College Counseling at NMSU. The consultant then moved to Michigan and worked for thirteen years.  Each year when school was dismissed for the summer he would head west, taking with him the paintings he had painted during the winter.

Eventually Avery bought a ranch at Springer, New Mexico, from Virginia Harkness.  And for seven years he worked for various ranchers in the area. His wife Carol taught school until May 1981.  Then they bought their property at East Grand Plains where they live today.

He has painted many famous peoples' portraits.

Keith's mother started teaching school when she graduated from high school in 1913.  His father (one of the inventors of color photography) was Norton Louis Avery. His parents married in 1917. Keith was born in 1921, and his brother Hoyt Louis Avery on May 5, 1924.

Keith met his wife Carol in January 1946, and they were married October 10, 1946. Their oldest son Carlton Louis Avery, or Clay, was born September 23, 1951. David Keith was born December 29, 1954. Clay is an artist in his own right and his wife, Cathy McNaughton, is a commercial artist. Clay and Cathy's son Chayne is also an artist, and their other son, Chan, is graduating from Eastern New Mexico University with a degree in art.

**<u>TAPE THREE:</u>**

Their daughter, Jane Ellen was born in Tempe, Arizona on June 26, 1956.

Some of Avery's life is detailed in the book *Trails of a Wanderer – The Keith Avery Story* by Rhonda Sedgwick Stearns (published by Guy Lodgston Books of Tulsa, Oklahoma).