

**NEW MEXICO
FARM & RANCH
HERITAGE
MUSEUM**

**ORAL HISTORY PROGRAM
INTERVIEW ABSTRACT**

CONSULTANT: H.B. and Margaret "Peggy" Birmingham

DATE OF BIRTH: Unknown GENDER: Male/Female

DATE(S) OF INTERVIEW: April 10, 2001

LOCATION OF INTERVIEW: Birmingham residence, Reserve, NM

INTERVIEWER: Carol Pittman

SOURCE OF INTERVIEW: NMF&RHM X OTHER _____

TRANSCRIBED: Yes: August 8, 2001

NUMBER OF TAPES: One

ABTRACTOR: Sylvia Wheeler

DATE ABSTRATED: September 14, 2001

QUALITY OF RECORDING (SPECIFY): Poor. There are frequent tape "glitches."

SCOPE AND CONTENT NOTE: Life on a ranch in western New Mexico. Also working for the forest service.

DATE RANGE: 1920s-1950s

ABSTRACT (IMPORTANT TOPICS IN ORDER OF APPEARANCE):

TAPE ONE, SIDE A:

Peggy Birmingham describes their home in Reserve, New Mexico, noting that she lived there while her husband, H.B., lived on the ranch. H.B. also worked at the post office in town for a period of time. In between times he worked for the forest service as a dispatcher in the watchtower. (When he was younger, he also fought fires.) As a dispatcher H.B. states, "I would tell helicopters, people, where to go . . ." He worked in that position for nine years. Then the forest service opened a dispatch camp on the ground where he worked for two years until he suffered a heart attack. He disliked working on the ground because he couldn't see.

The watchtower was two stories and thirteen steps high from the ground, a cinder building with a catwalk around it. His family lived with him during the fire season, six months of the year during the 1950s. They moved their household goods, washing machine, etc. into the tower. When he was twelve, their son stayed alone on the ranch to go to school and to tend the young heifers that were ready to calve.

Birmingham mentions that many elk are in the area, thus many hunters, but that he only shot deer. He mentions seeing coyotes chase and kill deer and try to catch elk by running them in a circle until one would weaken. He believes it necessary to try to control the coyotes. Also, the coyote hides brought five hundred dollars each. He trapped them. Loggers do the same, as a source of money in the winter. He thinks coyotes are wily.

Birmingham has kept a scrapbook of sayings, and historical notes. He especially likes R.C. Patterson's *Scraps of Sense and Nonsense, Good to Read on Stormy Days*. Birmingham also speaks of early days in which people who stole your horse could be hanged, stressing the importance of the horse as transportation. This information and more anecdotes from Patterson are told. Patterson, who lived in New Mexico, was born in 1837 and therefore dead when Birmingham was born. He also has his grandfather's diary, a big book with a velvet cover that he hopes to give to the New Mexico State University archives. Apparently, Mr. Patterson would have been his great-grandfather.

They began looking through a scrapbook whose contents evoke certain memories, among them the fact that Birmingham's father had a ranch up the Largo Canyon and then moved to homestead on the Augustine Plains. While there his father worked for the forest service in the game department while his mother took care of the ranch. (He points to a photograph of what's left of the town, Augustine Plains.) The consultant speaks of deer hunting for ten days, September 10 to November 10, in 1922, of killing deer and jerking the meat. He recalls the Laguna Indians coming down on pack mules and killing deer to take back to the reservation; his father was at that time the game warden who caught them. The Indians would trade their jerked meat in the early 1920s. The Indians were put in jail, saying they would rather be in jail than "sleep in the same building with a Navajo." Actually, he says, his father got along well with the Indians.

He shows a photo of the confederate army discharge of one of his Birmingham relatives. He thinks the Birmingham's originally came from England. There is talk about letting the New Mexico Farm and Ranch Heritage Museum make a copy of some of this information. Birmingham gives an oral genealogy of the Birmingham family, the names of his father's family of seven children. H.B. and his wife have two sons, H.B. III, and Michael and now three grandchildren, which would make seven or eight generations of Birmingham's here.

H.B. Birmingham recalls his school days; a school could be founded when eight children were of school age. He says his parents hired a governess for the two younger children after he graduated from the eighth grade from the Reserve school, which he calls "the Birmingham school." After the eighth grade, the family moved so he could attend some high school classes at Apache Creek School. He finally graduated in 1937.

In the early thirties he had his own saying: ten sheep were worth one cow or \$100.00. (Peggy Birmingham says she came out west in 1950.) He was in the sheep business three times in his life; fencing was poor and it was hard to get shepherders. "We'd ship 15,000 sheep in two days from two ranches."

Peggy Birmingham says she was born in New York, came west to visit an aunt and "fell in love with the country." She met H.B. in the fifties while working at the Eagle Guest in Datil. "I was twenty-seven, he was thirty-five. He brought in a log cabin to put on his ranch and later built one room, a bedroom and then a great room. They didn't have electricity, or water. They had a gasoline-run Maytag, which she couldn't operate. They stayed on the ranch for twelve years; she taught her children there.