

**NEW MEXICO  
FARM & RANCH  
HERITAGE  
MUSEUM**

**ORAL HISTORY PROGRAM  
INTERVIEW ABSTRACT**

CONSULTANT: Anthony "Tony" Treat

DATE OF BIRTH: October 16, 1938 GENDER: Male

DATE(S) OF INTERVIEW: June 15, 2000

LOCATION OF INTERVIEW: Treat residence, Roswell, N.M.

INTERVIEWER: Marcie Palmer

SOURCE OF INTERVIEW: NMF&RHM\_\_X\_\_OTHER\_\_\_\_\_

TRANSCRIBED: Yes: October 9, 2001

NUMBER OF TAPES: Three

ABTRACTOR: Sylvia Wheeler and Jane O'Cain

DATE ABSTRATED: July 5, 2002

QUALITY OF RECORDING (SPECIFY): Good

SCOPE AND CONTENT NOTE: Details family history of ranching in southeastern New Mexico from 1903 to 1995.

DATE RANGE: 1903-1995

## **ABSTRACT (IMPORTANT TOPICS IN ORDER OF APPEARANCE):**

### **TAPE ONE, SIDE A:**

Treat was born in Albuquerque. In the 1940s his father leased a ranch south of Picacho from his great-grandmother (this ranch has been owned since 1950 by Joe and Mary Skeen, his second cousins). At the same time his father and a partner owned ranch near Corona. Then in 1950 this ranch was “swapped” for a ranch that his grandfather owned near Picacho, a ranch that abuts the Skeen ranch. Treat was raised on these two ranches primarily. In 1964 he and his wife purchased the ranch near Picacho from his parents, it was called the Block Dot Ranch taken from their sheep brand.

His great-grandfather, Joe Clements Sr., moved to New Mexico from Gonzales, Texas, around 1903 and established a farm near the thriving community of Hope. Joe’s children went looking for ranching country and put together a 150- section sheep ranch in the mountain country west of Roswell, east of the Mescalero Apache Reservation. After the death of his great-grandfather in the mid-1920s the ranch was divided three ways amongst his wife and two sons. (He states that on one of these ranches net wire fence was built—one of the first in the nation.) He remarks that Carl Adamson, second husband of his great-grandmother, was riding in the buckboard with Pat Garrett when Garrett was murdered near Organ. Treat has heard rumors through his family to the effect that Adamson may have colluded in Garrett’s murder.

In the next generation his grandmother Sally Clements, born July 19, 1888, married Arthur Roy Treat on December 25, 1909. The Treat family owned a butcher shop in White Oaks. He states that he has heard through the family, “their cattle supply for butchering were stolen cattle.” Roy and Sally had four children; his father Bill was the oldest, born October 28, 1910. (His father, soon to be ninety years old, lives at a Roswell nursing home.) Two more sons were born in 1912 and 1914 and a daughter in 1921. The sons were all ranchers in the Roswell area. A.C. Hendricks of the Flying H Ranch gave Treat’s uncle, Lloyd, three sections of land after Lloyd had worked for the Flying H Ranch for many years and this allowed Lloyd to get into the ranching business.

Treat stated that the family had owned a home in Roswell for years so that the children could attend school. His father attended Business College in Wichita, Kansas. Following graduation circa 1930, he went to work for Standard Oil Company in Albuquerque and there met his wife-to-be. In 1938 the consultant was born. The family moved back to the ranch in mid-1939 and ranched with Treat’s grandfather for a period of time before buying a ranch.

### **TAPE ONE, SIDE B:**

Discusses his mother’s background and states, “it couldn’t have been more opposite of my dad’s.” His mother was raised in New York State and California. His mother’s name was Ramona Elridge Reynolds. Her family was “very wealth,” and eventually a family member bought a ranch near Socorro and that is how they came to be in New Mexico. He is uncertain of his parent’s wedding date as they divorced and remarried.

Treat’s father and a partner bought a ranch at Corona; he also leased the ranch now owned by Joe and Mary Skeen. After letting the leased ranch go his father and grandfather “switched” ranches. His father took ownership of the east part of the original ranch at Picacho. This is the ranch Treat owned until he sold it five years ago.

Treat's family lived in Roswell during the school year where Tony attended elementary school. He went on to graduate from the New Mexico Military Institute in 1957. The consultant earned a degree in animal husbandry in 1962 from New Mexico State University. He married in 1959.

Describes that during the time his great-grandmother ranched near the Mescalero Apache Reservation they had some problems with residents of the reservation trying to take food from the ranch commissary, "there was never any fighting but they had to go in there and just push them out." He then describes a series of waterholes on his ranch in the "Indian Pasture" where there is evidence of many Indian encampments. It is an area where the lechugia plant is plentiful. The Indians would gather this plant and cook the leaves to make an alcoholic beverage.

The Treats chief livestock was always sheep. After he returned from college in 1962 the family began to develop one of the four basic herds of Debouillet sheep in the state. The Skeens, Truman Pierce, and A.D. Jones of Tatum owned the other three basic herds of Debouillet. Treat states that in the 1930s A.D. Jones got his start in the sheep business with Treat's grandfather (A.D. Jones was Mary Skeen's father; Punch Jones is her brother.)

Debouillet sheep are a "well-rounded breed of sheep," producing large lambs and a finer wool with unusual length and color, a wool in high demand. The Skeens and the Jones family are still raising Debouillet. Bob Boyles bought Treat's land and sheep, but he isn't certain if he is still raising the breed.

In an average year a Debouillet ewe would produce one eighty-five to ninety-pound lamb and twelve to thirteen pounds of wool. He could raise around fifty-five sheep on a section of land. His ranch was comprised of forty-six sections. He stocked his land a "bit light" to protect the land in hot, dry summers. Other ranchers stock as many as seventy sheep per section.

The consultant describes the terrain of the ranch, "hilly with deep canyons . . . very rough." All the gathering had to be done on horseback. (The sheep thrive on a higher elevation unlike cattle that tend to "congest" in the flat areas causing overgrazing there.) They were dependent on wells for water. He had about fourteen windmills on his forty-six-section ranch. He states the windmills are a major expense nowadays. Treat drilled five new wells between 1963 and 1995 in order to distribute the water more evenly across the ranch; he tried to drill near an electrical power line so that he could utilize electric motors and not have to depend on wind generation. He had four creeks on his ranch, but they were not "live water."

Discussion of the motorized equipment needed on the ranch: a semi-truck and trailer for hauling sheep and wood, Caterpillars and road graders for ranch upkeep.

Describes impact of the weather on the ranch. The consultant recalls four or five "big-time droughts," the difficulty in doing supplemental feeding in rough country, and the need to keep cattle, if you are running any, out of the sheep feeders. He states that in 1941 during his father's tenure at the ranch, they received seventy inches of rain; fences were washed out for miles causing animals to be mixed together.

Treat's family paint branded their sheep until the mid-1980s when the buyers began to complain about paint in the wool. They then started to use ear tags, however these are relatively easy to remove if someone intends to steal a sheep.

## **TAPE TWO, SIDE A:**

Treat didn't experience wintertime losses of his sheep because of all the protection afforded the animals by the terrain. The consultant describes what can happen to newly shorn sheep caught in a cold rain in flat country. Sometimes a sheep would drown on the ranch in a fast-running creek, "a very costly event when that happens," but he did not experience substantial losses due to the weather.

Describes the rock house built on the ranch by his great-uncle. Although the house was quite small, two rooms could be used for a dance floor and people came from miles around to dance. The house was built in 1911 and a concrete water storage tank dates to about the same time period.

Treat hired two laborers for "lighter times of the year," but in the "work period" he would employ as many as nine or ten people. They sheared sheep in the latter part of February and lambbed in mid-April. He states that sheep do not tolerate a great deal of interference; he would work with the sheep as quickly as he possibly could.

The Treats started putting in fences in the late 1920s, before each shepherd was responsible for a thousand ewes. They kept the herd moving and were with them twenty-four hours a day.

He states that he has sometimes hired a husband and a wife team, although this works well for cooking chores, it inevitably leads to problems of various kinds with the single men. A lot of the time Treat would furnish the groceries and the men would do their own cooking, sometimes he would hire a male cook.

New fence construction requires crews of ten to twenty individuals. He built with both net wire and barbed wire. Treat built cross fences in some of the large pastures that were difficult to gather effectively, probably about twenty-five miles in a six-year period. They used steel fence posts in the rocky soil of the ranch.

The ranch got electricity in 1957. Prior to that his father used an Aerometer wind charger. About all the electricity this provided was lights for the house, a refrigerator, for example, would draw too much power.

His sheep brand is the Black Dot (a square with a dot in the middle). He has two cattle brands, his grandmother's brand the T Lazy T and the R/R (R slash R) that he bought with his present ranch, the Rocky Ridge.

He describes typical round of work, but mentions that he usually had a "sub-foreman" that directed most of the work. In inclement weather feeding and checking that water is available is the major work. Then they always are watching for predators in the herds, fixing fences, and making improvements. The consultant says when he was a youngster his father would take him to the ranch and leave him there by himself with the ranch employees in order to "make me learn." (He describes that as a child he can remember very consistent rainfall during the summer at the ranch but says this changed at some point, he can't remember the year, and they no longer get the "west rains . . . we don't get that weather pattern anymore.") The principal job he had as a youngster was to ride horseback checking the herd, water and feed availability, and riding the fences checking for places where predators could get access to the herd. Also in those times screw worms were a problem, every other day the two to three hundred rams, who if they fought and got a sore were susceptible, would have to be gathered and treated.

Treat describes marketing their wool. They would begin shearing February 15<sup>th</sup> and the wool would usually be sold by June 1<sup>st</sup>. Lambs were marketed in the fall, having been weaned from the ewes in late September or October. The buyer picked the lambs up at the ranch. He discusses how he chose replacement ewes. If a rancher raised replacement rams, they were weaned in August because they mature more rapidly than the females and there is the risk that they could breed their mothers, which would then throw the “cycles off season.”

Started discussion of prices for wool and sheep when the tape ended.

### **TAPE TWO, SIDE B:**

Discussion continues regarding prices ranchers receive for their products. At one point his grandfather sold wool for three cents a pound and lambs for ten cents a pound. Of course, expenses were also much lower. Treat states, “we’re losing ground as time goes on because we are getting better prices, but it’s not proportional to what our cost side is.” In the 1960s the consultant recalls selling lambs for thirteen cents a pound (lambs weigh from seventy-five to ninety-five pounds depending on conditions during the year). However, at that time wool was selling from the high forties to the mid-sixty cents per pound, higher than it has been the last couple of years. The most he ever received for lambs was a dollar a pound during the 1970s. In the 1980s he received his highest price for wool at roughly \$3.40 a pound, in what he describes as a “fluke” in world wool production. Wool prices have been very depressed the last couple of years, one of the reasons that fewer children will choose to go into ranching, “there’s just no money to be made in this business anymore.” Many people buying ranching property do not expect to make a living from the land; it is viewed as a tax write-off.

Describes that borrowing money is ‘standard policy’ for ranchers, “you just can never play catch-up.” With operating costs escalating over the past fifteen years, sometimes notes were not paid in full from year to year leading to a debt that is difficult to pay. Many people mortgage their land and their livestock, or both. The consultant refers to government programs and says that the 1986 tax relief act had a devastating impact on agriculture. He describes the act that regulated what expenses could be claimed against income in figuring income taxes and its consequences. Also there isn’t the assistance from the federal government to put in cross fencing, develop water, and control brush or cactus on ranchers’ property, which, if these things are not done, leads to the degradation of agricultural land.

Losses from animal diseases are not significant in New Mexico; losses related to predation (coyotes, eagles, and bobcats) are of greater consequence. The primary method of control is government-financed trappers. Eagles are a significant threat, but as of 1972, they became a protected species and could no longer be killed.

Treat discusses that he started going out on horseback when he was five or six. He was always accompanied by an adult but rode his own horse. He doesn’t remember any significant accidents at the ranch during the time he spent there, but does recall a man getting killed in a horseback accident during the time his grandfather was running the ranch.

The consultant describes that at the time he and his wife began managing the ranch in the 1960s they had a broadband radio that allowed them to communicate with neighbors (telephones were not common until the early 1980s). Treat and his wife decided to buy a house in town in order to facilitate the children’s (born in 1963 and 1966) education and to allow Mrs. Treat to work as an educator. He discusses his children.

**TAPE THREE, SIDE A:**

Discussion continues about the consultant's children. The consultant discusses his wife's family from Las Cruces. Describes his wife's career as an educator in the Roswell public school system. His wife had a degenerative health condition and died in 1998.

Treat's present ranch, purchased about four years ago, is comprised of six sections. He raises Black Angus cattle, however, he has been forced to sell down to twenty head due to the drought conditions. One of the reasons he purchased the ranch was to allow for easy access to the hospital when his wife was ill.

The consultant describes his love of the land and a "good rain" especially because your livelihood depends on it. He discusses his greatest achievement as taking an "average" herd of sheep and turning it into one of the best three herds in the state. The greatest hardship of ranching is drought conditions.

Treat states that ranching is a "declining way of life." Many ranch owners nowadays do not even reside on the property. They discuss some of the property owners in the area. Treat states that a young person cannot get into the ranching business unless their parents can finance them. He relates that he has questioned his decision to sell his sheep ranch, but states "the sheep business now is a true disaster and . . . dozens of people, year after year, are going out of it." The consultant then says that income versus expenses is similar in cattle ranching, "nobody is really making any kind of money." Only wealthy people can afford to own ranches and they don't need to earn a living from the land.

Treat describes changes in ranching, for example, before fencing was common his grandfather drove his lambs to the railhead in Roswell.

The consultant suggests others in the area that the Museum might be interested in interviewing.

**TAPE THREE, SIDE B:** Blank