

**NEW MEXICO
FARM & RANCH
HERITAGE
MUSEUM**

**ORAL HISTORY PROGRAM
INTERVIEW ABSTRACT**

CONSULTANT: Emanuel Vocale

DATE OF BIRTH: January 28, 1913 GENDER: Male

DATE(S) OF INTERVIEW: June 15 and June 22, 2000

LOCATION OF INTERVIEW: Mr. Vocale's home, Deming, New Mexico

INTERVIEWER: Nigel Holman

SOURCE OF INTERVIEW: NMF&RHM X OTHER _____

TRANSCRIBED: Yes: July 10, 2000

NUMBER OF TAPES: Six

ABTRACTOR: Sheila Klug

DATE ABSTRACTED: June 3, 2002

QUALITY OF RECORDING (SPECIFY): Excellent

SCOPE AND CONTENT NOTE: Covers Mr. Vocale's emigration from Italy to West Virginia and thence to Deming, New Mexico. It includes his memories of growing up on a farm, returning to Italy to marry, and his history as a farmer and wine-maker in Deming.

DATE RANGE: 1912-2000

ABSTRACT (IMPORTANT TOPICS IN ORDER OF APPEARANCE):

TAPE ONE, SIDE A:

Mr. Vocale's father was a coal miner in Williamson, West Virginia, where he was visited in 1928 by a representative of the Deming Chamber of Commerce, a Mr. Ed Odenbach, who was trying to find people to relocate to the Mimbres Valley. Because Mr. Vocale's father had worked in agriculture in Italy and also because he was concerned about health problems connected with coal mining, he decided to move to Deming. He didn't have enough money to buy a farm, so he arranged to do crop sharing with the new owner of the land, a woman who worked in the mine office.

Mr. Vocale described how his father first went to Canada in 1912 and then to the United States in 1917. At first he thought he would stay for two or three years and then return to his family in Italy. World War I prevented him from returning as planned, and he decided he wanted to stay. Finally, in 1926, his wife and children came from San Nicandro, Italy, to West Virginia. The consultant tells how his mother missed the boat the first two times because she did not understand that it would not wait for her. Eventually, though, she and the consultant landed in New York with no money because she had given it to her sister in Italy. With the help of U. S. Immigration, she contacted her husband, who wired her money for the train trip to West Virginia. While waiting for the money the family spent three days at Ellis Island, which the consultant describes as "a great place . . . playgrounds and . . . the best food I ever ate." He also described the music and dancing done by the immigrants.

Mr. Vocale describes the train trip and how conductors along the way looked after the family, who spoke no English. The alighted from the train in Deming in the middle of a big sandstorm. The consultant's mother said, "This is the end of the world." A man standing nearby said, "No, the end of the world is Lordsburg, the next stop."

Mr. Vocale also told about the legal problems they had on the train trip. His mother's uncle was here illegally, mainly because he had not applied for amnesty in 1924. Mr. Vocale's mother burned all the family's papers when they got to the United States, so even though they were here legally they did not have the paperwork to prove it.

TAPE ONE, SIDE B:

The consultant describes their first year of farming. Because they got a late start (early June), they planted beans and hegari (white milo). The rows were uneven, particularly those plowed by the consultant's uncle. They were the "laughing stock" that year, but Mr. Vocale's father promised the neighbors that the next year they would not be laughing at his farm. By the third year they had the "best looking farm in Deming." Also during that first year they rented a tractor to use, but because they had never used motor-driven equipment before they didn't know how to care for it and burned it up.

Mr. Vocale describes the tough times they faced during the Depression. Schooling was not a high priority with his parents, so he dropped out early to work on the farm. They struggled for several years, and his mother felt isolated and wanted to return to Italy, but his father was adamant that they stay. Beginning in 1934 things started to improve.

Mr. Vocale then describes a trip to Italy he took in 1952. The country was still recovering from World War II. He describes how they had no ice and how they buried snow in pits they had dug

and then cut off chunks for people to us in an icebox. Because he couldn't get cold beer there he developed a taste for wine. After he returned to Deming he planted grapes, starting in 1956. He had problems at first because he had the grapes too close to trees and the birds kept getting the grapes. He reports he had planted the trees hoping that Immigration would not see the illegal Mexicans working on the place.

His father had had conscientious objectors and German POWs working on the place. The German POWs were in a temporary camp in Deming just to pick cotton. In the winter they were moved back to their permanent camp.

TAPE TWO, SIDE A:

Mr. Vocale talked at length about Mussolini and his regime. He relates a conversation he had with a friend in Italy in 1936, where he had gone to get married. In the conversation he stated that he was an American now, not Italian. His friend's brother was a "big shot" in the party and invited Mr. Vocale for a walk. Mr. Vocale managed to put him off, knowing that on that walk he would be beaten up by thugs.

He describes the difficulties in completing the paper work necessary for him to marry his wife and bring her back to the United States. He had a ninety-day permit to remain in Italy. They managed to marry in that time but he had to leave before his wife got her passport. Two days after he left, the Italian government came by with the paperwork to draft him into the Italian Army.

He describes in some detail the further problems his wife had getting permission to come to the United States. He was told that he needed to get someone in Washington to manipulate the order of the names on the waiting list. A good friend of his in Deming phoned Senator Hatch, who took care of things. Three days after the American Consul heard from Senator Hatch, Mrs. Vocale was notified that her visa had been approved.

Mr. Vocale describes how he had known his wife when they were children in Italy because their families were friends.

TAPE TWO, SIDE B:

Several years later his aunt had gotten to know his future wife well and suggested that she would make a good wife for Mr. Vocale. The consultant describes the long-distance courtship that ensued, including many letters to his future father-in-law and then to his future wife. He also had to get his U. S. citizenship before he would go to Italy.

He describes how communication was more expensive and took much longer than now. People used telegrams or would make arrangements to call the town's one phone at a certain time. Now the consultant routinely calls his niece in Australia.

The consultant also compares farming with a horse versus a tractor how the "good old days" weren't all that good except that he was young then.

He once again remarks about life under a dictatorship and how people opposed to the dictatorship suffered. He stated that both he and his wife have never missed voting in an election in the United States.

TAPE THREE, SIDE A:

Mr. Vocale talked once again about how he and his family arrived in Deming. The four-room house with running water and electricity they had been promised was not there. The landowner they had originally contracted with (back in West Virginia) backed out of the deal. When the original landowner saw how enthusiastic they were about farming he said he would take over the contract and help them out.

After a year as a sharecropper, though, Mr. Vocale's father said that he wanted to buy the place or else go back to the mines in West Virginia. The landowner sold him the place for one dollar down. When the Depression came along, things got so bad that the consultant's father could not make the payment. A well-to-do neighbor, Hannah Huxtable, lent him the money because she did not want him to take his family back to West Virginia.

The man who originally invited them to the Mimbres Valley also lent them money. He also introduced the family to a Japanese man who came there and planted vegetables. Up until that time they had been growing just grain and beans and were having difficulty selling their products. With the help of the Japanese man they grew tomatoes for the local cannery plus bell peppers, carrots, chile, and lettuce. Many other local farmers then started growing vegetables as well.

The farmers had an informal baseball club, and the Japanese man loved to play baseball. Finally he left the area and during World War II was put in an internment camp in Ohio. He sent Mr. Vocale a card from Columbus, but did not sign it. Later, in the 1950s, he came through Deming and stopped by the farm.

The consultant told how the Federal Marshal came out after World War II started and said that Mr. Vocale was harboring an enemy alien. Mrs. Vocale came here in 1936 but by 1941 she still had not become a citizen, nor had she gone to the post office to register as an enemy alien. The Federal Marshal was a good friend, but the men with him still searched Mr. Vocale's house for firearms, explosives, and short-wave radios. They took away his guns and radio but the marshal told him to come into his office the next day to get them back. (The pistol was retained, however.) Within a year Mrs. Vocale became a citizen, at which time the remaining items were returned.

Mr. Vocale started farming on his own in 1938. He describes how he worked for a month each year to help another farmer cure his sweet potatoes. He worked during the day with a crew digging the sweet potatoes. After dinner he stacked the sweet potatoes in the man's cellar. The man was very fussy about how this was done, and Mr. Vocale, one of the few who could do it satisfactorily, describes the method used.

Mr. Vocale next talks about the few tractors in Deming before the Second World War and how they were used mostly for plowing. He describes how he argued with his dad to convince him to get a tractor. Finally his father bought a John Deere tractor that ran on distillate.

TAPE THREE, SIDE B:

Mr. Vocale continued talking about the use of tractors and describes how he got his first tractor from Mr. Krill (the farmer who grew sweet potatoes) because Mr. Krill bought a new tractor and then discovered he hated it. Mr. Vocale had only forty acres and needed more land. He had a well dug in 1937 and farmed on his own in 1938. He grew Irish potatoes, beans and grain, but he did not have a cotton allotment.

The consultant needed to borrow fifty dollars in order to harvest his potatoes. Even though he owned his land free and clear the bank refused to lend him the money. Mr. Vocale ran into a good friend who was on the Board of Directors of the bank. This friend, Mr. Lindauer, co-signed the note so the bank had to lend him the money. The banker was not pleased at being overruled, however, and deducted ten percent from the amount lent. Mr. Vocale swore he would never deal with that bank again. In fact, in 1941 he told his wife that they would never owe money again, except on their house.

The discussion then turned to the use of Mexican workers. Many of these were illegal. They would come across the river, harvest the crops, and then return to Mexico. During the war it was very difficult to get workers, and they hired women for the first time.

The consultant describes in some detail the problems of getting a cotton allotment and how he had to go to the state because the county turned him down.

He also describes about learning the value of leveling the land. At first he did this just "by eye," whereas now it is laser-leveled.

TAPE FOUR, SIDE A:

Talk about leveling the land continues. The consultant describes the use of a "land plane" and then his earlier use of a "Fresno," which is essentially a drag.

The consultant next talks about a man who worked for him for twenty-five years. He was a non-resident but had a work permit. He wanted to become a resident, so Mr. Vocale helped him fill out his application. His application was turned down because he had too many children. The consultant describes how he called the American Consul and complained about low quality people being allowed in and a hard-working man like Mr. Sanchez being kept out. He finally convinced her to issue the permit.

The discussion then turned to the use of conscientious objectors as laborers to replace the men who were drafted. For two years they helped with the threshing, but they refused for the third because they felt they were doing "slave labor." He also used German POWs but was not allowed to talk with them. He did talk to some Italian POWs in Las Cruces. He did this by just stopping by while the guard was away. Mr. Vocale tried to tell the prisoners they were losing the war, but they did not want to believe him.

Mr. Vocale corresponded for a time with an Italian prisoner in New Jersey who was from his home town in Italy.

Finally, Mr. Vocale talks about drilling wells and water rights. He described how his first well was dug in 1938. In 1941 there was a lot of concern about the water level dropping, so the state engineer proposed an experiment. Every farmer contributed so much money (perhaps fifty cents?) and a 1,000-foot well was dug to determine how much water is in the area. They found there was a lot of water up to 500 feet. Below 500 feet there was water, but it would be uneconomical to pump it out. In 1938 he was pumping at 120-130 feet and in 2000 the water was around 290 feet.

TAPE FOUR, SIDE B:

Discussion of wells and various problems associated with digging them continues here. Talk then turned to concrete ditches, which Mr. Vocale started installing in 1953. The first one he did by hand. He had about two miles of these hand-dug concrete ditches completed when a college developed a Fuller form (also known as a "slip form") to pour the concrete into, creating the ditches much more cheaply.

Mr. Vocale describes the difficulties he had building the barn in 1944 due to rationing. The walls were made of adobe, but he still needed sheet metal, which he had to get in batches. The building was built by a seventy-five-year-old man who used no nails but bolted the building together.

Although electricity was available from the time they first arrived in 1928, the consultant's father did use windmills for about fifteen years, but after the water level began dropping he switched to electric.

The consultant pointed to two buildings which had been barracks at the airport but were moved to the ranch. Although they are now used for storage, they housed braceros, sometimes as many as thirty people, who were used to pick cotton. He talked a length about furnishing these facilities and problems he had with some of the workers. He also describes the ways some farmers took advantage of the workers, many of whom were illiterate. Some of the problems he had with the braceros led to his buying a cotton-picking machine.

TAPE FIVE, SIDE A:

After he started using the cotton-picker he stopped getting braceros. He used them for only four years and eventually his neighbors also stopped using braceros. He estimates the program only lasted about eight years because it was easier to deal with machinery than with humans.

Now they are trying to solve the problem of picking chile by hand. The crop doesn't ripen all at once, but using a machine only one crop would be harvested, making it fairly expensive.

Mr. Vocale's father had grown tomatoes and had fifty acres of them. While they were successful, production was not good enough for the local cannery. Mr. Vocale planted tomatoes only one year and lost them all to hail. He decided he did not want to grow such a perishable crop.

His father also grew lettuce, which he sold to buyers from El Paso, which was the closest (the next closest being Phoenix).

The consultant describes growing tomatoes in 1931 and selling them in Tucson. It cost twenty-five cents a lug (box of twenty to twenty-five pounds) to deliver the crop to Tucson, and they received only fifty cents. In addition, there was a great deal of labor involved in harvesting and packing the tomatoes then. Lettuce was the only vegetable crop that made his father any money, but basically he and his father did not like the vegetable business because the crop was so perishable and the window of selling time is so small.

Mr. Vocale described why and how sweet potatoes are cured. After they are cured they keep better and have better flavor. They were very carefully stacked in a dirt-floored root cellar.

Eventually Mr. Vocale bought a cotton allotment and added to it by buying farms and then keeping their cotton allotments when he sold them. He talks about selling one farm, minus the

allotment, to a neighbor. After three or four years the neighbor paid him off because he had sold the land to his mother. A few years later the state bought the farm for Interstate 10 and then decided it back to the owner for one dollar after they got the land they needed to build an overpass. Thus the owner sold the farm and then got it back for nothing. Since creation of the overpass had left a big hole there, the city decided to make a landfill out of it and began paying the owner \$250 a month for it.

Mr. Vocale also began growing pinto beans, but he stopped after losing his whole crop in 1955 due to too much water. He stated he got twenty-two inches of rain that year. After that he decided to stick with cotton and grain. He feels that although a farmer can get wealthy from chile, onions, and lettuce if he hits it right, cotton is steady. The grain crops he grew included milo, barley, and hegari (white milo).

He describes his winemaking as a hobby and relates how he got started with it after going to Italy in 1952. He drove his wife and four children to New York City and then shipped the car to Italy. The apprehension of doing this caused stomach problems, so he stopped drinking beer. On the ship he found that wine did not cause him any distress. When he got to Italy he did not like their warm beer, so he continued drinking wine. Ice, which was actually frozen snow, was difficult to buy in any quantity.

When he got back to Deming he planted grapes, but he had a problem with the birds taking all the grapes. Now he grows some grapes but buys the rest from a neighbor. He started growing Tokay grapes with cuttings he got from his father, who got them from a Swiss man named Ernst. Ernst's great-grandson is still producing wine.

TAPE FIVE, SIDE B:

His father made about fifteen or twenty gallons of wine a year and bought the rest from Mr. Ernst. At that time Mr. Ernst's wine was really bad, almost vinegar. Mr. Vocale's mother had experience making wine in Italy and he eventually learned to make good wine. Winemaking has changed a great deal from the 1950s until now. The most important aspect of winemaking, he feels, is to start with good, ripe, flavorful, and undamaged grapes. He describes the steps taken in the process from crushing the grapes through the bottling process. He also talks about the use of sulfides (a preservative) in wine and why some people must avoid sulfides.

He also talks about how wineries blend wines to keep the price affordable. Because he is making wine only for his own consumption, he uses the best grapes he can get. The soil and climate in Deming is not the best for growing grapes because they get less production. The flavor, he feels, is excellent. He also talks about testing the grapes for sugar content. Rather than use an instrument, Mr. Vocale simply tastes the grape. He talked about one winery in particular, Llano Estacado in Lubbock, Texas, which buys a great deal of grapes from his neighbor.

Mr. Vocale stopped farming in 1976. A few years ago another neighbor wanted to go into partnership with the consultant, saying he would supply the grapes if Mr. Vocale would make the wine. The consultant felt he did not want to be bothered.

TAPE SIX, SIDE A:

In 1966 he and his son went into partnership until he retired from farming in 1976.

He talked some about how farming has changed. Farmers today grow different crops than he did, such as chile, lettuce, and onions. Except for one year, he never grew chile. He did it “for fun” that year and then could not sell the crop. Producing grain and cotton has not changed as much except they do a lot of spraying on the cotton. He did not spray except for one year when the worms were very bad. The modern farmers have bigger yields, but it costs them a lot more, he feels, even with the government subsidies.

Mr. Vocale talked about how one year he and a neighbor pooled their cotton because the buyer liked to buy big lots. The neighbor kept wanting to wait until the price went higher. It did not go higher, and Mr. Vocale sold for a loss. His friend kept his in storage and had a complete loss, plus he had to pay storage charges.

The consultant describes how he helped organize the Columbus Electric Co-op. Later it changed its name and grew until it had distribution lines all over the county, as far away as Arizona. Now he cannot even hook up with the co-op because he already has service and is not allowed to change.

The consultant was also involved for a time with the Farm Bureau and helped organize the Farm Bureau Insurance in the area. He and a neighbor went around to the various farmers to get them to pledge they would buy the insurance if and when it was offered. Mr. Vocale himself pledged \$1,000.

TAPE SIX, SIDE B:

When the Farm Bureau got “big and fat,” they paid off the stockholders, a move which did not please Mr. Vocale. He is still a member, though, because he feels it is the only farmers’ organization and that farmers cannot be effective if they act individually.

The only loss Mr. Vocale suffered was when he invested in the cannery. The company was mismanaged, he feels, causing it to go broke.

Mr. Vocale talked briefly about his children and grandchildren. He worries some about his grandchildren, whose father(s?) died some years ago. He feels he is unable to help them as much as he would like to. Discussion turned to the fact that his grandchildren do not have a good knowledge of agriculture and how people in general today are not too knowledgeable about where their food comes from.

Talk next turns to growing watermelons. Mr. Vocale tries to have his be ready when other people do not have any.

Finally, discussion turned to Mrs. Vocale’s health problems, her scheduled hospitalization, and the fact that they have been married for sixty-three years.