



ORAL HISTORY PROGRAM
INTERVIEW ABSTRACT

CONSULTANT: Joe Weber

DATE OF BIRTH: October 27, 1924 GENDER: Male

DATE(S) OF INTERVIEW: July 4, 2003

LOCATION OF INTERVIEW: Weber Ranch near Buena Vista, N.M.

INTERVIEWER: Ramona L. Caplan

SOURCE OF INTERVIEW: NMF&RHM X OTHER _____

TRANSCRIBED: Yes: February 10, 2004

NUMBER OF TAPES: Two

ABTRACTOR: Ramona L. Caplan

DATE ABSTRACTED: November 2003

QUALITY OF RECORDING (SPECIFY): Good

SCOPE AND CONTENT NOTE: The Webers are an old farm and ranching family in Northeast New Mexico. Joe's grandfather first came to region at Fort Union in the 1850s. He settled in the area, eventually establishing several businesses. Also discusses his [Joe's] life and family and the modern use of the old family farm.

DATE RANGE: 1850-2003

ABSTRACT (IMPORTANT TOPICS IN ORDER OF APPEARANCE):

TAPE ONE, SIDE A:

The consultant, aged 78, lives in the house where he was born (with the help of a *curandera*). His father built the house in 1904 in Golondrinas, twenty-six miles north of Las Vegas, N.M. (mailing address Buena Vista).

He discusses his grandfather's home that was washed away in the 1904 flood, family nationality, his grandfather's arrival as a soldier at Fort Union, as well as his grandparent's settlement on 300 acres of his wife's family's land grant. Also discusses crops, the winery, brewery, the store and his father's employees.

Joe was nine months old when his mother died. Father raised sons Frank Jr. and Henry (both deceased). Aunt Amelia raised Joe in Sapello. Attended Sapello School through 8th grade. He had no transportation to continue school in Las Vegas.

Has found arrowheads, teepee rings, and pottery shards on his land.

The 1870 census lists Frank's family and employees. The Weber post office was located next to Frank's store. Freighters camped overnight and wrote on nearby big rocks. It was one day's travel to Watrous. His father never sold the family land. His aunt Amelia sold 5,000 acres in 1904 for \$5,000. Her husband [his uncle] talked her into it after a flood. The land is worth \$1,500 acre today, a total of \$7.5 million. The 1910 census lists maternal grandfather Anacito Madrid, mother Mercedes, father Fred William Weber, aunts, and uncles. "All in a Day: Highway 61" (*New Mexico*, June 1994) discusses Joe and Frank.

The consultant has a ledger written in English from Frank's store, which lists customers alphabetically for years 1869-1874. Ten pounds of coffee was \$4.00; vegetables were \$7.50 a bushel. Frank's friends from Germany also lived in Weber.

He has pictures of the 1904 flood at Mora. The Weber store was washed away. Many people left the area at that time. Irrigation ditches and fields were damaged. He remembers going to Watrous with his father to sell hay and buy groceries at Rankins & Reynolds store (Henry Rankins lived next door). He recalls that you could buy anything there—groceries, furniture, clothing, and machinery. Joe has his mother's furniture from Rankins' store. Farmers and ranchers sold goods to Rankins, which were stored in their warehouse [buildings are still there].

His grandfather supplied the neighborhood with groceries, beer, and wine. He brought supplies to Fort Union. Soldiers came from the Fort to buy liquor, also bought at Loma Parada.

Father built a one-room house from logs salvaged from grandfather's house after flood. He married, and then added two rooms to the original one-room house. Joe lived in Sapello with an aunt until 1940, when her house and store burned down. He then moved back with his blind father, took care of him and the farm until he died.

TAPE ONE, SIDE B:

The farm has always been a hay farm with irrigated land. Brother returned from Army and did not want to farm. Instead worked for a railroad in Wyoming. He moved to Denver and later died. Other brother also was not interested in the ranch. Joe bought out the brothers and ran the

ranch himself. Joe gave the bulk of the farm to his two sons, kept a parcel for himself, and gave twenty acres each to his three daughters. Describes his children and their spouses and children.

Used to get up at 4:30–5:00 to milk the only milk cow. He had a herd of twenty-six cows and sold calves. He mended fences, did all the chores himself, with no help except from his wife, Manuel, and Julia. Raised hay until the 1952 drought, when it became so dry that one could not raise anything. They leased out the house and moved to Wyoming with the three kids. A sick son, “born with big head”, died in Wyoming. Three more children were born in Rawlins. He worked for the railroad for ten years as a section-man and truck driver. He moved to Mora for five years; worked as a lineman for Electric Cooperative for twenty-two years. Wired house and moved back home in 1965. Kids bussed one hour to Mora school. Mercy attended Highlands Univ., and is now a schoolteacher in Mora. The consultant retired 1980, but continues to work the farm and grow hay. The land is irrigated from ditch, off of the Mora River. Land was completely fenced by father.

Had no electricity or plumbing as child. Water from river was pure. The consultant built a new kitchen when first married, and had an outhouse. The bathroom was added after they returned from Wyoming. Occasionally he hired help. Got electricity in 1965.

[Wife Mercy arrives home and joins the discussion.] Sunday night was bath night; family members took turns in the same tub water. Mercy brought in kindling wood. When Joe rang bell, kids had to come inside and wash dishes. The river was the kids’ pastime. Played with neighbor kids, had horses. Played “King of the Mountain” on haystacks. He recalls that the river flooded a couple times. A 1965 tornado took a cottonwood tree, shed roof, and barn, but left the cow standing unharmed.

Recalls that he used to get 50¢ a bale for hay in 1950. Five to six thousand bales annually. It is \$5.00-\$6.00 now. Last year, he made only 100 bales. Irrigation is not going well this year.

The kids’ chores were to carry water and wood, feed chickens, gather eggs, and clean house. No chickens anymore; dogs killed them.

TAPE TWO, SIDE A:

[Wife, Mercy, is no longer in the room.] Recalls that there were no doctors nearby. They used home medicine. Wife doctored them, sometimes took kids to Las Vegas to the doctor (for immunizations), picked herbs and saved them for winter. He never had government help or worked with any government agencies. His wife made cream and cottage cheese, and grew her own vegetables. They shopped for lard, flour and sugar.

On Sundays the Webers got together with neighbors. Cinco de Mayo and July 4th were spent in Las Vegas, N.M. Had fiesta in Mora on July 25-26. On “Bean Day” the family went to Wagon Mound (32 miles away) and ate for free. Families reunited at Bean Day. Joe’s two oldest children were also born in this house (with a *curandera*). The consultant’s grandparents, father, and other family members were buried on their land. This property has since been sold.

He recalls a typical breakfast of potatoes, eggs, bacon, and oatmeal. Dinner consisted of beans and stew. Supper was tortillas, beans, and chili. They had no television, and had only battery radio until 1965. They had a television in Wyoming and Mora. In 1968 he dug a well by hand, which pumped very hard water. Eventually he got a washer and dryer.

He met his wife, who was a neighbor, when he was twenty. His wife's family was three boys, and five girls. Went dancing in Buena Vista on Saturday nights on horseback. Sometimes he went in a neighbor's buggy. Later years, he had a Model A. He got eleven people in car — some on fenders, some in the rumble seat. He read newspapers, magazines, and catalogues. Before electricity, he recalls that he went to bed when it got dark and got up early. Brought water home in barrels in the back of a truck. On bath night, the cleanest kid was the first one in metal tub.

Mostly old people, sixty and over, live there now. There are no children, only his grandkids. Grandkids go on school bus to Mora.

He recalls that he swapped work with neighbors. He attended church in Golondrinas, which only has Mass once or twice a year now, so he goes to Mora.

[Son Charlie arrives.] Discusses the September 2001 *New Mexico* magazine article, "Villages of Mora County," that mentions the Webers. Grandfather spoke English, German, and Spanish. Joe never belonged to any farmer's organizations, but is active in church as a majordomo.

During times of drought, many people sold their land. Some returned, others did not.

The consultant used to sell baled hay for \$3.50 to \$4.00; now it sells for \$5.00-\$6.00. He comments that ranch and farm life is better now. He recalls that he used to sell a calf for \$7.00-\$8.00; now calves sell for \$300-\$500.

Property taxes used to be \$125 for whole place. Now he pays \$500 for his part. There are still working farms, and ranches nearby. Most make a living from work outside of the farm; little is made from the farm. The consultant has sold only calves for the past two years. He grows corn for himself and his family.

The consultant recalls his childhood, how work was hard and done by hand. He has farmed and ranched all his life. It has been a good life. In the city there is too much noise, traffic, and people. It is peaceful and quiet here. Better standards here, children are more respectful.

Charlie brought in magazine article that was discussed earlier. It includes a big picture of Joe, mislabeled as Ben, because the author got confused drinking Joe's homemade moonshine.

TAPE TWO, SIDE B:

Joe's son Charlie had a big accident, had several operations, and was hospitalized for one year. Charlie's sons range in age from 7 to 22. Four live at home, one attends Highlands. One of Joe's kids attended college. Charlie recalls Bean Day with carnivals and a rodeo. Charlie says it was nice growing up in that environment, and hopes his boys will keep it up, that heritage is important. Charlie wants to keep up family property. Says there are some young children around there. Not as many farmers or ranchers as before. Land is going to waste. They farm in spare time, but not as their main source of income.

Charlie helped with chores and carried wood. He recalls that he was afraid of cows — not good at milking,

Joe's mother's family farmed. Aunt sold the family place.

Charlie got an artificial leg a year ago, ten years after a steel-roller accident pinned and smashed his foot. Has had other health scares. Joe describes his heart attacks and procedures. Still smokes as he has since he was 12 years old.

Charlie always enjoyed this kind of life, but is not farming. He baby-sits children while his wife works as a cashier in Mora, 13 miles away. Cannot do too much physical work. Charlie spoke English & Spanish in school. As a kid, Joe spoke only Spanish at home, learned English in school. Charlie's kids do not really speak Spanish, but understand some. Charlie knows nothing about the family land grant.

Joe wants to be remembered for being a good neighbor, a good father, and a good American citizen.