

H. B. BIRMINGHAM ORAL HISTORY

There's nothing quite like a first-hand account of history, and that's the gift that oral history gives us. This oral history of H. B. Birmingham gives us a glimpse into the life of a Catron County character who, at 96 years old, has witnessed much of the history of the 20th Century in the county and has heard the stories of even earlier days from his family. From intimate details of ordinary life to larger historic themes such as the railroad, the home front during World War II, homesteading, cattle drives and the like - it's all here. There are tales of fortunes won and lost, straight deals and crooked deals, the ravages of nature, and business in the days when a man's word was as good as a contract. This is the history of Henry Bela Birmingham II - and that of his family - in his own words.



Henry Bela Birmingham, 1936



Henry Bela Birmingham, 2011

As the 150th commemoration of the 1862 Homestead Act approaches, the Socorro Bureau of Land Management's Cultural Resources Program will be promoting its oral history collection, particularly as it relates to homesteading. This interview with Reserve, New Mexico, resident H. B. Birmingham is part of that effort.

I interviewed H. B. Birmingham in Reserve on March 17, 2010, at the home of his friend and neighbor, Judy Griffin. Now nearly 96 years old, he has witnessed much of the history of Catron County since his birth in 1915 in Reserve. He raised both sheep and cattle, used the Magdalena Trail (Stock Driveway), and has extensive knowledge of his family history and the history of Reserve. Many thanks to Judy Griffin, who coordinated the visit and hosted us in her home. H. B. is a stickler for accuracy, so this article is in his own words--with only minor editing. All photos are courtesy of H. B. Birmingham, except as noted. My notations are in brackets.

Brenda Wilkinson, BLM Socorro Archaeologist
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CHILDHOOD AND FAMILY



H. B. Birmingham with his mother Ellen Mayberry Birmingham, 1915.



H.B. and sister May Birmingham gathering chips at the Cross V Ranch, Apache Creek.



HB That's the Birmingham family over on the Agustín Plains. And that ram - we raised some dogie lambs that our neighbors gave us, and we kept this ram until he was two years old. And he'd fight ya. Well, I let him run into a pitchfork, and by golly... So this family came in there, a Mexican family, they camped right beside the house. She was short, and the boy was sittin' up the doubletree to the front of the wagon, and was pokin' that old ram. And the old ram couldn't get to the kid. And finally the ram turned and started off. And the little boy got down to go to the house. Well, this old ram hit him in the butt and just flipped him over. His mother was in the house there. She heard all the commotion and came out. And she kicked the ram in the nose, and he started off. But when she bent over to pick up that little kid, that ram hit her in the butt. She was facing north, and by God she turned a complete flip, landed on her back, her head was facing south. It knocked the breath out of her. That

dog, he heard all the commotion. He come out and got the ram. That's the only thing that ram didn't beat on that ranch, was that black dog.



HB That's a picture up here at the Tularosa School. There--I'm there. Here's one of the Porter boys, and there's Horace Porter, and I think that's Harry Steen, my cousin. There's Anne Porter, Katherine's sister. That's up there by the graveyard. You come right by the graveyard before you got here. That's where the old school house used to be. That's where I went to school for a long time.



HB That's the Birmingham School over on the Agustín Plains. When I was a kid, you walked a mile to school. You carried your lunch. You was there at eight o'clock and you got out at four. When you got back home you had wood to cut, cows to milk. And now, kids don't have a thing to do--even right here in Reserve. Parents have got butane stoves and heaters, and they don't have to cut any wood (chuckles). And, I don't know, the kids don't have a chance like they used to.



HB That's my mother and that's my father. And there's me, there's my sister Sue. And that's my sister May and her children.



HB That's Patterson's son. And my brother Pat, and me, and my sister Katherine between us, and that's my mother and my sister May, I guess, and my father's kneeling down. There's my sisters' babies. They were all born within three days of each other.



H. B. Birmingham, 1936



H. B. on Alkali, leading Ranger

ROOTS

HB Henry Bela Birmingham was my dad. My father and his brothers--they're from England. And one of them was Bela, and he was a doctor. And Birmingham, Alabama was named after him. He was a hell of a good doctor, what they claim.

BW Birmingham was named after your grandfather?

HB Yes, that would be after my father's father. See there was six sets of half brothers and sisters. There was Mr. Birmingham's six pair, Mr. Hicks's six kids, Mr. Birmingham passed away, and she married Mr. Hicks 'cause his wife had passed away. So there they had eighteen half-brothers and sisters. The story goes he'd say, your kids and my kids are beating up our kids.

BW Okay, so you're Henry Bela Birmingham, Jr.

HB See, my dad - he was raised in Shawnee, Oklahoma. But he went to Canadian, Texas and went to school. And when he come to this country - we got a picture there where they come huntin'...1910, well, he was just like all these others. On the San Agustín Plains they were drillin' anywhere like 80 feet to 350 feet to hit water. And over here you had springs and warmer water. Well, he homesteaded there on the Agustín Plains. But he quit and come and got this place up here.



HB That's [the photo]...I don't really know. They were out huntin'. One of them is B. Steel, but I don't know which it is. But see, that's the pack boxes on the burros.



Bela Birmingham (H. B.'s father), second from left, his brother Pat Birmingham second from right, Grover Mayberry (H. B.'s uncle) far right. Taken at the Cross V. Ranch

HB My Uncle Pat, he's about five foot--or four foot eight or something.

BW Oh, so both your parents had their own kids, when they got married?

HB Yeah.

BW What was Patterson's first name, do you know?

HB It's R.C.--Richard. He's my great, great grandfather, R.C. Patterson is. And Mayberry is my grandfather. He helped build the railroad from Socorro into Magdalena. 'Course he worked on that fire guard plum to El Paso and back. Well, he liked this cattle country. His partner liked that country down there at Anthony. All that running water, level country. So my grandfather had worked on the railroad using scrapers and teams. And he sold all of his equipment and came back to Magdalena. Granny said when he done it he and his partner had a fire guard six feet wide on each side of that railroad, from

Magdalena to El Paso, Texas. A fire guard -- turning the sod over. So the trains wouldn't set the grass afire.

HB Well, now this is his story. He got down there at Anthony; he told his partner, says, "I'm gonna go back to Magdalena. I like that cow country." So my grandfather got on the train and come back to Magdalena.



BW Oh, and so here's grandmother. So was she a widow then when that was taken?

HB Well, she might have been.

BW Okay, your mom?

HB Francis Ellen Mayberry.



H. B. Birmingham's mother, Frances Ellen Mayberry, at the age of 19 (1911).



Ellen Mayberry



H.B.'s mother, Ellen, is third from left. Her father, Mark Mayberry (right), helped build the Magdalena railroad spur. Photo taken at Patterson, 1902 or 1903.

HB My mother's father--he was from Tennessee. And they built a railroad from back in Socorro to Magdalena, and that was built in 1885. That's him, my mother, and that's me, and that's May.



Birmingham family, Grandfather Mayberry on horseback, Ellen (H. B.'s mother) in the bonnet, Katherine, May and H. B.

HB That's an old eclipse windmill. The wheel is wood, and the tail is wood. They was just a direct drive you know, just up and down. Well, my dad had a ranch just on the southwest part of the Agustín Plains.

BW Did he buy that or did he homestead that?

HB He homesteaded.

BW And do you know what year?

HB 1918 was a vicious year. There was dead cattle beside the railroad track. The snow had covered them up and they killed 'em. And that's somewhere over there around Tucumcari.

HOMESTEADS and RANCHES (GIVE ME LAND, LOTS OF LAND!)

BW How did your family acquire the ranch?

HB Well, my dad acquired it by homesteading. A fella, Graham, filed on a section. And there's another boy livin' in Reserve here, filed on a section. Mains filed on a section. Millers filed on a section. And, I'd bought some of Rael's outfit. When Graham Main's father bought the Y Ranch, why we traded 44 [acres] for what I had at Collins Park.

BW How big was the ranch?

HB Well, I had--I think it was 21 sections in the forest. But on that hundred and sixty acres [that H. B. owned], Forest Service kept at me...aw, lets pool all that together. Be so much simpler. "No," I said. "If I have to bring in an extra horse to work cattle, I got a place to run him." So they finally backed off. You see, I had the mineral rights, the water rights, the grazing rights, and the timber rights. Now when you went to homestead, they took all that out. Well, of course, if you hold a spring, you could get that.

HB Oh, here's the Dark Canyon, that's where my grandfather--it's south of that divide. Oh, about three or four miles. But see, you go up there now, by damn, that's all growed up in timber.



H. B.'s Grandfather's Ranch

My grandfather, he married one of Patterson's daughters...then he bought his father-in-law out. That's where they got the Dark Canyon. Well, he went to drink. Then he was in town and Hubbell offered him \$50,000 for his holdings. Well, they talked there a little bit, and Hubbell laid a silver dollar on the bar. And my grandfather picked that up; he was pretty drunk. Hubbell said, "Mr. Mayberry, that's a down payment on your ranch." There was three fellas with him, and they just got up and left. Well, when he sobered up, the bartender said, "By God, you sold that ranch." And he said, "No, I couldn't...no." Says, "You picked up that silver dollar and that was a down payment." So, he stood by

what he had agreed. So he sold the Patterson, Dark Canyon, and the John's Well over east of Horse Springs--went to Hubbell. He sold to Hubbell. Now I can tell you this--if he'da' kept on with what he owned, I'd 've fell heir to it. And I'd be like these other sorry kids--got a lot of money and don't know what the hell to do (laughing). But those old cowboys...

HB That's it down on the Agustín Plains. Clear down at the end of the park. Collins Park is the place that I bought, up this side.

BW And so, when did your family first come to New Mexico?

HB My dad came in 1910 on a hunt. They come in a wagon and team from Canadian, Texas. They crossed the Rio Grande down there close to Las Cruces or somewhere. Then they rented pack animals to a come out in the woods. So he liked the country, then he moved back.

BW And do you know when he came back?

HB Well, and right after that, he come back to work.

BW And what did he do when he got here?

HB Well, he homestead over in the plains, but he left that and came over here and bought this fella out. Then after he lost that...see he worked for the Game Department, trappin' wild turkey. Well, he worked for them all the way back in 1910. Done a little trappin'.

BW Were there any buildings already on the ranch, or any of the land that you had?

HB No. There wasn't over here. Well, yeah there was. My grandfather had a house there.

BW Your grandfather?

HB Yeah. One of his daughters....scripted 40 acres. Now, I don't know what that scrip means, but you got--back there in Collin Park, they put in a sawmill there later, but I had the mineral rights, the water rights, grazing rights, and the timber rights. So that's--my father was the one with August Saiz, Gila Luna, Jim Hubbell, and Hunter Long--they're the ones that decided who was gonna get what, when they divided up the... One old boy says, "Let's just give that timber land to the state." I says, "Well, that's all right. You see, I'd rather buy it. Then I've got it." I says, "You be paying taxes to the county." And I says, "Well, a lot 'em, Moore from Roswell." He disagreed with him--a big shot. He says, "If I buy this land, I'll decide who's gonna graze it." Well, the Game Department put that in there and we fought there for two days over what to do with it. And I thought we had it settled, but our president, name of Montana--he had been the Sheep Association president for years and years. So he thought that our chairman of the Sheep Association had taken that clause out--that if you bought it you had the hunting rights. He said, "If I buy any of that land, I'll decide who's gonna hunt on it. And our president: "withdraw that statement." So that's when I quit the wool growers. 'Cause what would have happened if the state would have got it? The state wouldn't get that money, and if you want it, you'd pay taxes on it. And then after they graze it a year or two--hell there was grass to burn.

And I seen, my lifetime, oh I forget what they call it. They just take a post, set it in the ground in plaster. I've seen one at Raels' outfit, old man Rael's homestead. They'd plastered these poles. How

they made that cement stay on them things... Later on he built a rock house there. And hell, that-- maybe he'd have a sheep herder workin' for him, maybe his family would be in that little room there.

HB I don't recall this too much. That's the ranch over there. Or it may be our neighbor's ranch. See just that one building there?

BW Oh, there's a little cribbed log building there. Now where is this? And who is this?



HB I don't really know what that is. That has to be the Birmingham kids. There's my dad, but I can't place this fella. That's probably when we first moved over there. There was a nester there had a house. And he finally left. And they used cribbed log house... Oh, that's myself, and my sister May, and there's my dad. But these two here I don't...

BW That's one of the places you ended up with?

HB Well, we ended up with the cabin. They'd take a log, set it in the ground, and then plaster it with mud. Dirt roof. And how they made that mud stick in them cracks, I don't know. But I've seen a bunch in Albuquerque like that, and two on the Rael outfit over here. Old man Rael's first.

HB That's the ranch house that we finally filed on.



Birmingham Ranch on the plains, Horse Springs, NM 1951 (written on back)

HB See, there was a log house there. We put some more log rooms on it. Then this was, I think, a store room. This was where you park your car.

BW And that's your father's, and did you say he filed a homestead claim on that?

HB Well, his daughter had forty acres there that she filed on.

HB And here's one--a better one of the ranch. That's the old ranch house, on the right.



HB This is one my dad--see that's just a two room house [on the right], and this is two, three rooms [on the left.] And there's the windmill. And there's the store room there. Then over here there was a--oh, I forget--then there's a chicken house back there.

BW It looks like a car parked in there, that's a garage?

HB Yeah. That's where the old lady, the Mexican lady that the ram butted... See, later on they put a yard fence up [In front of the house with a white roof on the left].

HB And there's my outfit in Collins Park.



H. B.'s ranch at Collins Park

HB This gal painted a picture and that's what this is. See, there's your bunkhouse [off to the right] Yeah, and there was an old trailer we brought in [in the back] and out here there was a chicken house [far right].

BW So what can you tell me about this place? When did you get it?

HB This was the forty acres that I bought from Hop Lee, Grimm's grandfather. See, he's got **Hubbell's** outfit. **Hubbell** had tracts of land all over the country. But he never would settle any of them. I bought that--moved over there in--let me see, in '43. I bought these sheep from Aragon, and a permit. And the old boy built that house there, made out of adobe. And there's a little log house that's got two rooms, and that little log house. That little log house turns up on two homesteads. The old boy proved up on it. Then we had a fella we knew that proved up, so I just moved it in and set it there, and I should have never connected the house to it. Cause none of this roof's there. That little log house, and this is adobe. And that's the ranch at Collins Park.



H. B. Birmingham Ranch, 1947

HB It says the Birmingham Ranch. That's there at Horse Springs.

BW Is there anything still there?

HB See, here's part of it here.



H. B. Birmingham and his sister Sue, ca. 1936

HB It just shows part of the house. And that's my sister Sue there. That's the same ranch over on the Agustín Plains. See, I was smokin' cigarettes. I waited to twenty-one before I smoked.

STOCK DRIVEWAY

HB Yeah, now this is one of the first herds that was shipped on the Magdalena Driveway.



Herd being trailed on the Magdalena Stock Driveway, ca. 1886

HB Usually those big herds of cattle belonged to Englishmen. You take Montague Stevens, he was English. His wife was a cousin to Queen Elizabeth of England. He's the one that - he drew the money all the time from the Royal Family. That-a-way, he could do a lot of huntin', do a lot of ranchin'.

HB And that's George Farr's and my picture.



H. B. Birmingham, center left, and George Farr, center right.

HB Yeah. Now that's Mrs. George Farr [wearing hat], and now, this ole gal [far right], I don't remember her name, but she's writin' the story about the Driveway. And that's George Farr, and here's myself.

BW You wearin' a sidearm there?

HB Well, I always carried a damn pistol. I have killed as many as sixty-five rattlesnakes by myself, one summer. My land on the Agustín Plains, in the middle of it is sawgrass. Sawgrass grows up straight, and the edge of it is grama grass. You don't find any snakes down in that sawgrass; they're all back in the grama grass. And a lot of time you couldn't find a rock to kill one of 'em. So I carried a twenty-two pistol, just to shoot rattlesnakes.

HB Now I had met two guys, before the Driveway [improvements] was finished. And what they'd do, different people would put their steers together. And my uncle and I, Bob Hicks--he was my dad's half brother... Anyway, I guess the first time that I drove cattle was about 1932. It was my uncle, and we'd take other people's cattle, you know, put them together. And it was through this old cowboy that worked for my dad--learned me a hell of a lot about cattle.

HB See, when they started fixin' that Driveway, the CC boys done that, and as you come this side of Horse Springs--that well and the steel tank--and they made a trail on your right. That's the Continental Divide. Now you come from the east--all the water flows to the east. You come over that divide, all the water flows to the west.

HB See, I was more of a sheep man than I was a cattle man. I've helped drive--I know--two bunches of cattle to Magdalena. The ranchers would all put their cattle together. And we had a chuck wagon the first time. 'Bout 1932 we had a pickup. Those steer calves that weighed four hundred pounds in Magdalena in 1932 brought \$4.00. They brought \$16.00 for a big old steer. Now that was the first steer calves sold in Magdalena. 'Cause you couldn't cut the calves off from their mother and drive 'em.

Well, after they created the Driveway, the truckers went there--trucken' 'em off. And we were afraid that the truckers would get a franchise, and then you'd just pay whatever they... But it didn't turn out that a way 'cause there's so many different ones had trucks that they kept the price down.

We donated money to Good Sam. That money from Driveway for the winter grazin', we kept the money for trailin', but for that grazin' they let the Driveway Association handle it. [It is my understanding that when use of the Driveway ended and the Stock Driveway Association disbanded, remaining funds were donated to establish Good Sam in Socorro]

HB When we hit the Driveway back in the '60's, oh that was a long, tough journey. But after a year or two, then you had grass to burn. Lot of the cattle never touched it. Up here on the Continental Divide--it's half a mile wide there a while, then over Horse Springs it's a mile wide. You go east, south of Datil, that's where it hooks on. Well, they were developing water. But I was more interested in sheep than I was cattle. There's more money in sheep than there is in cattle.

HB So the first cattle that I helped trail in was 1932. And I was lucky, had a damn good cow man. My dad hired him to help drive them cattle. Well, if you got a road you got steers that'll take the lead--if you know which one to pick. If it's a road, you stay just back of that steer just a short distance. Now if there is no road, you get the same steer 'cause they've got leaders, which I didn't know, but this old cowboy told me. Says, "If you want that steer to move over a little bit, just crowd him--not much--he'll move over. If you want him to move back, you move away from him--he'll move right back to his position. After about three days, why we had the steer that the other steers were ridin'. And the old cowboy said, "That's a damn bullin' steer." I said, "What do ya' mean?" Said, "Well, all the steers are ridin' him." And he says, "They're gonna kill him." It got where he'd come follow the chuck wagon, and the chuck wagon would drive him, this steer that they was all ridin'. And they had a big fat steer replace him. But if you want that steer to move over on that trail, you don't crowd him, but move over towards him and about a half a length behind him--he'll move over. If there's not a road, you just move away from him at that distance, and he'll keep that distance, 'cause he's used to leading those steers. There was Shorty Lyons and Bud Nixon were trappers, government trappers, August Saiz. Trappers and cattle men. And my father when he liked this country, he went to work for the Montgomery there at Dark Canyon. And that's just south of where you seen that big REA line, crossin' the road, at that divide.

But you see, what they was 'fraid of--way back there--when you could file on six hundred forty acres, [after the passage of the Stock Raising Homestead Act in 1916] you could file on a whole section. Well, that's when they...oh when they really started the Driveway. People were afraid these homesteaders coming out from Texas and Oklahoma--liked all that level land on the Agustín Plains. If they could get 640 acres, they'd block the way of takin' cattle to town. Now that started the Driveway I guess. That's when they realized they'd take up that open country with homesteads. So they set it aside (the Stock Driveway), and we had clear right all the way except at Magdalena, and it was state land--we was gonna buy it. This old boy got wise to it and George Goze--he was the manager of it--and he had been operated on, so his brother went to the meeting. This old boy outbid him. So my dad had worked for the Game Department trappin' turkey, and was a friend of Barkers, and so they met in that old barn. And Johnny Miles was the governor. Well, my dad was raised with him in Texas when they was kids. My dad said, "Well, don't worry about it. I'll fix that." So he got a hold of Johnny Miles and told him what happened. And he checked, said, hell, he didn't realize they'd sold that little tract of land. So he said, "I won't okay it." So when he backed out, that old boy, he raised hell. But he was gonna' charge us to come and cross that. But I think they finally gave him five hundred dollars just 'cause "you're not gonna get it."

HB Well, after we started grazing the Driveway there was a lot of people wanted it, and I had a decided on Datil. We traded a hell of a lot of free wells to join the Driveway. And I give this old driller five thousand dollars for his section [I think it's a whole township]. Then he had some friends had half a section. I gave them twenty-five hundred, provided I could make it in two payments. So everybody said, "Oh, you give five thousand for that section of land." And I said, "By God, you wouldn't have got it any cheaper." And see, Farr's had a lot of country there. And hell, when he was on that board and gonna divide it--but he didn't want it cause he was using all that free country. So they couldn't agree, so they got another advisory board and my dad, they put him on it. Yeah, well, I guess your sanitary board.



HB Now, that's the Benton Well--there on the Driveway. There's Mr. Farr there, and that's one of his boys--and probably Mrs. Farr there. That's one of the wells they [the CCC] drilled.

BW Okay, and so George Farr--of the three men squatting there, he's the one in the middle.

HB Yeah, that'd be George Farr. After they finished it [the Driveway improvements], them ranchers that adjoined it said, "What the hell you gonna do with all that extra grass? If that gets on fire, it's gonna burn us out." Well, it would've. So that's when they come up with the idea of a 'grazin' it. The government--I forget what they...I think it was a dollar a head. But they'd allow you a hundred head--'course had a lot of little people... Some of them wanted to rent it all you know, money making proposition. Well, we charged. They didn't let us graze it, but now the trailin' freight--I can't remember what that was. I was gonna say ten cents a head for sheep, but I think that's wrong. And anyway, after they got all afraid they were gonna burn out, that's when they had the idea of grazin' it. Then I got one or two of 'em--oh, Buddy Major bought a lot of cattle in Magdalena, then he was payin' for 'em. That year you could not sell a heifer yearling--was no price for it. There he had seven hundred heifer yearlings there he had paid for. But right out of Magdalena you come a little bit--couple, three miles--to the left there's a township of country that belonged to the Driveway. And they set that aside when--these old timers--in case you had to hold up for the train. But I've been very fortunate, and I had sheep. And I guess maybe a time or two, you had to hold up a day 'til... See the sheep went in box cars, double.

BW What do you think's been the biggest change in ranching in your lifetime?

HB Well, I don't know. There's no sheep men anymore. **Hubbell** used to have a lot of sheep. And I know for shippin', I had the 21st of October. Farris had the eighteenth. And I took the twentieth and twenty first. If it come on Sunday you had to--and so I told that old agent, I said, "I'll represent that Aragon pool I guess you call it--all them little sheep men. Aw, **Hubbell** used it two days. The Aragon Pool used it one day. I said, "We want the same dates--there was seven days in October you couldn't put a cow in that corral. It was strictly sheep.

BW And that was mostly you and **Hubbell's**?

HB Well no, the Aragon, Castillos, and Rael, Sanchez--and I don't know. See, you travel ten miles a day--or five days with sheep--to get to Magdalena. Then, if you had to wait a day, why... One time an old boy went in with me. He had been in World War II and it ruined him pretty bad. And if he got to drinkin', he was quite hard to get along with. And he was with us twelve days. And I didn't know he had a twenty-two pistol. He rolled his bed up every morning; I'd put it on the truck. He wasn't carryin' a gun I guess 'til we got to town there and was shipping. And he comes to me and says, "See, I hired him to help this old sheep herder bring them lambs. 'Cause they go to ballin' up on ya'--you gotta have somebody stay back with the lambs 'til you can get them to the other bunch." And I said, "Well, go up to the bar there and get me a blank check on Belen and I'll pay ya'." So he took one of my friend's cars. Drove up the street--turned right to the bar. Then, 'stead of him turnin' around and comin' back, he drove around the light plant they used to have. They used to have the light plant, and they got a bridge there now--this side of Magdalena. Well, 'stead of turnin' right around that light plant with his car, he drove off in that draw! This old gal that run the light plant, she seen that car go off in there. Well, she called the law and told 'em that a car went in there. Well, Uncle Bob Lewis--he was the marshal there for years and years, there in Magdalena. Well, he was retired and had this young Mexican. He drove down there and just parked, got out to take a look. That old boy started shootin' at him with a twenty-two pistol. He run off and left his patrol car sittin' there (laughing.) Well, I found out later they had my sheep herder, my boy, in jail. And we had to wait 'til next morning. So, all these fellas around Horse Springs had sheep there. They all went down for the hearing. So I got ahold of the judge, and I knew him. I says, "Now I'm gonna"... You know, what I know about this--I didn't even know he was even carrying a gun. And they tell me now, he's been wounded bad [in WWII]. And he gets to drinkin' and he goes crazy. And I said, "I guess that's what he done. And that old boy wants to put him in jail. I said, "You can do what you please, but I would suggest you bar him from any bar in Catron County or Socorro County. Well, he says, "I have no authority in Catron County." "Well," I says, "I'll fix it up with the judge out there...or with the sheriff." I says, "He's the boss." So then he says, "Okay." So we left out that next day. They wanted to know my side of the story and I told it. I says, "I didn't know that he was carrying a gun and he's been good at helpin', but all the fellas tell me that he gets to drinkin' and goes crazy." And I said to that sheriff, I said, "Partner, you're just lucky that he didn't hit ya'." His cap was leather [the officer's], and was identical of old Hitler's cap. I said, "That damn German cap you got on, I say, you could pass for old Hitler." He hit the ceilin'. "No," I says, "I told ya' that he goes crazy." He'd been wounded. I said, "You're just lucky he didn't..." So the old judge fined him twenty-five dollars and barred him from both counties. And boy, that old marshal--he raised hell. I says, "You get rid of that Hitler cap." Well, he didn't like that much, but... See Bob Lewis, since I was a kid he was marshal.

WORLD WAR II

HB I had a cousin. Lot of 'em goin' to certain places, so they all go. Well, he was captured by the Japs over there--I know that. After that they wouldn't let too many people from the same place join the same division. New Mexico really got a bad deal there. And I had a cousin there in Japan and he says, "Hell, them old guns we had wouldn't even shoot." Said, "We wasn't even prepared to fight."

HB They say in World War II a lot of those Mexicans turned their sheep over to their sons so they wouldn't be drafted to the army. But a lot of them didn't take care of them. And by God, some of them went broke. So I bought one of them out, out of Aragon there. They had three thousand sheep that they wintered.

BW So you didn't buy the land, just the sheep?

HB Well, they wintered over there in the forest. Ramon Trujillo--father, yeah, lives up in Cruzville. He had fifteen hundred sheep. And Rael, they were always there. They had fifteen hundred. Yeah, pretty good story there. My dad homesteaded on the Agustín Plains. Well, he didn't like it. He liked here. So he moved here, bought a fella out, run it for about three years. And World War II come along. And, well, he had three hundred cows and sixty yearlings. The government wanted the money after World War II, so he lost his ranch. Several other ranchers lost their ranch. They couldn't pay what they owed.

HB Becker-McTavish--my brother was workin' over at the ranch see, and we needed some bacon. And Apache Creek didn't have the bacon. So I went to this store to buy some bacon, and I had no ration books. This old gal said, "Oh my goodness, you're gonna lose those stamps"--that was the meat stamps. And I said, "There's a book." "No, those are meat stamps." "Oh, hell," I said. We raise cattle and I got sheep. We got our own meat. We talked there a little bit. And she said, "Boy, we're not that lucky." And I don't know how it come about, but I says, "What we're short of is sugar. Got some sheep herders--there was my brother and myself and one sister, and my mother and my dad and two men--seven. "Why," I says, "that's what we do." "Oh," she says, "I wish we was that lucky. We buy our stuff at the bakery--we don't buy much sugar." "Well," I said, "sugar is what we lack." Said, "I'll trade you gals some beef stamps for some sugar stamps. Any of these other gals like you?" Well, here they come. And I had picked up our ration books here in town and went to Springerville. Well, you couldn't use them for a little while and I told 'em, I says, "I'm gonna keep two books out of the new books. You can have all the others." I says, "Here, take 'em." You're not supposed to tear 'em out. One of the gals said, "Don't worry, we'll take care of that." When I got back to Apache Creek, I had enough sugar stamps to buy a hundred and fifty pounds of sugar. Old Romey Price was runnin' the store and I said, "Romey, I hit the jackpot over in Springerville." "What do you mean you hit the jackpot?" "I traded them gals meat stamps for sugar stamps. I need a hundred and fifty pounds of sugar." "Well," he says, "I've got the sugar if you've got the stamps, we'll just trade."

LIVESTOCK

HB And I got the names of people here. Now there's, Higgins, Kelly, Patterson, Milligan, and Grosstead. Those people was in the American army when they came to this country, trying to catch old Geronimo. So, they were just in the service for about two years, then they were discharged. Now they had a fort at Aragon, but only a short period of time. Well, they all liked this country out here, so they all came back--married Mexican women. There was no Anglos. When your Driveway was completed,

you had August Saiz, Gila Luna, Hunter Long, **Jim Hubbell**. **Hubbell was a sheep man**, Gila Luna was a sheep man. Yeah. Hunter Long, and I think August Saiz...they were the cattlemen.

HB Now, they owned fifty thousand sheep at Quemado, and down by Beaverhead. In fact, they had sheep all over the whole country. My dad was appointed for the Game Department 'cause he had worked with the Game Department. Not as a Game Warden, but checkin' for wild turkey, quail, and transplanting them in areas where they didn't have 'em. There's Banta, Godding, Luna, and Otero. That was the big sheep men. Otero owned the N Bar Ranch.

HB Alexander, 1901, he was put in charge of the V Cross T. V Cross T, they were a English outfit. They trailed cattle, hell, back to St. Joe, Missouri back in the early days, to market. See, the V Cross T used to have a lot of cattle. Back then, all those big herds belonged to the English. They didn't belong to the people here.

HB Now when we had those four hundred pound calves in there, they went on in a truck. The buyer offered my dad three and a half. He told him no. So he told me, said, "Here's the address of those boys --oh back east there. If Mr. Farr and them can't agree with this buyer, ship 'em to St. Joe, Missouri. Here's some boys that I know, they'd be down there and they'd buy those cattle." See, the cattle buyer used to come out, would hang around...

BW What do you know about Wolf Well?

HB Well, the cattlemen used to water there, and they'd go by. And this one fellow this side of there was Montosa--that was a sheep man. Here's a big herd of cattle come through, and old sheep man wouldn't give water--he had a ranch there. He was on the water patrol for a long time. Oh, I forget his name, but anyway, he wouldn't let this herd of cattle water. He [the cattle man] would just get ahead of that old sheep man with his pistol and says, "By God, you better let us water. Just hope to hell this damn pistol don't go off." "Now," he says, "you don't treat people like that just 'cause you got sheep." He let them water the cattle. He didn't argue about it.

HB When I was in the sheep business, I done my own herdin'. Oh, and a lot of these old sheep men would advise me what to do. Well, I'd do it. And it saved me a hell of a lot of trouble.

BW So what did they tell you to do?

HB Well, you graze your sheep to the west, of a mornin'. If you got good grass, take 'em west of a mornin'. That's about eight o'clock. It'll shade up and it'll stay shaded up all day. That evenin' they come right back the way they went. Just go, and be sure that they all come back, that some of them don't get cut off; be sure they all come. It's just that simple. He says, "You know, they don't have sun glasses like we got" (chuckles). And that's right--you can go south, north or west of a morning, but by God, you try to go east... And then a jack rabbit would jump up, and they turn. They hunt an excuse to go back. And I watered some lambs at Horse Springs. Twelve, thirteen days later they went over the scales in Magdalena, they had gained three and a half pounds, at thirty cents a pound. That was enough money to pay the man that helped me. I done a lot of herdin' sheep. Well, it got to where you couldn't get sheep herders. They'd rather come here and work in the sawmills. And there's some people'd go from here up there. They'd give 'em a mutton and they'd butcher it, and bring it to town. That didn't work. I had one old boy do that on me. When I couldn't get herders I could depend on, that's when I quit sheep. No, it got to where you couldn't get a man you could trust, and that was **Hubbell's trouble**. He'd bring all the fellas out from Albuquerque, a lot of old fellas. And they'd--well, when I was a boy

they'd draw twenty-five dollars a month. Then some bunch said to him something about paying--well, they're all old people--they can do a little bit of good. And he--the road from Horse Springs down, oh, I guess about nine, ten miles--that wide. On all the bad spots we got some nicer gravel there close by. They fixed a ramp--they used their team and scraper, load this dump truck, then they'd go dump it. These old boys took their rakes and scattered it out. They worked on that road a year and a half (chuckles). 'Course they got their room and board, you know. And he says, "Well hell, they might not do what a young man would, but they damn sure do a good job, and you can depend on them."

HB And I had this goat this old boy give me. She was a milk goat. Ears drooped, and she's brown, and white stripes. That goat knew more 'bout handlin' sheep than the sheep herder. See, this old fella went blind and he sold me a bunch of Dutch Ovens. And he wanted to *give* me that goat. "No," I says, "I'll give you ten dollars for the goat" -- 'cause I felt sorry for him. And I didn't know, by God, she would work sheep! But she'd go around that box car, come back to the door, and them lambs would--in they'd run. Hell, you'd go to Texas right quick! But when they got loaded, here she'd come. She wanted smokin' tobacco or a cigarette (laughing). You'd give her that cigarette and she'd really go to town. She'd go through them lambs a bleatin'. Pretty soon them lambs get to goin'. Then she'd get to the back with the herder, waitin' for her smoke (chuckles).

This old boy'd just cut the lambs off, but when you do--I've always had a few ewes or that goat... If a lamb started at night to graze, that goat would raise hell bleatin'. You could get up and go to the lamb in the middle of the night, get her back to the lambs. And this old boy lived close by, and I don't think he knew too much about sheep. But they went the limit. He was a quarter mile from the stock pens so I told him, I said, "Take this pair right here. Buffalo carrier, five hundred gallon water tank holder." "I said," I got two big blocks. There's a ten foot mini trough; set them blocks down close as you can to them lambs, put that trough on, and let that water run just a little bit." I says, "Them lambs will start drinkin'. And then you just leave 'em alone. Don't try to drive 'em or do nothing. I'll bring this goat over and we'll bring 'em in." "Oh, I'll take the goat." "No," I says, "you're not gonna take this goat. She might not work for ya'." So he went. Well, I could go in that guy's power wagon--four wheel drive--'cross some rough country. He was a little over a quarter of a mile. They'd just put up lights at the shippin' pen for Magdalena; before it didn't have it. Got that goat there, gave her a little smokin' tobacco. Talked to her--you could tell right quick that was her lambs she was raised with. She went through them bunch of lambs--I guess he must have had three hundred a bleatin'. Well, then they started followin' her. And when they run into that stock pen, that goat was on a run; them lambs was on a run (chuckling). And the old boy finally come around. He says, "I'll give you fifty dollars for that goat." "No," I says, "you just think you will. That goat's not for sale."

HB Well, there was a drought in here--see I was in the sheep business three times before I got in there and stayed. One time I had these sheep; there was 400 head of 'em. Well, I had to settle 'cause I didn't have--they didn't raise enough on the winter country to--it just is. So we took 'em to town; this man and his wife took 'em in. Well, we sold all the ewes, and this buyer cut back about fifteen or twenty ewes he didn't want. So I told him, well, that's okay. Well, I got as much money for 'em as I'd paid for 'em. 'Course I didn't tell that buyer that you know, and why I had to sell 'em. Well, one year I weighed those lambs, and they'd gained three and a half pounds. But this year, that old gal let her husband bring them in, and I went in the pickup and we sold the ewes too, but we cut them off--all before they got to town. But there was a few that he didn't want, so I sold 'em there at town to people for mutton, for two dollars apiece. And this old boy, he was gonna bring his sheep in. So I said, "No, I'll bring 'em in for ya' 'cause this goat may not work for ya'." Well, hell, she knew that wasn't her lambs. And she went in that crowd a runnin' (laughing), and sheep was runnin' behind her. She'd go down to the box car come back to the door; that lamb come in and she'd butt at 'em, then they'd run. Then she'd come

back and knock on the door; she wanted a cigarette. Give her another cigarette, a little Prince Albert in your hand, and load the top deck...

BW What can you tell me about shearing?

HB Well, Hubbell had twelve shearers. They're upstairs; they were up on a platform. Each shearer would average a hundred and fifty sheep. Multiply twelve by that, by a hundred and fifty a day. And they sheared for ten days. Hell, that old man Hubbell didn't know how many sheep he had.



H. B. shearing sheep

BW Okay. What about the homesteaders, did you meet very many of the homesteaders in the '30s, '40s?

HB That's when my dad--he moved from here in 1922, then he filed on it. Then he had five hundred [acres] filed on forest. But he joined Hubbell there for three or four miles. But Hubbell had it--at Socorro County it showed it was state land. And this old boy told me, he said, "You file on that and see what it is." So my dad, he filed before four or five people there. He joined Hubbell there for three miles. Hubbell wouldn't pay his taxes. He went fifteen, twenty thousand dollars in debt. Then he'd compromise with the old judge for half.

HB And Forest Service... They put a thousand ewes and lambs together, number eight on the left side on this herd. Then when it rained and they sheared, he put 'em together. Well, that herd had a number eight on their *right* side. Well, that-a-way the lambs would have the same number that the... 'Cause they shear the old ewe--they'd brand 'em number eight. And old man Hubbell would go out ridin' with these young bucks [from the Forest Service]. "Oh, we counted that herd yesterday." Red Hubbell would take out all he'd want. Oh no, say, "we counted number eight way over there." Well, them

herders wasn't even movin' them sheep around none. They'd check, and sure enough--and their number, it was number eight. But then they realized--look at that. It was on the right side, and the one they had in the book was number eight. He got away with that for...I'd tell some of these young rangers that, and boy, they...(laughing)

BW What are your best memories from childhood?

HB Oh, I took care of the ranch for my dad, worked with the Game Department. And then I had sheep, and I herded sheep for a long time. All them old fellas would tell me what to do. If you do it, by God, it worked.

BW How old were you when you started herding the sheep?

HB I was 21 when I graduated from high school. I'd had sheep a couple, three times before I bought Aragons out.

HB You see **Hubbells**--they had two pack burros, where the bedrolls... The herder and the head tender--so when they got to town they had all that. They put 3,000 lambs and two herders.

BW Two herders for three thousand lambs?

HB They'd have three, 'bout that. Then they had a cook. After they got started why, just one time I had to wait 'til they got a car. This side of Magdalena, on the south, after you got out there a couple or three mile there's a township of country. And I was grazing it--land they set aside. If you had to hold up with a big bunch of cattle, why, you'd have a place to graze 'em. And see, where you're hittin' on the divide up there it's a half mile [wide]. Then it's a mile down to Horse Springs. Then Horse Springs, goin' on it's a half mile to the next buildings, then it's a mile from there on. Then when they went to lettin' them graze it, everybody in the world wanted it, 'cause it was good grazin'. Cattle would go down there--out there by themselves--from our ranch.

HB There was an arroyo there, and there's one the other side of Horse Springs. Our neighbors had a big old calf fall in that. They're full of tumbleweeds. But I always carried a pitchfork in the pickup truck, 'cause I worked around in the Forest Service. In a forest fire, you can pick up that piece of wood on fire, and get it back away from the fire line. So I got some of the tumbleweeds out, and then poked that calf and he went up the head of that arroyo. Then he can jump out. But some places you had to pull all them tumbleweeds out to get it.

WATER

BW Were there wells or springs on your ranch?

HB Well, we drilled wells. After the Taylor Grazing Act, **my dad and Mr. Hubbell** done a lot of trading, and out at Quemado--had a meeting there. There's a fella, Crick, would make it rain, and charge you a dollar a section. Well, I went up to the meeting with **Frank Junior Hubbell--he's one of the boys.** There was three other boys. He wrote a check--752 dollars--to Crick. He said, "Boys, by the time they claim we dig out, this'll pay our way." But says, "I'm gonna give you a check for seven 752 dollars", said, "We use that much. We've got that many sections under our use." He didn't own it, but had public land; they'd use it." And he says, "If he makes it rain half as much as he said, we'll all be in good shape" (chuckles). Well, there's some of them got a lot of rain, and some of them didn't get very

much. And he's the one that when it rained--this Collins had done this--oh, it might have been in Oregon--I can't remember. So, I forget his name--he presented that to us. And I looked at it, and I says "Hell, I can't do any of that thing." "Well", he says, "this Collins has spent three or four years on that study. And now if it don't fit your business, I can't do anything about it."

BW So the guy said he could make it rain?

HB Well, Crick said he did. He got a little outfit, burnt coal in it in cloudy weather. He'd put up all that--some places got a lot of rain and some didn't. But they tell the story that he tried it in the winter time, and they really got a hell of a lot of snow. So that kinda...

BW From burning coal?

HB Yeah. Well, in 1968--accordin' to that drug store down there--there was thirty-one inches of snow. Well, it snowed here for eight days and nights, off and on. But the country was warm. And then after that snow, it got cold. There was fence between here and Luna--steel post. They clipped that wire on that steel post too much. That snow froze on top. Your top two wires was holdin' that weight. It would never...from the bottom. They had to replace all that barbed wire. 'Bout every fifty feet the thing went, but they'd twisted it too much on that dimple. Then that weight broke it.

BW Can you tell me about drilling wells?

HB They were made by a machine. We were on the southwest end of the Agustín Plains, and there was a lot of sawgrass and chamise brush. That sawgrass grows up straight, and then there's chamise brush there, then back at the edge of that low country, the grama grass. And those wells would be anywhere from 80 foot to 350. You get out in the middle of the flat in the lowest place--Hubbell drilled a well there and by God, cattle couldn't drink it even. Well, they ran it out on the ground, thought maybe that would help. That didn't do no good. That was the toughest damn water. Someone said there was too much sodium in it.

HB See, I was on that A.S.C.S. Committee for forty-four years. What that is: Agriculture Stabilization Conservation Service. That was paying the farmers not to plant. 'Cause it all wound up--this boy from Oklahoma that had, I guess, darn near a section--he was selling that wheat--seven dollars a bushel. Then up above Quemado--oh hell, he bought a lot of land. But there's one at Cliff, and Cliff's down there between here and Silver City. There's a boy come in there, and these Mexicans called him a millionaire. He paid them a dollar an hour to work. And them farmers said, "You paid them too much money. We can't afford to pay it." "Well," he says, "you fellas aren't doing the right kind of farming," and they kept getting after him. "Well," he says, "Hell, I'll buy your land if you can't do it right." So a lot of them sold their land. Well, he was getting the water rights for the Tyrone Mine, and after he got the water rights, he could... Some of the fellas sold it, and some didn't. But by God, Tyrone Mine's got a lot of land from that old boy. If they had a known he was workin' for Tyrone Mine...

BW They wouldn't have sold?

HB They wouldn't have sold.

HB But now they'll try to tell you that he built that big lake. Well, now there's several, but I just remember that. Cause Hubbell went below that lake. He built one, I think it was twenty-five, thirty foot deep.

BW A lake?

HB Yeah. Right below the Patterson. [Mark Matthews says it's Patterson Lake, south of Highway 12 on Bursum Road]. See, Hubbell owned that. Grogans filed on land below that, and that spring at Patterson's--it's run there for two miles way back in the '20s and '30s. 1922 that bank was two mile long, and half a mile wide. About six inches water in it. You've never seen so many ducks in all your life. You ride up to the edge of that bank--there'd be fifty, seventy-five ducks. Go on around and here's some more. Yeah, I was up there quite a bit. Oh, there's an old boy--see you had forest land, you had BLM land. Well, then there was no BLM, and a lot of these fellas used it for free. Well anyway, this old fella's gettin' water off this spring. The fella that owned it didn't like it. They got into a fight, and one of them killed the other. And the sheriff went up there--Frank Balke. He was the second sheriff in Catron County. So he goes up there--he never wore a pistol. And he pulled up to the gate, and took his gun off, hung it up on the gate, walked up to this old boy, and he says, "I need to come and talk to ya'." Well, the old boy says, "If you're associated with those state police out there, there's no talkin'." Frank says, "No, I don't know what happened, but if you don't go down and report to Socorro on what's happened... I don't know what your fighting was about, or anything about it. But you're gonna have to go down there and turn yourself in." And he says, "If you don't, when I leave here, them cops, they'll set this house afire. They'll get you out." And he says, "They really haven't got any business in here anyway. Their business is the road, but we get them to help us sometimes." So the old boy said he'd go. So he got in, and Frank Balke went to Socorro. But he got three years for killin' that old boy. But being that they was fightin' over water, and that old boy owned the water--it wasn't a spring like they thought it was.

BW Did you raise anything at home for your own use besides meat?

HB No, not out on the plain. But my mother, when we first moved over there, she went back up Long Canyon and had a dug well that she'd draw water out of, and pack it to that garden. She'd raise a little garden, but out on the plains there's too much alkali. Hubbell drilled a well way out there on the plains, and it was so salty the cattle wouldn't drink it. And it would eat up your galvanized pipe in ten years. And he thought they could drill through that. And I know, I was there at one time myself when this feller drilled a thousand feet, right there south of that Horse Springs. I was there and I don't know how deep they went, but that rancher said they went a thousand foot--never got through the bottom of the plains. There was still, at a thousand foot, there was still fish bones and things with leaves on top.

HB Here is the T U T old ranch at the Patterson. See that's a lake of water there.



HB That spring is run way down there. In '22 all them canyons run. And some of them run together, first time in a long time. That's where all the ducks was. But this is a pretty big lake. Now, they'll tell you he built it with a wheel barrow and shovel, but that's not true. I don't know where they got that. No, he had a scraper--the horses built it. But they had a scraper and fresno. See, there was, at that Pelona Mountain top, back over there--that's country deep to water. Five or six hundred foot, so...

TOWNS

RESERVE



Building on left is Jack Frazier's store.

HB Yeah, that's Jack Frazier's Store, here in Reserve. And what that building is--I can't place it. Now where you turn by the post office, when you come up the hill, right where that post office was, that's where the old hospital was. That's where I was born in 1915. I don't remember much about it, but... (chuckle)



HB Alright, that's the old courthouse, and that's a Model T. They were plantin' way back then--were plantin' wheat. Wheat got seven dollars a bushel. Well, everyone then had a farm--they went to plantin' wheat. And that's when they organized--it was the A.S.C.S., Agriculture Stabilization Conservation Service. Now what that is--we were payin' these farmers not to plant. 'Cause when wheat got seven dollars a bushel, everybody went to plantin' it. Well, then they raised so much wheat it got a dollar and a half a bushel. And there's a lot of people in Clovis and that country went broke. They had turned these farms over to the boys to run them, and you got double house trailers and fancy cars sitting there. Well, when that wheat fell to dollar and a half a bushel, by God, a lot of them fellas didn't make it. They went broke. So that's when they started this A.S.C.S. I served on that for forty-four years. That [the photo] was before they put streets through Reserve. And when they did put streets in Reserve, they're wide streets. Two cars can park and you can drive around them and get by. There's no side streets in Reserve. If you go to the back, you better get permission--whoever owns that property--to go. There's the courthouse. They built a new one during my time. That building there (center) had something to do with the wheat.

MAGDALENA

See I bought part of a permit, and sheep, from the Aragon. Well, they were going broke. So I was looking at the Bank of Belen; they backed me. And Becker at the Bank of Belen, he had a brother over in Springerville, Julian Becker. Becker started the store. Becker was the oldest boy, and he wanted Julian to run it. Now when my grandfather built that railroad in there [Magdalena], they [Beckers] got that. The Kelly mine was a doin' a lot of mining. And this is what Julian Becker told me. He said, "I'd already settled in Springerville. They wanted me to come back and run that store. But there was a young Englishman there by the name of MacTavish. I figured he'd be a good business associate. I put him in charge of running the Becker-MacTavish Store in Magdalena. And you know, it turned out pretty good. So we gave him an interest in it." Said he was a young Englishman, looked like he'd had good schoolin' and be a good manager. So they called it Becker-McTavish. Now then, they say that's one name. It's not. And a lot of people was seeing Becker on the store, and they thought he was MacTavish. And he's the one that Becker supported, you know. But it turned out good. You could buy a hundred pound sack of sugar from Becker-MacTavish if you had the money for \$3.50. You could buy a hundred pound sack of flour for \$3.00. And see, they had the Kelly Mine there. Well, later on when that mine closed, all they had was just a few supplies to the store. And cattle would ship from here. So then they finally did away with the railroad. It was a losing proposition.

HB That's taken there in Magdalena.



Written on the back: Ben Gooch, Earl McCord, Grover Mayberry,
Frank Fuentes, in car that was in Rio Puerco

HB Grover was my mother's brother. [The one with the light colored scarf].

BW Do you remember what Pie Town was like?

HB Uh, there's an old boy and he got a reputation for sellin' pies. That's where it got its name. And the old boy that got it started--he sold out. And I worked in the '30s for the Fish and Wildlife in Frago, that old boy cooked for us. And he sold out 'cause they offered him a hell of a lot of money. Well, to get water there, they had to go north of Pie Town, to the west of that continental divide, to drill. They tried to drill around Pie Town there; there wasn't too much water.

WEATHER

BW What about weather? Do you remember any big snowstorms or bad droughts?

HB In '68, here, in Reserve. Front of that store down there. And after nine days and nights, and snowin' and rainin', there was thirty-one inches of snow in front of that grocery store down there. They just bladed it up in the middle of the street, and you'd go down one side and come back up the other.

Socorro Flood

[According to H. B., these two photos are of a flood in Socorro. This may be the famous flood of 1896.]



CHARACTERS

BW Did you know Shack Simmonds?

HB Oh, yeah. Where'd you hear of him?

BW From Dave Farr. He had pictures of Shack Simmonds, and they talked about him. The Farris have a Bible that he gave them. So what do you know about Shack Simmons?

HB He worked for Alexander. And Alexander was the first sheriff of Catron County--1922 we cut off from Socorro County. That's when Catron County was created; at first it was all Socorro County. We used to have to go to Socorro to pay our taxes. We were all one unit. Shack Simmonds, he's the one that trained me for--and Ross Metter--what I know about cattle, yeah. Well, he [Shack] come in travelin' a J-Cross steer--belonged to McCarty. "Where's your parents?" I told him they should be back tomorrow or next day. They were back in the state. "Anyhow, get your gun, we'll have beef." So we butchered that. It belonged to McCarty. I've seen, when I was a kid, two year old cows with another brand on 'em, and a big ole calf by their side. And that's when they started this sanitary board. Mr. Alexander was connected with that. But anyway, he had a pretty good ranch. And when the board of finance called that back, he had to sell every cow they had, but twenty-five cows and heifer calves. That's all that he had left. And Shack Simmonds was workin' for him. That's where I got to know Shack. Well, Shack got the cards out one night, said, "Let's see if the boys can play poker." Alexander talked to them a little bit. Went and got his notebook, and passed it to each one. "How much do you think you're gonna win?" "Aw, maybe a dollar and a half, two dollar." So he takes out his check book, he writes each cowboy, what they was gonna win. Says, "Now boys, this is your winnings. As long as I'm working here, there'll be no gamblin' and card playin'." That's what Mr. Alexander told Shack. They talked along a little bit and he says, "You cowboys will draw forty dollars a month, and if you don't smoke, you draw forty-five." One old boy said, "Well, what's the difference?" "Well," he said, "There's not a difference. But Cal, Shack and me gonna be workin' a lot of cattle. And an old cow starts outa' that herd, and I holler at that cowboy--head that cow off, Cal, you're rollin' a damn cigarette" (laughing). "Now," he says, "There's no gambling." He says, "All that's good for is to cause trouble. Some old boy would lose; there will be no gamblin'. Now if there's any of you boys that don't want to work here under my leadership, you're perfectly welcome to quit. If you say so, I know how much you get per month, I know how much the company owes you, and I'm ready to write you a

check. And you can go and find another job” (chuckling).

That Shack Simmonds, he was quite a fella. See, he worked for Alexander. And come over to the Agustín Plains, and then--see there was no fences then. And the cattle would go down on the Agustín Plains to winter, and come back in the forest to summer. And they do it just automatic. And he come into the ranch there one time. “Where's your folks?” “Oh,” I said, “they're in Texas-- they're settlin' a Texas estate. They should be back tomorrow anyway.” “By God, let's have some beef. Get your gun.” So I got the twenty-five twin. He had one of our neighbor's beeves--by God we butchered it. Well, when the folks come home, there I had beef. ‘Course it was along in October. It was cool weather. And my dad, he found out that it was a stray, and poor Shack--the cussin'... Well, you butchered your own, you didn't butcher somebody else's. And he went with me and said, “Now, during this fencin' over there we're gonna be fenced off, but there will be a lot of cattle get in here.” Said, “Come back here, we ride in front of them springs you'll find a cow, two years old, with a big old calf--yearlin'.” He said, “By God, just take it home with you and brand 'im.” Well, my cousin and I went out and we found this yearlin'. We drove--and I was graduated that year in Magdalena and the folks come in. “Where'd you get the beef?” I says, “Shack brought one in and we butchered it. He wrestled with the brand on it.” And my dad didn't say anything, but he give my mother a good talkin' to. Says, “We don't want them boys out here runnin' these, ‘cause he'd bought two two-year-old cows, that was gonna have calves, from a trapper.” My cousin and I run this yearlin' in. Well, we didn't know, or I didn't. She followed a... Next mornin' she's standin' there at the corral where the yearlin' was inside. My dad didn't say anything, but he told my mother no, we don't want that to happen. Said, “Those mavericks belong to somebody.” So old Shack come by later when he quit Alexander, and went down south to--and that's when we butchered that J-2-Cross. And then my cousin and I saw Shack down here at the bar, and I told him what my dad says, didn't want us kids picking up that stuff--that was just stealin'. “Well,” he said, “your dad's really right. That's not the way to do.” So Charlie McCarty--the one that was Charlie's uncle, and another boy by the name of Bill-- he's the head boy out at McCarty. Well, Shack and him couldn't get along. But anyway, he and another one was in Uncle Bill's [bar] there. Shack's in there drinkin'. And Shack told him, said, “You fellas butchered that heifer and steer that belonged to Birmingham.” Well, he denied it. Shack said, “Don't deny it, I trailed that bunch of cattle up. He bought that cow and that spotted steer from Ed Steel, and ya' don't sell calves.” He says, “We got to come by there, and cook told me not to worry, it would be one of yours--but it was a stray.” Well, it was TK connected--that's what the brand was. So he said, “Well, your brother--I think a lot of him.” I said, “You do what he wants you to do. You're gonna have to ride early or late to beat that old kid a ridin' that dun pacin' horse.” Says, “They got five against one that I butchered one had J Cross on it. You gonna have to ride early or late to beat that kid. They got ten mavericks.”

BW So everybody was doin' it?

HB And everybody was doin' it, yeah. But my dad put a stop to it. Well, that heifer, she was standing there by the fence, by the gate, and the yearling was inside. It wasn't nursing but, by God, it followed it. But it had wintered there that winter. I was in Magdalena and went to school, and my grandfather--he's the type that he'd put his brand on one of them mavericks. (laughing) But that was the custom in the early days--branding those mavericks.



Mr. Hellem (?), Milt Craig, Bela Birmingham (Third from left), C. E. Main (center), Manuel Encinias, Edith Mayberry, Earnest Stockton of Silver City, Art Hill of Kelly, NM, Mr. H. J. Mayberry (far right) summer of 1912 at the Gann place.

HB There's B. Steel, an old boy that my father was raised with. He was raised in Texas (second from the left). That's my father (third from the left). Here's Charley Main. He done the cement work in this country way back. And then Manuel Encinias, next to Mr. Main.

BW And then do you know who the woman and the child are?

HB Yeah. That's one of Mayberry's daughters. I was born in 1915, so that's before I was born.



HB Now this is Ab Steel. He worked for my grandfather. And that's my mother's two sisters. I don't remember who the other one is. Steel--he was the first man started your registerin' brands. You got to register a brand now in Texas. Yeah, he was the one in charge of all that. See, he worked for my grandfather for a long time, then he worked for Hubbell. Then he got put in, oh, inspecting cattle.

BW Did you know the Morleys?

HB Well, not real well. I knew some of the women more than I knew Ray Morley. He was kind of a politician, that Ray Morley was. And they used to have Indian hogans. I guess he had some daughters there at Datil. I remember them.

BW Did you know Agnes?

HB Yeah.

BW What'd you think of her?

HB Oh, she was okay, but there was a lot of 'em had a lot of different--Montague Stevens, did you ever read that book of his? Did you ever see it? Well, Katherine Finch wrote a book, and Molly Higgins had two. We lost one of them, and the one that Kelly wrote in Magdalena, that disappeared. I don't know whether we loaned it to someone and they didn't bring it back, or what. You take way back there, Montague Stevens--he wasn't an American citizen. He's from England. His wife was a cousin to Queen Elizabeth, the old queen. Well, that's why he could hunt and do all these things. And my grandfather--he liked the loggin' company, so he'd saved enough money when he was workin' on the railroad--building railroad track for years--that he could buy this fella Montgomery out, that had that Dark Canyon Ranch. Then he married one of Patterson's daughters. And see, Patterson was my great, great grandfather.

BW What about Elfego Baca?

HB Oh, now that's the damndest--if they would tell the truth about that. Elfego came out here from Socorro campaigning. Well, they say he was a young fella--I guess he was. But anyway, Charlie McCarty's grandfather come here with the Slaughter Cattle Company--that's the V Cross T. They belonged to the English, the cattle did. And he come out here, and it was Charlie McCarty's grandfather--he was shooting at the Mexican chickens here. See, down in Reserve there, those streets are wide. Ella's, she owns all that on the left--the other over there on the right--then the Jones Bar, they own it all. There's no alleys between them; it's wide. And when they were workin' at Ella's there, I said to one of the boys sittin' over in his seat... he said, "We'll do this to the alley." I said, "Wait a minute. You better go get permission before you get in that alley." "Oh, they got to be an alley." I said, "No, it didn't have to be when Reserve was still..."

But Elfego--Charlie was shootin' at the chickens. So when he, Elfego, came out... Charlie McCarty's grandfather was just a big old kid. And of course, they all wore pistols then. He was shootin' at them chickens. So Elfego put him in jail, or locked him up. And they fined him five dollars the next day, and got after the one young fella who-in-the-hell sold him any whiskey. 'Cause he was under age, but it didn't make any difference. But when the boy got to finish in there--he's behind all the Elfego... There's not a statement on that until they shoot. Now, they had Charlie in jail, and when he come back, had a chance that Elfego killed three cowboys. Well, the other cowboys was drinkin' when Charlie came back on horseback. They fined him five dollars and turned him loose. When this boy went to talk

to Elfego, Elfego shot through the door. Hit that cowboy in the stomach and he died that night. So then they did some shootin'. I've talked to a lot of these old timers, and if they'da put it like it was, I'd know all of it. Now then, he had sixty cowboys shootin' at him? Hell, there wasn't even sixty cowboys in the whole southwest there! There wasn't that many bullets in the whole town!

BW Did anybody shoot at him?

HB No! They did after he shot... But the floor was a foot lower, and it had had this little half circle. Well, when they went to shootin' at him he was laying down on that floor. The bullets were goin' over him. If they ever tell the truth that he killed this one fella--he died. Well, he [Elfego] come through that. He claimed that a horse fell on him. Well, I never heard that from the old timers. Elfego shot through that door, and shot that cowboy in the belly, and he died that night. Then by God, they did do some shootin'. But three people that homesteaded with my dad--the old timers--and their story was different. Elfego done the shootin' and the cowboy died. Then they did do some shootin'. But they didn't know that the room was about a foot and a half lower than the floor.

PATTERSON HOTEL

HB Mr. Patterson, he had that—well, you got some pictures there. You'd go by there and spend the night. He'd put your horse up, feed you your supper and breakfast, and charge you a dollar. He had four bedrooms that he would rent to people coming through. This fella, Horace Jones, he had a store there in Glenwood. I spent the night with him one time, and we got to talkin' about old times. So he's [Mr. Hubbell] coming out of Magdalena, and Mr. Patterson had rooms that he would rent to people coming by. And had a big livin' room, two bedrooms, then quite a long kitchen, and then a store room. And he'd charge you a dollar. He'd put your horse up, you had a room to sleep in, got your breakfast, your horse taken care of, and you'd leave him a dollar. Well, Mr. Hubbell come by there and spent the night, and he didn't offer to pay. Now this is accordin' to the Mexicans--where I get it. Mr. Patterson had his foot on the wagon wheel. Well, hell, you couldn't just drive off with the foot over the wagon wheel. And Mr. Patterson said, "Well, Mr. Hubbell, you're forgetin' somethin'." "Oh, no. I got my valise, and whatever-it-was. May the Lord reward you for your services." Mr. Patterson said, "Mr. Hubbell, the Lord didn't sleep in that bed last night, you did! You owe me a dollar!" (laughing)



Mr. Patterson's "hotel" and ranch house near Horse Springs

GOVERNMENT AND LAWS

HB My dad was appointed to represent the Game Department. You see, all that BLM country—it was open country and everybody grazed it. Well, now they had the job--Grosstead, and my dad from the Game Department--of dividin' up this federal land. If you had water, and had used it before 1937, you were entitled to apply for it.

BW So it was after Taylor Grazing Act?

HB After Taylor Grazing Act. They had a hell of a round for a long time. So they got rid of that board. Got August Saiz, Hunter Long, Gila Luna, **Jim Hubbell** (two sheep men and two cattle men). Game Department put my dad in to represent the Game Department. So they finished the Driveway (fencing and wells). Everybody--if they had a little property--you were allowed to apply for the Driveway. Well, after about four years after it was finished, people in that Datil country said, "What the hell you gonna do? All that feed that's not even touched. It's gonna burn us all out," which was right. That's when they went to grazin' it. So what they done, if you had deeded land there you were entitled to apply for it. Now, that was in 1937 when they finished dividing up, this federal land. And there was worried people. I know I had a hundred and sixty (acres) there at Deadman. I had the mineral rights, the grazing rights, the water rights, and the timber rights. The south end of the Agustín Plains, back this side there a little... Well, it's Collins Park, they called it. They finally put a sawmill there.

HB Oh, this study they made. They made it for two or three years back east. Yeah, see he sent us the study of these colleges. Well, when I read it, it just didn't fit us. And that's when I was asking him. "Well, if it don't fit your business, I can't do anything about it." (laughing) Then I got to noticing the Forest Service. We got a young ranger at O Bar O and he come in [as] a new ranger. And he drove up to the house, he got out and introduced himself--you know, young boy. And I said, "Come on in and we'll have a cup of coffee." "No," he said, "I just don't drink coffee. I don't impose on these ranchers." "Well," I says, "hell, you better start imposin' on 'em 'cause they'll all invite you in to eat, and for a cup of coffee." So, that kinda...

We had a milk goat--a kid--'bout two months old. He said, "Mr. Birmingham, do you have a permit to raise that fawn?" "No," I said. He says, "Well, you have to get a permit." I says, "Hell, let's just knock the thing in the head and forget about it (chuckling)." See, what we'd done is taken the mother in the herd for the herder to milk. And my sister was raising that--it was two months old. She was raising some dogie lambs, and that new kid could get a bottle when the lambs got it. And then we talked there a minute and he got ready to go. "Now," he says, "Mr. Birmingham, I hate to do this but I'm gonna have to." I says, "Well, where do you get a permit?" "Magdalena, from the Game Warden." "Oh," I says. "Hell, drive a hundred miles for a permit? Let's just knock that damn thing in the head." Well, that kinda' shook him up. And when he got ready to go, now he says, "Mr. Birmingham, something like that, you don't have a permit to raise that fawn, I'm gonna have to report you." And that's when I realized, you know, that he *didn't know*. And I said, "Where in the hell you raised?" And he told me. I says, "Do you know anything about a goat? You probably know what a Angora goat is." I says, "You know, there's a white goat, but this is a milk goat." I says, "You mean to tell me you don't know the difference between a milk goat and a fawn?" Boy, that poor fella was embarrassed. And you never seen a fella so embarrassed in all your life (laughing). His old head didn't have much hair, but it got red, got white, then red again. So he got ready to go. So he asked me, said would I do him a favor? "Well," I said, "I suppose so." Said, "Don't ever tell this" (laughing). I said, "Partner, this is too damn

good to keep. But what I *will* do, as long as you're here in the forest, I'll never mention this to anybody." So he got in his... But after that I got along good with that ole boy!

And I get a kick out of these forest rangers. A new fella'd come in you know. Maybe he's from Nebraska. Well, when he got to Catron County he tried to compare Catron County to Nebraska. Well, your soil didn't match, your people damn sure didn't match--they couldn't see why. And this old boy--the one that told me why they took all that--'cause the college made the study, I says, "We depend on the environment. If you're not sheep man enough to know it's wrong, there's nothing I can do about it (laughing)." And I hadn't thought of it that way, you know.

HB So I says--actually we had this meeting--I says, "Hell, that won't work here in Catron county! Where in the hell did you get that dope? (laughing)" I said, "If you're not rancher enough to know it won't work in Catron county, God help ya'."

INDIANS

HB We used to have refuges here, where you couldn't hunt. And this Indian went up to the canyon and there's--oh, 'bout as wide as this room and half as long--and then you'll see a spring and a little aspen. There's aspen everywhere on that whole hillside. And when he got through that thicket, there was a bear. Well, he shot it. Well, the old bear was there just above it, and when that little bear squalled, here it come! Well, he had to shoot her. She fell at his feet. And I went by their camp the next day, and one of them Indians said, "You know, one of my buddies killed a little bear. Then the old bear charged him, and he killed it." Said, "What do you recommend he do?" And I says, "Well, I'll come back tomorrow and talk to him." So he waited 'til nine o'clock. That was right in these two refuges that posted no hunting. He told me just what happened. "Now", he says, "What'll you do?" I said, "Put your tag on that little bear--that's the one that you killed. The one that charged you, let your partner tag it." I said, "Just tell 'em the truth of what happened." Well, the Game Department found it out later. "What authority did you have of telling him so--shoot that little bear?" "Well," I said, "I didn't tell him with any kind of authority. He shot the little one, then the big one charged him." "Well, can you prove that?" "Well," I says, "I'm takin' his word for it. He didn't lie. I've been to that spot, and we talked there a little bit." And I says, "I did tell him, by golly, not to show it off. Keep it hid, and when they got to the reservation, do as they please" (chuckles).

CHANGING TIMES

HB Now that's when they started puttin' coffee out in cans. They'd always used the kind where you ground it. Mr. George Farr took his herders some of that ground coffee in cans. That old sheepherder sent the camp tender back to the ranch. Says, "Mr. Farr..."

See, they'd have a thousand sheep maybe, in a herd. They had two pack burros, with pack boxes with supplies, one pack burro with your five gallon water kegs, the other one carried your bed roll, and your tent. You had five burros. Two carried the pack boxes there on each side of a burro. That's where you carried your supplies.

HB See that eleven dollars (pointing to a notebook)? That's for fifty-five gallons of gas.

FIRE LOOKOUT

HB Here's--see, my wife worked at Eagle Peak here for several years. She was a lookout, and I was a smoke chaser. That's me with my oldest boy, Bela. And see the chipmunk on his shoulder? There was a whole lot off 'em, and you'd feed 'em barley. And they got a rail there they'd climb up. Stand up on his hind feet, and you drop something down to eat, and down he'd go. So they took that chipmunk home...



HB That's me on a horse there. We come from Agustín Plains over there to Eagle Peak, then they built this. I never did get up in that. But then Peggy and I was in this cabin. She worked there for five years. It's a cinder brick cabin in the tower up there. We lived in the tower. See they had a house...cabin here. But it was made out of log, that thing there. I was just a kid, my dad and Henry Graham worked there.



Eagle Peak, 1923

BW Okay, and then this bigger picture, Eagle Peak Lookout. Do you know when that was?

HB They put that there in the '50s.



Peggy Birmingham (right)

BUSINESS

BW Did you guys ever have to borrow money?

HB Oh, whenever we got money, [it was] from Becker in Belen. And what you'd do, sell your sheep or wool--just send him the whole damn check. You might have to turn around and borrow sixteen hundred the next day, but he was sure of being paid. And I knew of one boy that had a store there in Belen. He come out and sold washing machines. And he sold my wife a washing machine--I think it was a hundred fifty dollars. Well, it was one of them nice round-tub Maytags. Anyway, I told him, I says, "I got my sheep on the way to town. You'll have to wait for your money 'til I ship them lambs." And I says, "We're gonna ship a certain day-- Magdalena." He said okay. So when he got back to Belen--there was a hardware store there--his boss really raised hell 'bout it. "Did you sign a contract on that Maytag?" He said no. "Well, don't you have anything in writing?" He says, "No, that old boy, when he sold his wool..." Well, they was all setting by the safe, said, "you'll get your money." So after we got our money I went in, said to the clerk, "I want to pay that money." "Oh", she says, "how much of a payment?" I said, "I want to pay for it all--that's what I agreed." "Oh, you're the one that caught all the hell from the boss, 'cause not havin' somethin' signed by ya'." There's a store in Magdalena, McTavish, and they was sellin' about the same time. Says, "Oh, he caught hell 'cause you didn't sign something." Well, that old boy, he told me later, said, "I knew if I didn't leave that wash machine there someone else'd come by--when you had the money you'd pay me mine." (laughing)

DAILY LIFE

HB Well, my main dish is butcher a beef, cut up those ribs, take a pressure cooker, put plenty of water in it and pressure those meats and beans for ten to thirty minutes. Then take a cup of rice--throw that in there. And if you got a green hot chile, throw one of those in, yeah. Then take a big potato--don't peel it, just split it two ways. And cook it for eight minutes, *but no more!* 'Cause if you do, that potato will

all go to pieces. And now you got something good to eat! You got rice and those ribs... Yeah, beef. Those ribs puts a flavor to it. I used to get green chile from Socorro, and they were hot! One of 'em is enough (chuckles) and by God you had a good meal. Years back...see this was all free country. And you'll find where they camped. They piled these rocks up around it [a can or bucket]. And a lot of people will—hell, those trees has got somethin' on em. What's all that? Somebody built a fire there! Well, that's where they did their cookin'. We used to get a gallon bucket, punch a hole in it. Put your beans in that, and a rib or two,

BW What was the hole for?

HB To let the pressure off. If you didn't let the pressure off, you'd have the lid blow off of it. But you take a piece of canvas, wet it, lay it over that hole, then put some butter over it. Well, that'll let the pressure off. Gallon bucket in the ground--well, you can use anything other than a push-on lid. If it's a push-on lid you can bury that, but you build this fire in the ground and leave coals in it. And set that bucket in far enough that it goes back in it, then cover it back up and leave it all night.

BW How often did you go to town?

HB Well, we went about once a week to Horse Springs to get our mail. And the other side of Horse Springs--a mile or so--there's some buildings on both sides of the road. Well, that old boy put a grocery store in there. Well, we'd ride ten mile up to get the mail once a week. Or if we went in the pickup it was twenty-something. So, normally my brother Pat went up and got the mail. And he bought a pack of Camels, and there was just two or three items that he was supposed to get. Well, my dad didn't say anything, but he watched. And out in the corral they put that notch together standing up, then take a two by twelve and nail 'em. That's where you fix your manger for your cow, and you had a solid center wall there running with it when you feed. And we got that far. So, he bought those cigarettes--knew this fifteen minutes ago. We had two log rooms, then a room there for our teacher, and a little supply room. Well, my dad sits over on the dresser where my mother and him and the girls slept. We slept in the kitchen, the boys. The teacher had to sleep in that other room we built. No, we would ride to Horse Springs, like I say. And my dad just watched when my brother Pat went out and got him a cigarette. My dad went and got them cigarettes, and he just tore the top off of 'em. Well, he set them on the dresser in the room where we kids dressed by a heater. Pat had come in there. My dad'd come and get a cigarette and light it, by God he got to where he couldn't catch him in that room with them cigarettes (laughing). Well, they was sittin' on the dresser. But my dad never did smoke all them cigarettes though. 'Cause Pat got up, by God, and got dressed and got out.

BW So did you go to Springerville or Magdalena usually for supplies?

HB We'd go to Magdalena mostly, 'cause we went with a wagon and team. See, Springerville...they're wide streets over at Springerville. Oh, my dad got a Model A pickup. Then we had a Model T, but it didn't—oh, you could use it, but the Model A... They came out in '32, Model A. The fella down here at that store... Frazier, he was a salesman. He had a Model B pickup there. I had a Model A. He allowed me three fifty--or three hundred, for the Model B. He took off fifty dollars 'cause he'd had it near a year. I give him a four hundred dollar check, drove out a new 1927 Model B pickup. Now look at what they're payin' for 'em.

BW So when they went to Magdalena with the horse and team--before they had the trucks--how often would they go?

HB Oh, they'd usually buy quite a bit, 'cause it took 'em two days to go, and three days to come back. We lived up at Cross-V. And we went to--why after he got that Model A, let's see, the next model was a Model B. And then the V-8 come out, and they were more efficient. What I mean--you could drive cattle in that V-8. It was a red one, and the thing would run 90 miles an hour.

BW Did you guys go to the doctor, or did you treat some sickness at home yourselves?

HB No, mother done most of our own treatment. But hell, we kids was out workin' all time, exercisin'. We're not like the kids now here in town. They don't have nothin' to do. They got propane stoves, electricity, they don't have to chop wood like they used to. So I don't know--a kid'd take advantage of it. We walked a mile to school, took a lunch. And you got a teacher if you furnished the building.

BW Did you ever go to a doctor at all that you remember?

HB Well, no. There was a Dr. Keyes that come to here. He's a chiropractor. And I go to them. When I was in Magdalena, Dr. Warren from Datil--he was a chiropractor. I had a horse roll over on me, and it threw my neck out of place. Horse just jumped a stream of water--there's a sharp rock, hit that with the front of his foot. I got that rock out, and dug that chip, but he limped. And after I got it checked, put a leather around and tied, and he could drink. And hell, that horse--you just drop the reins--I had two horses you could just drop the reins. And one--when I had them sheep--tie your bridle up to the saddle horn, turn him loose, and he'd take them herd of sheep a mile and a half, two mile, to water. I'd get the truck close to where I had the camp, go and get a load of water. Well, that would meet him where I had the water. And by God, he'd drive them sheep. He wouldn't let none of 'em... I knew when he'd get a little lame, why I'd take him to the ranch and the kids could ride him. And 'bout daylight, he'd bring my mother's milk cows in. She'd say "Take that horse back to the camp, he don't let our milk cows graze--by ten o'clock he brings 'em in to water" (chuckles).

BW When people died, were they buried at a cemetery in town or out on the ranch?

HB Some of them are buried out on the ranch, yeah.

BW So what were your meals like when you were a kid? What did you have for breakfast, or lunch, or supper?

HB You used Mother's Oats. They'd usually fry meat and make gravy and biscuits. So you had your bowl of oats, your fried piece of meat if you wanted it, and biscuits.

BW And is that what you had later in the day?

HB No, you'd--see we butchered our own meat, so summertime you made jerky. But usually milk and gravy and fried meat.

BW So you had a milk cow?

HB Yeah.

BW Was it you or your dad--which one was in the Stock Driveway Association?

HB He was in charge of that 'til mother... She had rheumatism and she fell down one day and had a hell of a time crawlin' back to the house from the corral. So he got out and he put me in then.

BW And how long were you in?

HB I was in that A.S.C.S. For 44 years. I stayed in there 'til I had a triple bypass. Then—'course they paid you ten dollars and ten cents a mile. We had to go to the doctor, to Datil. Then we had to go to Socorro to the meeting, but they didn't have meetings too regular. No, with these ranchers--I'd argue with them, but the farmers I didn't. I didn't try to tell them what to do.

HB That's when we were packing those feed blocks on a burro.



HB That's the barn where you stored your saddles and...



HB Oh, this one was taken at the Y Ranch.



Lion hunting at the Y Ranch, 1989

HB And this one of the tents there--sheep herders used those tents. They're just a pyramid. Enough for a couple people.



H. B.'s sons Michael and Bela with friend Bill Brennan on a "gold hunting" expedition.



H. B.'s sons, Bela and Michael

HB Yeah. See that's one of the pack burros we used to use. Michael must have been about three years old then.

COURTSHIP

BW Can you tell me how you met your wife?

HB She's from New York. And Calberg--that family lived at Quemado. And Peggy's aunt--she was in the service and she got acquainted with him. And she left the service; she come back. They were in the service together. He never had to go overseas 'cause he was trainin' some of these soldiers to use skis. He said, "Hell, I didn't have to do nothing but ski." Then that's where Peggy came out. Her aunt married Calberg, and she come out on her vacation.

BW To visit her aunt?

HB For a week, and she liked it. She worked for the telephone company. She went back so she could make enough money to pay her way back out. So she got her train, come back to Datil. But they had a restaurant in Magdalena then, but then they ran that Datil outfit for a long time. She worked there. That's where I met her, Mildred Eileen. Hell, when she and I was married she couldn't even cook (chuckles).

JUDY He met Peggy in Datil. Her uncle owned the Eagle Guest Ranch. And she came from New York and was working there helping them with the restaurant and bar.

HB Well, September 10th we'll be married sixty years.

BW Wow. Can you tell me the story of how you met?

HB Her sister married Calberg, and she just waited table there. Some Indians come in and she was sellin' them Indians beer. Howard says, "Peggy, you gonna cause me to lose my license--you sellin' Indians liquor." "Well," she says, "I didn't know they was Indians." So they caught on pretty quick. And when she was waitin' tables, they'd come in. She'd serve 'em what they wanted. Howard would get after her. "Well, how did I know?" So she was asking 'em, "Are you a Mexican or Indian?" "No, we're Mexicans" (laughing). She'd go ahead and serve 'em. [Note: Until the law was repealed in 1953, it was unlawful to sell alcohol to Native Americans]

BW So do you remember the first time you met her?

HB Yeah. I met her there at Datil. The woman who worked there told Peggy, said, "If you catch that old boy, you better enjoy it. He's a hard worker." And she didn't know one thing about me then. So, when I proposed to her she said, "Well, when?" "Well," I said, "you don't want to set the wedding now." I put the wedding off. "I'll set it" (chuckles). Yeah. But she had to learn how to cook. But she worked here for the county--for the city hall, and she could write down what you said in shorthand. She had worked at the telephone company. But they come down there one time, her and her girlfriend--when I had them sheep--and eat supper. They went back--they run their car off the road. Some of 'em got on to me, said, "Well, why didn't you come back with 'em?" "Well," I says, "hell, they were drivin'--getting late." And I says, "Be time for them to go to bed when they get home." She was a good lookin' girl. She's coming down with Alzheimer's, and she's losing a lot of weight.

BW So did you go out on dates?

HB No, they'd have a dance every once in a while. They had a dance there at the Eagle Guest for the March of Dimes, and we got Dick Bills from Albuquerque to play. He was a good musician. And he played Sunday, and they paid him and his three musicians a steak supper and gave 'em ten dollars apiece. So he took 'em up on it. So we had that dance Sunday night. Peggy and George Calberg and George's wife, they was workin' in the bar. We started at five o'clock. So we run seven hundred and fifty dollars through the bar that night. They were getting free sandwiches. They used a lot of stuff. They just had to pay for what [they drank] but they got the sandwiches free. What they donated—boy, every one of us was surprised they run that much money through it. He gave 'em a hundred dollars out of that, 'cause hell... Hell, I said, "There wasn't standing room in there! And I knew the state cop and I called him at midnight. He wanted to know how the party was going. I said, "Oh, it's going good; everybody's having a good time." "Well", he says, "I'm on my way to bed, had to go down to San Antone, pick up that liquor director. He was drunk and couldn't drive. So my wife drove my car back and I drove and put him to bed. "You're not gonna have to worry about him." "No," I says, "they're all havin' a good time, nobody's drunk." I says, "We'll just close it up." So I went in and I says, "Folks, you better close it up. The bar is closed. The state police is on his way out." So, by God, everybody cleared out of the bar. And he got home that next day, Monday, 'cause he spent the night up there. They done the checkin', cause they knew how much we started with. We sold seven hundred, I think, fifty-two dollars that night. And that old liquor inspector, someone... That state cop had told him about it. 'Cause the state cop--he was a Mexican. And oh, he says, "That smart aleck, he don't want you to do this or that." Says, "I'm glad when you pull one on him." That state cop says "I'd stick it to him myself, I wouldn't have to arrest him."

BW So how long did you and Peggy know each other before you got married?

HB I guess about six months.

BW Did you spend a lot of time together before you got married?

HB No. She was there; I'd go there pretty regular.

BW Did your family go to church?

HB Peggy was the Catholic, and she never did go. She kinda' quit goin' to church.



Mrs. H.B. (Peggy) Birmingham

BW What about your parents?

HB I guess they were Presbyterians. No, Peggy--course, she couldn't get along with some of them. "Well," I said, "you go to Horse Springs. It's only twenty-five mile; they got a preacher there." No, she was pretty much of a greenhorn when she come out.

BW Judy told me a story that she [Peggy] came to the house and asked where her closet was. Can you tell me that story?

HB Oh, yeah. I hung up a piece of iron from the ceilin', where she could hang her clothes. And then a curtain around it (chuckles).

BW Was that alright with her?

HB Well, it had to be (laughing)!

Civilian Conservation Corps

BW What about the CCC? Do you remember when the CCC was out here?

HB Yeah. They done a lot of work. They finished that Driveway--and then the forest boundary wasn't fenced--and put a lot of fencing. As you get about Apache Creek on that mesa, some of those big posts is still there that the CC... They had a camp this side of Magdalena, and they done a lot of good work.

BW Yeah, over there by VLA; you can still see the stuff there.

JUDY Skip Price's place--out by Apache Creek--they have all that stuff buried out there from the CC camp. Yeah, it's all been washing out. And I found three canteens that I painted them. And they made a cut in the back to destroy this stuff. And H.B. said they had all kinds of shovels, and all kinds of stuff they had to break up and put out there. And he said there's one of those bulldozer deals buried out there. H.B. said they dug a hole and buried it, and they buried all these shovels, and these canteens and stuff, but they had to break them up. Because they couldn't--after the camp was closing, they didn't have any use for them, and they had to get rid of them. So, out there at Skip Price's place, all this stuff is washing up.

These are the recollections of H. B. Birmingham in his own words. The oral history project is ongoing, so please check back with this web site for new postings.