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Interviews with Pioneers

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INTERVIEWS WITH PIONEERS

INTRODUCTION

The final stage of data collection was to supplement the scattered fragments of literature and the sampled accounts of land title records with a systematic areal and topical county-wide interview schedule. The interviewees were first generation pioneers who could recall the settlement patterns of their homestead families and who had knowledge of the lifestyle of the homesteaders. Only a few of the interviewees had difficulty remembering the events of the past.

There are many first generation pioneers still living in northeastern New Mexico. Most are over eighty years of age and several are nearing the century mark. Their recall of the era of farming is remarkable and it is fascinating to record the events which are firmly locked into their minds. Many decades have passed since their families abandoned the farm and the homestead and either migrated to the urban areas for employment or remained on the land by converting to a cattle economy. When probed or reminded of events through the line of questioning, most interviewees would discourse with clear details and dates about events between the period of 1890 to 1930.

METHOD

Although nearly fifty interviews (at an average of two hours per taping) were conducted, a vast number of potential interviewees who were unable to be included in this survey. The list of contact candidates for an oral history survey was at least three times the number who were interviewed. There were many more who were not discovered as well as many in Albuquerque and in other areas of the State who could not be reached. The most frustrating aspect of excluding people at this date who can recall the homestead era is that they are of such senior status that they will unlikely be available at a later period for interviewing. It is a continual problem of conducting a historical survey of the era through the eyes and memories of those who produced the history. We are on the fringe of a time when the entire generation of pioneer homesteaders will be gone. New Mexico and Arizona were some of the last states to host the swarms of free-land settlers. These states constitute one of the few remaining areas where the frontier archives of this era are still walking around. The enlightening element of this project is that fifty persons have provided us with experiences that will contribute significantly to the homestead history of New Mexico.

As shown on the map of site specific interviews (see Map 11 with its corresponding table), Union County was the first area

for the oral history aspect of this project. The distribution pattern reflects the method that should have been employed throughout the northeastern study area. Interviewees are scattered, in combinations of two or more, in a shotgun approach throughout the county (with the exception of the Dry Cimarron area). The combinations increase the probability of cross-tabulation of dates and events through the method of using one source to verify the information of another source. What was extremely beneficial for the interviewer in the Union County survey was the location of the interviewees. Although the communities that were discussed were nearly distributed county-wide, eighteen of the thirty resource people (60%) were located in Clayton. Two more of the Union county interviewees were in Albuquerque. This reduced the need for travel to each site location for an interview and enhanced the prospect of conducting up to four interviews per day.

The system utilized in Union County did not carry over into the other counties. The time proposed for the project did not allow for the type of coverage that would be deemed adequate for such a vast area. After completing fairly comprehensive interview work in Union and Harding Counties, it was discovered that the budget for field work was almost totally depleted. In Colfax County, the shotgun approach was shifted to one of a concentrated survey of irrigation farming as a method of survival in the region. French and the Antelope Valley Irrigation District (French Tract) were selected as a representative samples of Colfax County irrigation projects. These irrigation projects were attractive options for the dryland farmers who were unprepared for the unpredictable natural hardships associated with encouraging a crop out of the High Plains. Many dryland farmers from Union and Harding Counties wound up in the Colfax irrigation districts.

By the time the tape recorder reached San Miguel County, the project period was nearly over. The decision was made to interview someone from the llano area west of the Canadian and to collect an oral history from a pioneer settler in the Canadian River Canyon country to complete the sample. The remaining two counties of Mora and Quay could not be included in this portion of the data collection.

INTERVIEW SCHEDULE

All interviews followed a programmed sequence that would begin with the more familiar topic of family history and move into more specifics at a later point in the interview. If one is to compare the transcripts of any two interviews, they would discover a number of discrepancies in the question sequence and in the line of in-depth questioning. One of the procedures vital to conducting a successful interview is to probe the

resource person into talking freely about topics of their choosing. This frequently entails a lot of informal chatter and light conversations, which are directed toward putting the interviewee into a semi-relaxed state. If the resource person drifted into a tangent topic, the interviewer flowed with the conversation. Much unrelated topical discussion may follow before the interviewee is returned to the subject of the interview.

An outline of the "intended" interview procedure is included below. In most cases the schedule was followed and in all cases there were attempts by the interviewer to find as many answers to each stage of the interview as the interviewee was willing to provide.

INTERVIEW SCHEDULE

A. Family Background prior to movement to New Mexico

B. The Move to New Mexico

1. How did they receive information about New Mexico?
2. How did they file?
3. How did they travel?

C. Homestead Site

1. Exact location
2. Selection criteria for site
3. Structures and layout of buildings

D. Housing

1. Stages of development
2. Craftsmen employed
3. Sources of building materials

E. Neighbors

1. Housing built by neighbors (any sod construction?)
2. Outstanding memories about neighbors
3. Previous locations of neighbors before New Mexico

F. Water

1. How was water originally obtained? From where?
2. When was the well drilled? Who was the driller?
3. What were the uses of well water?
4. How were range stock watered?

G. Farming

1. How was the sod broken? (phases and total acreage)
2. Crops and land uses (food/market crops - acreage of uses)
3. Farm processing of subsistence and market crops
4. Transport and markets for crops

H. Weather

1. Severe conditions by dates (droughts, cyclones, blizzards)
2. Years of abundant harvests

I. Community

1. To what community did you belong? (how was it named?)
2. What made a community? (buildings/clubs/activities [ball games/picnics])

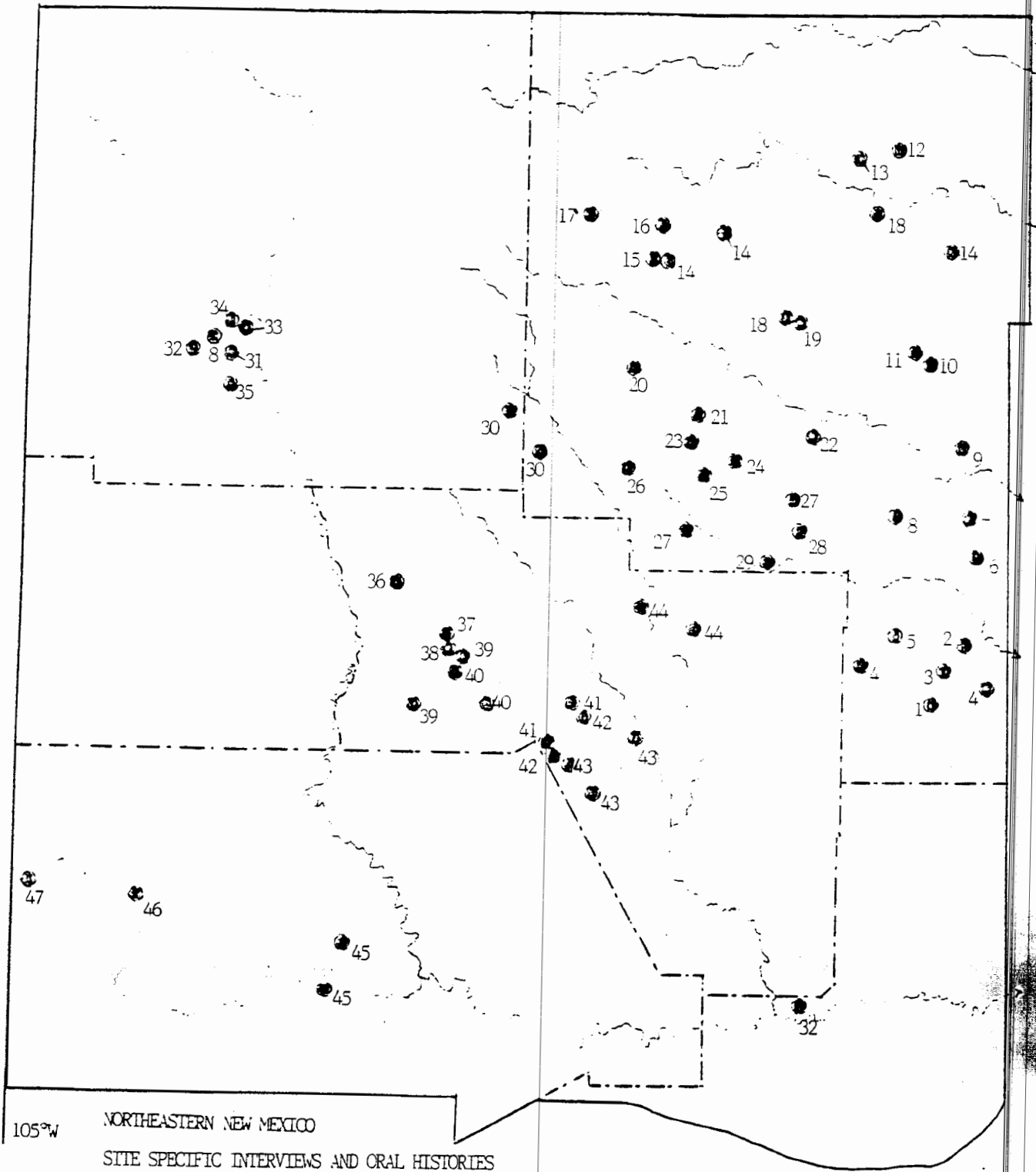
J. Neighboring Communities

1. Any activities between communities
2. Any significant or unusual elements in any community

K. Specifics

1. Describe the school system available from grade one through high school. Give names and locations of schools. Where did the teachers reside?
2. Where was the community cemetery? How was the land provided?
3. What church denominations were in the area? Where did the preacher (priest) come from?
4. Identify special occasions (including folk tales that have been passed down).

Map 11: Interviews



105°W

NORTHEASTERN NEW MEXICO

SITE SPECIFIC INTERVIEWS AND ORAL HISTORIES

sites number keyed to reference table

SITE SPECIFIC ORAL HISTORIES ON
NORTHEASTERN NEW MEXICO

Community	Interviewee	Interviewee's Current Address
UNION COUNTY INTERVIEWS		
1 Amistad	Mrs. Christine Brams	Amistad
2 Amistad	Mr. and Mrs. Homer Ricketson	north of Amistad
3 Amistad	Mrs Margorie Brosier Topper	Clayton
4 Amistad	Mr. Pete Shields	north of Amistad
4 Hayden	Mr. Pete Shields	north of Amistad
5 Hayden	Mrs. Idaline Hauser	Hayden
6 Sedan	Mr. Luster Cowen	Clayton
7 Sedan	Mrs. Patty Duckworth Cowen	Clayton
8 Thomas/Snyder/ French Tract	Mrs. Winifred Sowers Blakely	Clayton
9 New Home	Mrs. William Caudill Wheatley	Clayton
10 Clayton	Mrs. Lucille Roberts Isaacs	Clayton
11 Clayton	Mrs. Clara Toombs Harvey	Clayton
12 Cuates	Mrs. Wanda McLaughlin Hughes	Cuates
13 Cuates	Mr. Lawson Long	Cuates
14 Victory/ Grenville/ Seneca	Mrs. Winifred F. Steele	Albuquerque
15 Grenville	Mrs. C. A. Asker Johnson	Clayton
16 Prosperous Valley	Mr. C. A. Johnson	Clayton
17 Sierra Grande Valley	Mrs. Mary Mae Winfred Pelphery	French Corners, Colfax Co.
18 Mt. Dora/ Circle Valley	Mrs. Ina Mae Reed	Mt. Dora
19 Mt. Dora	Mrs. Vannie Reed	Mt. Dora
20 Sofia	Mrs. Vascilica Belcheff	Clayton
21 Lake Norman	Mr. Bill Wheatley	Clayton
22 Tate/Clabber Hill	Mr. Bob Daves	Clayton
23 Pennington/ Patterson	Mrs. Helen Beckner	Clayton
24 Pennington/ Clabber Hill	Mr. Harold Root	Clayton

Community	Interviewee	Interviewee's Current Address
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UNION COUNTY (CONTINUED)

25	Pennington	Mrs. Inez Crist	Clayton
26	Pasamonte/ Beenham	Mr. Cliff Sivyer	Clayton
27	Cerrito Blanco/ Barney	M.E. Gonzales Family (Ida Gonzales/ Helen Sosa/Elis Garcia)	Albuquerque
28	Garcia	Mr. Emilio Garcia	Clayton
29	Miera	Mrs. Juanita Miera Vigil	Clayton
30	Gladstone/ Farley	Mr. Albert Bada	Sugarloaf Valley (near Gladstone)

COLFAX COUNTY INTERVIEWS

8	Andrews/French	Mrs. Winifred Sowers Blakely	Clayton
31	Antelope Valley	Mr. Royce Briggs	Antelope Valley
32	Antelope Valley	Mrs. Louise Arning Galloway	Albuquerque
33	French	Mr. Samuel Weston Pelphrey	French Corners
34	French	Mr. Dale West	Springer
35	Springer Tract	Mr. Leroy Gandara	Springer

HARDING COUNTY INTERVIEWS

36	Mills	Mr. Roy Cates	Mills
37	Roy	Mr. Roy Self	Roy
38	Roy	Fr. Douglas Raun	Roy
39	Rock Springs/ Roy	Mrs. Marie Heimann	Roy
40	Solano/Roy	Mr. Joyce Laumbach	near Sabinoso
41	Black Lake/ Mosquero	Mr. Tito Trujillo	Mosquero
42	Black Lake/ Mosquero	Mrs. Lynn Croswaithe	Mosquero
43	Canon Frugoso/ Lower Mosquero/ Mosquero	Mr. Augustine Blea	Mosquero
44	Bueyeros/Baca	Mr. Canuto Gonzales	Albuquerque

QUAY COUNTY INTERVIEWS

Logan	Mrs. Louise Arning Galloway	Albuquerque
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Community	Interviewee	Interviewee's Current Address
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SAN MIGUEL COUNTY INTERVIEWS

45 Variadero/ Trementina	Mr. Julian Estrada	Las Vegas
46 Trujillo/ Tuloso	Mr. Candido Baca	near Trujillo
47 Casa Grande	Mr. Henry Turner	Bernalillo