

Socorro County Historical Society, Oral History Tapes

Dave McDonald interviewed by Holm Bursum, Jr.

I've known Dave for over 50 years, I think that's right isn't it? About 55. About the time you were working out at the ranch. You married (Murdis?) Thompson in 1921? By golly, that's 52 years ago. You know, my first recollection of the Thompson girls was when Lillian, Murdis' twin sister, I was just a little kid and I went over here and old man (Byris?) the local undertaker then and she impressed me quite a bit, I think that was the first time I ever saw her. What year were you born, Dave? 1901./ Well, tht's 72 years ago, you don't look over 55. Where were you born? I was born in Tularosa. The folks were out at the ranch at that time, weren't they? In those days, you know, you was lucky to get to town once a year. When did they start the ranch out there? In the nineties. About the same time as my Dad started out there. I think he started about '93 or '94. I think it was '93 because he was working up there in Gallup. Well, you know my dad, he hauled that stamp mill into White Oaks from San Antone here with a bull team.. But my dad said he could never remember your dad, your dad did the same thing. That was unusual they was both using the same road with ox teams. He asked me about that water that used to run out by the old (Bruton?) tank down there - several times he went through there he watered the steers without taking the yokes off, That must have been around (Regel?) or in there. By the way, Regel started running again, it hasn't run in 20 years. It's running pretty big, it's run the tank over. He asked me about the deer up there. He used to feed the deer up on those hills. He said they wasn't wild. I guess there was always a lot of deer up in that country. Most people didn't realize there were deer. Well in those days the road went right up the canyon. That started the wash, you see. You know, something I was aiming to talk to you about was the condition of the country. It must have been in a wet cycle from 1905 up to about 1920 they had grass, because if you recall u p to about 1920, that country around Mocking Bird Gap where you live and up at Hansonburg was full of ranches. The Newmans were there, Bill Davis had a ranch, George Davis had a ranch, George Eames? had a ranch. These droughts have come about ever since I can remember - the first one was along in 1909 because my dad had to take his cattle out out to Ruidoso, was it?, and never got them back to the ranch. Then he took them over to what you call the Porter place and kept them there a year. It started raining in 1911, 1911 was a big wet year. I remember my dad told me about it, of course that was before my time and then when I built a road up in Colorado in 1953, the year my dad died, and I asked those old timers - I was building a road up on the east fork of the San Juan River and there was an old road there - the remains of one - and there was a telephone line, and I asked him what was going on there - what that old piece of road was. They said that used to be the highway up until 1911, the year of the big floods that washed it all out, and then they moved it and put it over by Wolf Creek Pass and papa? said that agrees with 1911 being a big wet year, but 1908 was a big drought. He moved out west to Magdalena. The Newmans came up here to La Joya. I heard about a horse being dead in a horse pasture up there. They came out over those malpais. An Indian came through there They was leaving the bars down up there so the (----) around that old dead horse. I kicked his butt and told him to get on out. On those rock bluffs they had bars so the horses could get away. Well they probably let them get away. --- We

were just one generation after the Judge Fountain stuff down there, you know I think Judge Fountain was killed in about 1908. Yeah, somewhere along in there. The reason I brought it up was the McGillilands was down there as neighbors to you and Jim Gilliland and Dick and who else. Him and Dick and George. Jim was the one that they used to link with the Fountain case, and of course no one has ever known anything - not for sure - but they always linked him with that, they didn't say he did it, but they said he knew who did it. I heard all those stories but there was no proof about who did that. They had a Brazzell mixed up with that too. Well they had Oliver Lee and Jim and the Brazzells. They had old Dick Gilliland - I knew him well. Is Dick still alive? No, he's dead. George is dead, there's none of them left. Dick was the last one that died. He died about '57 or '58. Was it that far back? He was down in Alamogordo and took pneumonia. I remember the Woods were all down in that country there. Yeah, back there in the '80's some of them said there was Lum? Woods and Jimmy Woods. Were Henry and Lum brothers? Yes. And then, H. A. Woods - he was Lum Woods' boy. Lum Woods didn't have but one or two boys. Well I guess (--) Woods lives out there in Deming. The only one I know was Sellis? Woods - he died young. Ruby was Woods. Well I don't believe I knew that. Vanneman was a brother of Marvin Akes' wife. And then there was old Watson Ritch - he lived down there. --- He was a Territorial Governor? When did he go down there? Well it was long before my time. I recall the Rich schoolhouse. Yes, but his ranch was further on down. Down about Rhodes Canyon or there? Then Watson Ritch, he moved out there on the flats. He had quite a little area along the ---. Is Watson Rich still there? No, he's been dead for not too many years, probably about twenty. He has a couple of sons. You know that one. What was the old man's name? It was W.T.R. Was it Billy? R-i-t-c-h. Well I knew the young Watson, of course he wasn't very young. Is he still alive? Yes. Yeah, he's at Tularosa and there's another boy, I can't think of his name. There were two of them. Well I knew young Watso, he taught school down there at the Ritch schoolhouse. I can't think of his name right now. And then the Hardins all lived in there, didn't they? Yes. There was Leland Miller, They were brother-in laws. And then Cicero Green - Mrs. Green when Cicero's wife - she was the sister of yours. They're both dead. What about their daughter, is she still alive? She is. She's in Tularosa. She married Danley? Well, the Bill Danley?. He worked for them when she married ---. Wilson was his name. They call him Bill. You know his ranch. Has he done all right? Well, he's got this ranch up here south of Horse Springs about 38 sections he told me. Some of the Rail (Rayl?) ranch . Did you know him? Yeah. Well, that's what it is. He got part of that. Well that's good countrr, horse range. He bought from old man D.A. Budding? Was Beda? The old man or is that the boy? No that's the boy. He had a boy, now what the hell was his name. Well he got the back part of that Rayl. Thirty-eight sections, I believe. Well that's good country all right, good ranch country. Does he live out there. No, in Tularosa. He goes back and forth out there. Rayl's? not too healthy. He's having leg trouble. Circulation? Yeah. Do you know what year he was born? No, I don't. But he was about the same age as my dad, wasn't he? Somewhere along there, yeah. He might have been a little older. Could have been. Now Harper? was born in '67 - he would have been 107 years old in February. The tenth of February. Well in those days you never put nuthin' down, you thought you would keep it in your head all your life, you know. It gets away from you after a while. It sure does. Well you've got a good memory. I always had a good memory except it

doesn't work when I want it to. *A.G. Hill, you remember him pretty well, of course. He was our neighbor to the north and he was born in 1867. He was exactly the same age. He and White? and Compton What year was your dad born? He was 75 in '45 that's when he died. Well that's 28 years ago, and he was how old. Seventy-five. Well he would be 103, so he was born about 1871 (sic). So he was young, I always thought ---. He was married on his birthday. I don't know why, but I always thought your dad was a little bit older than my dad. He got gray pretty young then. His father was almost 102. But his family never got past 91. Michael McDonald? Yeah, he was born in Cork, Ireland. In 1826 and died in 1928. He was 102 years old. Where did he die? He died at Wilcox. That's out at his daughter's. He had a place out there? His daughter's place. He was healthy. He wasn't sick or anything, just wore out. That's something to live a century and then to live in two centuries. He was up at the ranch when we was 91 years old with some miners. He owned some horses up on the mountain there he had old Bob, and that's the one he told them he wanted. They gave him old Bob. That evening he came in and had the rest of them. In those days he still had the wagons and teams and he had his own horse, and he would ride once in a while. Do you remember any of the Burtons? I know a lot of hearsay about 'em, but of course I knew Jack West. Papa said he bought Charlie Bruton? out in 1928 - that Jose Bruton country out there. Josem? was the old stage station - the overnight stage station between San Antonio and White Oaks and Ft. Stanton and Roswell and Lincoln, San Antonio being the closest railroad point to Roswell, New Mexico. At that time, up until 1905 - that's when Carrizozo started, that's when they brought the railroad into Carrizozo in 1905. In fact there wasn't any town of Carrizozo until 1905. It was the Carrizo ranch. The railroad there, they got some bridges marked 1906. Some of the bridges - 1906. Down south of town? Yeah, down toward Las Cruces. Well 1905 was about right. Next year they was heading south, down to El Paso. It was the El Paso and Southwestern Railroad. Well, anyway old Howard Sweets was in Socorro in the 20's and he became manager of the eating house over there and his brother was the president of the railroad. But he ran the restaurant for a long time. You could get a meal, all you wanted to eat for thirty-five cents. You could get all you wanted to eat. How many children do you have? Two, two living. Ray and Guy. What's Guy doing now? He's a CPA. He is a partner in the (--) Foxon? Company. Where are they located? All over the western part of the United States. He's one of 200 partners. They got 47 offices, I believe. They employ about a thousand people. That's a pretty good size outfit. That's just the way business is going nowadays. Everything is big now. It's also the trend with the times too. The independent operator's got a hard row to hoe these days. You got to be big, or you got to be awful little. Getting' back to that business of the ranch business, though, don't you think the years must have been generally better there for about 20 to 25 year up until about 1920 than they were after 1820 or they wouldn't have been so many ranches in that country - all that had a little spread that were makin' a living out of it. Back in those days, you know, the country was filling up with people, you know. They started in diggin' wells you know, and when they couldn't dig wells they started getting' drills in. My dad had one of the first wells in that country and that was down in the Story ranch. In those days down in Deming they had a horsepower deal (drill)? In fact there was an old steam engine and went to drillin' wells a while. I know when they first started drillin' wells, my dad told me he drilled two wells at (Washeo?) because he didn't think you would get enough water out of one six-inch hole,*

he said you had to have a big hole to get water out. Of course it doesn't work that way, but the odd part was, the second well they drilled - the first was 160 feet and had plenty of water and the second well he drilled about 20 feet away he went 400 feet and didn't get any water. It's like gold, water is where you find it. Unless it's sheet water, and then it's pretty simple. Well that country of yours, it was hard to find water. Yeah, you got to go up in the hills when you got trouble. We went several hundred feet up there - no water. What was your mother's maiden name? Nutley. And where did she come from? Texas, Mason County. How many brothers and sisters did you have? Oh there was probably ten or twelve, somewhere around in there. Well I remember George and Rube. How many did I have, you mean? I thought you spoke of my mother. There was only six of us. How many in your dad's family? Oh there was twelve or fourteen in that family. And in your family there were ---. Six. And who all were they - George was he the oldest? Yes. And then Ross and you and Reuben then Anna. George, Emma. Oh yeah, I forgot about her. The three youngest still livin". George and Ross are gone. And Emma. That's three. You and Rube and Anna. She lives at Tucson. She's had a couple of bad strokes, but she's come out of both of 'em. One of 'ems been about eighteen years ago. Two years ago, they didn't give her any chance for a couple of weeks. She didn't know anybody or anything. They needed to cut an arm off, and she didn't know anything about it. Remember that dance they had there at Hansonburg - I think it was 1919. I guess I was about eleven years old, but when I was learnin' to dance - the reason I remember the date very well was because they had a barrel of beer that was made in Socorro - you know that was the year that prohibition took effect and that was the last legal booze you could buy. Seems it was the Fourth of July, I believe? They had a whole barrel of beer - of bottled beer and they kept it in wet gunny sacks to keep it cool. I remember the fellers all drank beer. Your sister was there. And I asked her if she would dance with me. You know how those old country dances are? The men would stay down at one end of the room and every time the music would start they would grab a partner and they wouldn't ask her to dance. Finally, I went down there myself and asked her to dance with me. I couldn't dance worth a - but I always remember that. She was a pretty girl. They were classical dancers. Him and his wife, you know, golly they were steppers. That's where Pop got all of his. Golly, I bet there were a hundred people at the dance. Oh they got in there - somehow they'd stack those kids up - little kids, and they'd just stack 'em up like cordwood on those beds and they would sleep right through the dance. At midnight they had a big feed and then dance on until sunup. You know one thing I noticed is everybody wears boots to the dances and the cowboys, they came horseback to the dance, well they came all booted up, but they had a pair of slippers strapped on the side and they would take the saddle off and wear their shoes into the dance. ---- Well, can you remember any wild experiences you had back in your early days that would make a good story? Right now I don't. About the first thing that ever happened to me, I got an arm broken when I was about eight or nine year old. We was ridin' burros, you know.. My brother and I was. In those days, any time a cow left home, you had to go find her and milk her. My brother and I got on the burro, you know ---- this old burro threw me off and broke my arm. I walked to the house, a couple of miles and my sister she got a horse, and I climbed up in bed and they hitched up the mules to the wagon and started out to Carrizozo. We got in the next mornin' after sunup - over to Doc Haydon. He started twistin' on it --- he got it back where he thought it was right and

taped it down again. It's a pretty good arm. *Oh yeah , you wouldn't know it ever was broken. You get a little pain?* No, no. *Well ,you can't reach as far. They didn't give you anything, no ----? Well I remember one time old Sam Holmes, he was livin' down there at the Hanson mine, and a snake bit his boy. He had his old Model T all torn up and he couldn't take him anyplace to the doctor and he just cut it - slit it there and put salt and coal oil poultice on it. That's what he told me. After a coucouple days he got his old Model T put together and he could go to town to see the doctor and he said he's all right now and he had no problems. He's lived this long and he's got no problems.* We passed him down at San Antone, and we didn't know whether he was comin' in or not. We had to go to the Park Hotel. That leg had swelled in, you know - it was blue up to his rib line. *What was that boy's name?* Teddy. His name was (Corn?) *Corn adopted him? Dorothy Corn? Oh he was married to Henry's daughter. They separated and she finally married Sam Holmes. Where did old Sam come from? First time I ever saw him was when he got back from the navy. You remember he always used to wear that navy uniform from World War I? His mother used to be neighbors. Old man Camp finally married her. I don't remember him I remember Sarah she was a lot older than I am, maybe five or ten years, I don't know. Sarah's no spring chicken. She lives in California. Old Tony Smidt, Fred Smidt's boy? He died though, didn't he?* No, no, Tony didn't die - Eric died. *And what happened to Jornada?* Oh, she's still living. *You know that's the only person I ever knew in my life that was named Jornada. She was named after the jornada del muerto, she was named after that flat country out there.* Her first husband was named Douglas. Roy, you remember him? *Oh,Rroy Evans?* They got two kids. *Old Roy's still alive, huh?* Yeak, the last time I was down there which was a year ago last December. He had a new car. He was just about blind. I thought he was going to run me off the road. *Well, he worked for Johnny Hill, didn't he?* He got to workin' for the state. *He had two brothers, there was (Blondie) and Carl. Yeah, there was Carl. --and one they called Littleton. Was he a brother too? Yeah, he was married to old lady Davis. Well I remember there was always a lot of scuttlebutt about whether George about whether Bill shot himself. I heard that too. There was a box of cartridges opened and one shell taken out and put in the gun and he was drinkin' of course as usual. I always thought he shot himself. There was some others might want to kill him. There's something else I could tell you, but I don't want to tell it here on ---. Remember to tell me later, huh when they cut this microphone off? George is Bill's boy, right? Bill Davis. George Davis went up to Mountainair, and the last I heard he died somewhere. Some of those Evans, old Roy, he didn't have a reputation like Blondie and Carl. Carl was supposed to be about half bandit, wasn't he? Didn't they run him out of the country for a while? Blondie wasn't tough, he just liked to steal. He couldn't help it, I remember when they sent old Blondie to the penitentiary for stealin' a quart of whiskey, but they never could convict him for stealin' cattle and finally the only way they got him in jail was for sellin' bootleg whiskey. No, they finally got him for stealin' wire. That was the last time The first time, though, the first time they ever got him in jail was for sellin' whiskey. Because they tried him a lot of times. He told me when he got out of Leavenworth - he came back - you know I was workin' up there at Brush tank, you know I was workin' up there in 1932. He came up and stayed all night with me. Well he was out at Carrizozo at the Valley of Fires, he was - he told me, he was kiddin' - you know we always got along pretty good --. He didn't get mad or hold a grudge against anybody.*

Your old man was always trying to get him sent up for stealin' sheep or something, and you know he said, by golly, I never could do it. he got some lawyer and he told me who it was, but I don't remember who it was - he said we'd buy the jury off. The old man never could get me sent up. I stole the sheep - and then the last time - I thought that was funny - when he got back from Leavenworth and served his time he hung around for about a year and then they caught him stealin' wire. And a cow. And you remember - oh first he stole the cow and then they arrested him and they had him in jail and then he went over there and stole the hide. He broke into the jail and destroyed the evidence, so they couldn't get him on that, and then he stole the wire. That's the way it was. That's right, he stole the wire. And it was government wire so they popped him again with a federal charge and he went up again.. I guess he's dead now. Oh yeah. Bess is dead too, his wife. She was Bess Phillips. You know I just barely remember old man Phillips he had a long beard. Well he might have had in his later years- I haven't seen him in several years before he died ---- Johnny Norton. There was only two brothers . Uncle Charlie they called him, Charlie Phillips. Then I remember old man (Ranpelt). Bid concrete worker. No, I didn't know him. ---Well this was before him. What's this guy's name that used to live at Datil and Magdalene, he's still around and stationed down here across from the Roadrunner a long time ago - golly, you know him - I used to know him real well, but I can't think of his name right now. Who was it loaded chile up there? Jack Best. You remember old Jack. He had a beard. You know he was runnin' chile. He had a dugout there and he took me and my dad to the ranch with him in a Model T, and I'd say we got stuck in the mud and broke an axle and so we walked up to (Showli)) about three miles and I remember he got to lead me by the hand and he would not lie down - I was tired. I was only about seven or eight years old and he put us up there in that one-room hogan he had beside that rock up on the side of the hill, and we stayed all night there and the next morning he got a team and brought us down to Hansonburg in that buckboard. ----- Did you know George Washington Hales, did you remember him? No. Well he lived here in Socorro, and you could have known him, but you know Washeo was named after him. Yeah, his name was George Washington Hale and he had that relay station there at Washeo and when he left there he came down to Socorro and he was a foreman they told me on the Santa Fe on this Magdalena branch and he lived here until he died, but I don't remember it. Bower that used to live out there, do you remember him? He came into our country once - he was a (--) man for A.P. Murray. On that Murray place there? What was his first name? I don't know what his first name was. Bower. Yeah, I knew him. And there was another guy - I'm tryin' to think of his name - Smyth - do you remember where the old Smyth tank was out there? Yeah, and they claim he ate rats and snakes and anything he could get- he was like a desert rat - that's what he was. ---- came down and was goin' to jump a mine --and that minin'claim was runnin' out at midnight ----he was a gun man ----Winchester, you know and when twelve o'clock came they all began to throw up their monuments, you see on this claim that they located . Two partners was goin' to jump it And old Bowers was there? He was makin' a gun play you know. Well they never did find any minerals out there. Well none of that country in the San Andres is highly mineralized. Low grade minerals is what they are. That country up above Bingham, that's all low grad ore. There's been a lot of money spent on that place. I remember those McCarthy's it was, came from Denver and gosh they spent a lot of money there. It's been a lot of money and a lot of work. The development, you see and

the haulin' they were handicapped on account of water . *Yeah, of course they didn't have no water or roads they could truck the ore with in those days and they couldn't run a mill because they didn't have the water. A dry process won't work - it never has. But it's a big low grade proposition I guess.* Just like the old (Esther) city. They even had a smelter there. *How far is Esther City from your old place - your dad's ranch.* About twenty miles. *Well I've never been out to Esther City.* My uncle hauled all that machinery . *It's through the gap isn't it?* Yes, it's over east from Moonshine Spring in that area there's some red country. *Was that Moonshine a nice spring?* It was in wet weather. *And then there was another spring at the white house. Isn't that what they called it, the white house?* There was a lot springs along there. Bob Ross and the (Wittmeyers) had some springs in there. That's where they killed Bob Ross over there. You know he was kind of an outlaw. And he'd been out of the country, you know, huntin' (dogs). We always thought he had stolen my uncle's horse, well my uncle might have let him have he horse he didn't holler too much about the horse being gone but anyway he come back and settled there and that's about the time the Hackett Cattle Company started. And they had boughten the Nabors tank. *Yeah, Jim Nabors was the guy that lived up there. -----gap-----*Bob Ross asked him out and he wouldn't come out and at daylight he made a run for the big arroyo there and old Tom Tucker shot him in the back of the head. Tom just said well I just took a hip shot at him - I didn't mean to hit him. Somebody said he was a better hip shot than he was aiming. Anyway they had two beeves? and they had to go to town with them. Anyway that put a stop to that beef stealin'. And they got rid of that whole bunch, Bob Ross outfit and the Wittmeyers. *Golly, they were in a place there where you never could have rooted them out because that's rough wild country and remote, that Nabors tank country.* Well he was tough, I guess. He steal my dad's horse one time, and anyway that horse was gone and dad went all over the country lookin' for him. He had gotten with another bunch of horses and finally got him back. *Well stealin' a horse in those days was pretty dangerous business.* Well, my dad ----a Winchester and he -----went in that direction. That's the first time he ever put his gun, you see. *You know that Nabors tank over there, my dad told me one time that old man that started that --it seems to me there was another man started that tank, an old German with a wheelbarrow and old Charlie Bruton went over there and was goin' to run him off, but he stood his ground and the next time Charlie showed up he met him with a shotgun and that was the end of that and he went ahead and finished the tank with his wheelbarrow.* But he was finally found dead there and the story got out that certain neighbors had sort of choked him with that red bandanna handkerchief that he wore around his neck . My dad claimed that he was choked to death with that handkerchief. He didn't die of a heart attacked (sic) or anything. *Then the neighbors came along and ----. Did they get it? I think they wanted it that red-- and then the neighbors showed it to the Hacketts? Yeah, that's big country. We used to ride that whole country checkin' on the sheep that we used to winter up there ---.* You remember that fence up there on the mountain? Do you know why it's sittin' there? To put stolen cattle behind. That's where they held them in there until they weaned 'em. Those calves that were brought down from the mountain springs, and they was cut off from the cows down there about a mile and a half or two miles from the mountain springs up there and somebody hold the cows in those hold-offs there and they'd start out with the calves and they'd bring 'em up there and turn 'em loose behind that fence. That's what it was for. *Well, I knew there was a lot of fences up there from*

bluff to bluff there. There was rabbits and chicken up there where the waters we. I wonder who dug those ----springs up there . I don't know --- it just dripped. There was a lot of stalactites up there -- I haven't been up there in thirty years but the last time I was in there I used to take baths all the time -- it was just like a natural bathtub and the water ran out on that piece of rock there and the little stalactites growin' from the ceiling about five or six inches long --I bet those things are probably a foot long by now growin' out of the limestone.. Were they hangin' from the ceiling? Yeah they dripped down from the ceiling. Because limestone formation --- Well, we used to use the water in those days in veins? and rabbit? and Deer Springs - those three. And we always kept -- on top of the water for drinkin'. And there would be a crust of lime around the water line. That gyp water out there was tough. Well Dave this has been nice to get to visit with you and as you know this stuff is for the historical societies in Socorro and they'll go over this tape and if they find anything interesting in it, they'll probably write it down and put it in the records to get something documented about people in the area before we're all gone and they can't get it and there'd be a lot of people if it wasn't written down--- and I'm sure everything we said wouldn't be interesting to anybody but you and I because we all lived in the same place and know who we're talkin' about. But I didn't know whether you wanted to share some stories on the Gilliland business because as long as I can remember they was always talkin' about Jim Gilliland. Well I remember Jim he was a big tall guy and wore that moustache - wore those high boots with his pants inside. He was a well built man, wasn't he? Old man Logan used to be in that country. He was a midwife for all the ranch women when they had their babies out on the ranches in those days - he'd go stay with them. The called him Dr. Smoky. He had a bunch of goats in the canyon down there in the Good Fortune Canyon. This side of Ritch Canyon? Yes. He had a fallin' out down there and old Judge Gilliland he was married to one of the Logan's daughters or something and then he put a sign up, you know, for hound pups and damned lies? And old Dr. Smoky just to make the old man mad. Well I never heard of him. He used to come to the ranch - he used to come in a covered wagon. What year did Eugene Manlove Rhodes die? (end)