

Socorro County Historical Society, Oral History Tapes

Paul Woofter interviewed by Sue Little

We came from West Virginia. *You're a long way from home. How did you ever get out to New Mexico?* We came on my mother's (--) in 1910. *How did you come out?* By train. *From where to where?* From Grafton, West Virginia, to Raton, New Mexico. *You could come all the way then by train? Did you go through Chicago.* We stopped in St. Louis, that's all I know. *When you came out to New Mexico, where did you live?* Raton. *Why did you live in Raton?* Well, there was an opening there for my father. He was a railroad engineer and in 1911 he transferred into San Marcial. *San Marcial, that city that was?* Until 1929. They called that the Horny Toad Division. There was a center there that overhauled all the trains started from there to El Paso to Deming and to Albuquerque. They had a Harvey House there. They had two daylight trains each way and two night trains each way. *And San Marcial was the center - I'd never heard that before.* It was a lot (----) Socorro - big payroll. *Do you mean San Marcial was actually larger than Socorro?* It was a railroad town - they overhauled all of the engines. *And all of that washed away in the flood.* Nineteen twenty nine. *And then did they move it to Belen?* They moved the office part to Las Vegas and the shops to Albuquerque. There is nothing left down there now. *I had heard that repotr before, but I never knew it was such a railroad center. Did you leave San Marcial at the flood or had you already done it?* I left in 1917. My father had a wreck at (---). In those days they had a pusher - had to push it up the hill to Engels - one to El Paso and one to Deming, and very strange, coming back they found the wrecked train and the conductor and the caboose and they come back in and everybody went to sleep and they had that wreck. They got fired and that's when we moved to Oklahoma. *What did you do in Oklahoma?* Went to work for my brother in the oil fields. In four years I came back and bought this ranch I'm on now in 1921 from Mike Harris. *And you have been living here since 1921?* Except when I was in school. *Where did you go to high school and the university?* I went to grade school at Walters Oklahoma and high school at Ardmore, Oklahoma, and Oklahoma University at Norman, Oklahoma, I went to Winton, (USC?). I'm about half Okie. *So after just four years you had enough money to buy a ranch? There's just a few people that know about ranches - they see them in the picture show. Are these picture show ranches really ---* You can't run a ranch by seein' a picture show. You won't make any money. You gotta' change with the times and no two ranches are alike. It depends on the individual ranch how you run it. I've been here 52 years and I've never had the (----). The reason I moved into Socorro - I batched ten years and my daughter went to school there and rented an apartment there, and I finally bought a home and a 175-acre irrigated farm and a small loan agency here so I'd have a reason to come to town. I sold the farm because when I was at the farm I wished I was at the ranch and vice versa. *How long does it take you to get out there?* An hour - 53 miles. *You've never gotten to the point where you'd have your own plane?* My son-in-law comes in and gets to some of those places, but I'm too old to be buying an airplane. *Now I'm interested in something in the operation of this ranch, how many hired hands do you have?* I've had three hired hands in 52 years. And this one Indian family has been with me for 29 years. *What about the others?* One of them was lost in the war, and the other one works for the highway

department. He didn't want to batch and moved his family to school. His name is Charlie Baker. He's off of 107 where it turns off this highway coming back. *Well, this Navajo family, what did they do about schooling for their children?* Sent 'em to Magdalena - most of 'em are gone. *Well, now I would like some information about that ranch, I don't know much about ranches and one of the questions that people ask is about life on a ranch? What about the roads?* Well, I'm on a state road - they take good care of it, but before I had TV it was pretty lonesome batchin'. You had all this static on the radio. We didn't have (arrays?) in those days. We had a Wincharger and batteries. Well, you'd go to bed about 8:30 and get up at 4, you know and do your own cookin' and wash dishes and everything. I tried that ten years. I moved to town about fifteen years ago and I bought this farm and my daughter was Fair Queen in '62 (52?). She went to high school here. She was (----) manager over at Wichita Falls. I got a grandson 14 and a granddaughter 13. She lives 85 miles from here - rides a school bus. *Now when you went out to the ranch, how long did it take you to get out there?* About an hour - 52 miles. *So you didn't come into town and go back the same day very much?* Lots of times I wouldn't get out there until sundown. *So you had to be sure you had enough food. Did you produce much of your food?* Just beef, we don't garden. Water is too scarce. *Yesterday we were talking about ranching and we got into well witching, have you had any---* I usually drill 'em where I want to, but there's nothin' to that. I got a 900-foot dry hole out there where they said I would hit water at 600 foot. It don't cost any more to witch it. We had a forked stick. *Did you ever see anybody witching with a Bible and a brass key/?* I never saw a preacher on the ranch. *Well, I don't know if you have to be a preacher. Well, when you first went out there you had all cattle, did you ever have any sheep?* No ma'am. You can't get anybody to herd 'em anymore. *Why not?* Most people won't work for that kind of wages and be out most of the time and be with 'em day and night. A lot of kids are running sheep now, but they are growing fences - all you got to do is keep the coyotes out, but now they won't let you put any cows and the sheep people are in trouble. *And you can't take care of the coyotes?* You can't buy poison. *Can you shoot them?* Oh yeah, you can shoot 'em - did you ever try to shoot one? *I haven't had much experience.* Well, first thing - I don't like to carry a rifle, but what's made the most wonderful difference to ranches is these plastic pipelines. I've got 20 sections out there with water in thousand foot hoses. Now we put a plastic pipeline in maybe 20 inches deep and put pressure on it, see, 90 pound pressure on it. *Where does it come from?* From headquarters. I got a submersible pump. I've got five or six good wells but that's for my pipeline. *How do you feel about that underground river that's supposed to be out west of Socorro? And that so many of these springs is supposed to come from it?* I don't know - I've seen dry years but I don't know where the water comes from. *People seem to think that there is an underground river from the northern part of the state that runs right down, and all these springs in here come from that.* I can't answer that. I took geology in school and I sure can't understand that. I have friends that have run 8 or 10 years. I've got a hydraulic ram. It's the only one I know in this country that pumps water 495 feet vertical. It runs with water - no oil - no grease - all you do is the water has to drop 30 foot. It spills about nine tenths of it on the ground. Of course that's where the water comes from. It works. *What are the changes in the ranches in the 50 years you've been out there?* Well, there used to be about 30 horses in the remuda. Now you keep five or six, you've got a 4-wheel drive jeep and you don't drive 'em all the

time like you used to. You take your pastures and rotate them. It's easy. Beef is high, but everything that goes with it is high. Where we used to pay \$20 for salt, now we pay 60. Meal, we used to pay \$20 to \$40, now we pay 50 to 160. Everything's high. Wages is ten times as high as it used to be. You gotta know what you're doin'. *Did you keep cowboys with your cattle? - was they always free on the range?* Well, we had it divided between our neighbors - we called it a (strayler). When the neighbor worked, the other man went over and worked with him and you'd cut yours out and go home. There's a little mountain town called Dusty - you'd do that. You see, part of my land is in the forest, and where we used to run 7,000 head of cattle, now we run 700. The Forest Service kept cuttin' our permits down. Now they want to make a Wilderness Area out of the top of it. In case the wind quits blowin' we can't put a pump jack on it and pump it - theydon't want anything that's run with gasoline. They call it wind power. All the boys out there went to college and all they know is what they read in a book - they don't have any experience. *Well, now your pastures are all fenced?* Yeah. *And what kind of hay do you have?* Hay is gramma grass mostly - natural. Here's no water. You can go four or five months and don't get a sprinkle. *Well, what do you do during that 4 or 5 months, is there no hay for them?* Well, you put out something like to feed them like protein blocks - they're 37% protein and then they don't have to walk so far. But the higher you breed 'em - the cattle - the shorter distance they'll walk. You take the old Brahma (Bramer) cattle and Chihuahuas, they'd walk like three or four miles. You get a Hereford or something and breed them up real high they won't go that far. I mean I put Hereford cattle in -- pink eye. *What kind of cattle do you have now?* Well, I've got mostly Black Angus. And I've had one case of pink eye in four years. *Well, children have pink eye. Why would Black Angus not have it and Herefords would?* It's the sun hittin' on those white eyelids, you know. I never saw a horse with black around his eye that had pink eye. Do colored people have it. *I've never heard of it.* Another thing on Angus - you don't have (---) on 'em - natural immunity. *You know, I just cme up from Mexico and it seemed like they had more Brahma down there.* Bramers? - well they'll get out and range. But I don't think they get as fat. *They eat a lot of pork down there, but it is not nearly as good.* The pipeline is the salvation for ranchers. *And shipping is very different, isn't it?* Oh sure, they haul 'em in now. *The first time I was at Datil I guess it was Marty Friedman showed me they still have this runway at the ranch.* Oh they used to have a stock driveway out there. It was two or three sections wide. They take 'em to the ranch now, they don't drive 'em any more. But during the war you had to take 'em by truck or something - you didn't have enough money - it's quite a chore. *The old cattle drive is no more, just in the picture show.* Th chiefest thing on the ranch is buyin' good bulls. Usually you keep 'em three or four years and you get a third out of 'em what you paid for 'em. *Where do you get your bulls?* Lately I've been buyin' them at Vaughn. I figure if they can make it in that country, they can go anywhere. Yej, thy're there on the east side. *Hey have winters there.* You betcha. *Is there much change in feeding?* I think they feed more than they used to. But it used to be the price - they wasn't worth feeding. You'd lose lots of 'em and you'd run after one and then they'd run at you and fall down. And the other thing now, they haul the kids to school and it used to they didn't haul 'em. That's the reason I had to move to town and my wiferented an apartment. She'd come home Friday night and go back Monday morning or Sunday. The we got an REA loan which is cheap and went to pumping a well by electricty with a submersible pump - electric motor

in the bottom - we used to have an old gasoline pump jack and you got TV - oh it's a lot different. Better roads they grade 'em, there wasn't no such thing as grading thirty years ago. *In case of accident or emergency would come up, the airports would always come in with a helicopter.* I guess they could - we never had one. We used to have telephones when they put REA in. We had Forest Service lines but when they put REA in that was put out of business. Of course, I couldn't talk out there anyway. I can't talk Navajo. *You don't stay out there?* Sometimes - say we're shipping or branding, but I've got a bigger home out there than I've got here. *I wanted to ask you about branding - that's one of the old traditions. You know, stealing brands and all sorts of things.* It's a lot different from it used to be. If you got lots of help you'd rope 'em and hold 'em down - one on his hind leg and the other on his back. But now we use (tables?). We run 'em in the chute and catch his neck - with a heat iron and butane you can run one a minute. *I saw on cable news about branding with colored ink. The humane society though that branding with a hot iron was not ---* Well, how did they shed the hair? *I don't know - they didn't go into that - with colored ink.* Well, you'd run 'em in together and then they'd blur - a little white on this one and a little white on that one. It wasn't a success - they tried that ten or fifteen years ago. You earmark 'em and if he's got two full ears you figure he's not branded so you go get him. A lot of people in the old days went to what they called sleepin' - they'd go up and earmark him and not brand him and they'd take him until he was big enough to wean and then brand him. That's what you call sleepin' 'em. *Was there much of that done?* Well there was some of it. *They kinda used to hang. Most of my information is from motion pictures - They'd hang them.* No, they don't hang 'em anymore. *Well, you've been in Socorro so long, someone was talking about Hangman's Street or Hangman's Alley here in Socorro, do you know anything about that?* No, I remember when I first came here they hung someone down in the old park where there used to be the Park Hotel. That was before my day, but about the time I came here, Magdalena was pretty rough. There was quite a few killin's along about '15, '16, '17, '18. Somebody was telling me about the last elections --*You remember the flagpole in Magdalena? There were three dead bodies around the flagpole.* I don't remember that. That was before my time. Oh, we didn't go to Magdalena much until '21. Of course they had a Harvey House in Socorro, and when there was dancin' we'd go to San Marcial. It's a better town, and the old city marshall still lives there - Walter Dow. *I bet he would have some stories to tell.* You betcha he can. *Well, let's go back to the ranch. Do you use any cowboys on horses now?* No, ma'am, just when we brand or shipping. We have to pack some salt out where we can't get to it with a jeep. We don't put our salt where our water is - you have to separate 'em. You can move your cattle with your feed - put 13 blocks out and if they're not feeding well put 13 blocks and that'll move your cattle. We keep two horses up all the time - we keep a trailer. If he have to a ways off, we put the horses in the trailer and we save riding that way. *But you go as far as you can on your feet?* Sure - of course this time of year everybody has ice up there. We haven't had much of it lately. Here about ten days ago it was about half an inch thick. We break the ice just every other day. *How cold is it out there?* Well, the mountains make a circle and my ranch is in a hole. We consider fifteen or twenty above cold. We used to have to drive cattle to Magdalena and maybe you couldn't get on the scale - there might be 2,000 head ahead of you, see? They'd stand there and shrink, especially calves - they'd bawl. I earmark my steer calf and my heifer calf and I separate 'em, I can cut the whole herd in

an hour and a half. *After you sell 'em how many do you have left on the ranch before you start again?* Well, you cull your cows every year. When I buy a bull I put the year he was a calf on his head because I don't want to keep them over six years, see. Angus are a little harder to cull than Herefords. They all look alike. And Angus, you'll think the calf will suck his mother, but that's not true. He'll suck any one in stock. You get a Hereford out to one side and pretty soon he'll go back in and look for his mama. But Angus will outwear Herefords. *How is the meat?* Well, I can't tell any difference. Well, you take twenty years ago - you sell your cattle and you had to beat the check to the bank because a lot of 'em bounced. He check wasn't no good and the cattle are already gone. That hurt a lot of people in this country years ago. *Was there anything you could do about it?* No, the state it was trouble - a lot of them never got their money. *Now, where do your buyers come from?* Oh, they come from everywhere, but I sell a lot of mine locally. Buddy Majors - well he knows my cattle and he don't try to cheat me and I don't try to cheat him. And our word is good to each other. He'll get 'em sold - 2,000 or so, he'll go around and get 'em. You need about two or three buyers in the country to get competition - you'll get more money for 'em. You just take one, thought, he'll cheat you blind. *You don't have bouncing checks anymore?* No, Buddy's check is on a Socorro bank. See, both of us is directors on the board down there - it makes a good deal. I went with a settler to Kansas City on the train and stalk 'em to get a cashier's check - I done that more than once. *What are the big changes you see in Socorro? What about the politics?* Well, I'm a Democrat, but there's rotten ones on both sides. And half of 'em has got their hand out - and they don't pay enough. I don't vote a straight ticket and sometimes I don't vote for either one of 'em. But Socorro's a lot better town than it was twenty years ago - they got oiled streets - better sidewalks. I can remember when we didn't even have sidewalks. Anything goes on in my yard - that's my wife - I don't cut the grass or nuthin'. *Somebody told me -down in the Magdalena area, they had the bullfight, do ou know anything about that?* They had one in Socorro, but it wasn't really a bullfight. They had sticks like broom handles. Just a sham. ---The rodeo, it used be up there where Sedillo Park is now. *Were you ever a rodeo performer?* No, no. *You were just a straight rancher?* And racehorses. My father had them up until two years before his death. He sold his ranch and race horses. *Well, I think the exception is to turn it loose like you did.* Well, there ain't no use having race horses if you can't watch 'em run. If you don't watch that ranch it's not going to make any money. I go out to the ranch - I don't have anything to do out there except to see if they did everything I told them. *Well, that's the important thing - to see that it is done.* I can see the tire tracks, I can tell you whether they were driving today or yesterday. *Well, if you've only had three hired hands, they must have known you and you must have known them.* I never asked a man to do anything wrong. *What about this Navajo family, do they speak English?* Yes ma'am. The old ones can't read and write. You just got to treat them like they're your kids. Now if they get drunk and get in jail or something, I don't get 'em out. I let 'em set in jail thirty days. They're good people in my books. I wouldn't trade 'em for anybody. *Well, the very fact that they've been with you for twenty nine years* And they won't tell nobody nuthin' - if anybody asks 'em what I got in the pasture out there, they say you go ask Paul. Those Rangers - they like to ask this and that. They don't get very much out of those Indians. They never say a word unless you ask 'em something. There not like us. When you ask a question we answer real quick. The Indian is like a union man - he'll count to fifty before answering you.

Contrary o many opinions I think I'ts the sense of humor of the Indians that's uppermost. Much more than you think they are, and they can do more with less than anybody. Like building fences - you just show them the corner and they'll get it straight. They don't need no transit or nuthin'. The food stamps and everything has ruined most of them. Well, I sure could talk about food stamps. Well, let's go back to the Fair Board. I'm interested in the Fair Board I'm interested in what you said about it being self supporting. The State has never put a quarter in that. We've got everything off of what we made. The race horses last year made \$282,000 - that was clear. If you put it in the State and let the politicians get their hands on it and use for a building or something they're going to tell you who can have the contract and that's no good - you put it out for bids. I'm not satisfied with the Spanish Village last year the way they let that operate. We turned it over to them and let them run it themselves - there's going to have to be some changes made there. Do you speak Spanish? Huh-uh. When you were in school did they make you take Spanish? I don't remember. When I was a kid I could talk as good as they could but I forgot most all of it. Well, there was someone yesterday aaid they taught half a day in Spanish and that was good and everybody could speak Spanish and everybody could speak English. I don't remember that. You shouldn't think these kids didn't have an education because they went to school - all of them. I can't keep my Indians in school. I've had 'em go off - before they had the dormitory I'd haul them to Albuquerque - Christmas and Thanksgiving and everything. I've had 20,000 miles on my (---) - I guess I had eight or nine kids. Now they'd get mad and walk all the way from Albuquerque to Alamo. They've got this dormitory now - we got one girl now - she's about a year with her mother up there. Her sister came and got her and took her to Arkansas now . Thye don't do much business in the dormitory there. Well, it looked like a good idea on paper, but it never has worked. Now when Booker T. Washington started his school which is now at Tuskegee, said, "Education is what teaches you to live better when you have to live anyway." So he made 'em better farmer, better hired hands, and I know when I was a child growin' up in Alabama we'd always pay twice as much for a Tuskegee laundry as others and yet they grew out of that, but it was raising the standard of living little by little. Like I told you, my Indians can't read or write now. I think vocational school's the place to put these Indians. Indeed, it is. Some of 'em makes six or seven dollars an hour. There are a lot of Ph. D.s out there that can't get a job. I'm kind of an old foggy, but I say what I think. My father had four years of education in his life - that was four months in the year - then went to school in the coal mines and that was about four months in the year, and each one handed his books down to his younger sister - all the same books, but in writing letters you couldn't beat him. He'd write it down just like it sounds. He was a pretty fine old fellow. But his hair was short. You betcha. My grandson come to see him - I guarantee he was in a barbershop before he was in diapers. How old is he? Thirteen. I went to a big wedding last Saturday and my daughter got the bouquet. She'll probably never know more that she does right now at thirteen. She's not old enough to know what she doesn't know. There wasn't nothin' to get in trouble with when I was thirteen. Nobody had a car then. Once I got on the train with my dad - this old Walter Darr I was tellin' you about - his father-in law ran the Ford Garage in San Marcial. It took all day to go from Magdalene to San Marcial. That Magdala's quite a town. Magdalena used to be a good town. If you want to talk to anyone up there you better take 'em with you. You won't find anybody there to talk to you. That's the truth.

Have you ever been up there? *Oh, yes. How long hve you been in Socorro? Since the fall of '68. I've learned more from these interviews about Socorro than anything else. I know more about the history fifty years ago than I know about today. Do you know Mrs. Ferguson? She was the nurse when my (--) was born thirty seven years ago. She's a fine old lady. I interviewed her this week. She talked about - she went over there temporarily f or ten or eleven years at the old hospital. You know, down in Mexico I have a good friend who calls his wife Vieja and I was a little like this about it and he said "old woman" is not considered very nice but Vieja is all right.*

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