

**NEW MEXICO
FARM & RANCH
HERITAGE
MUSEUM**

**ORAL HISTORY PROGRAM
INTERVIEW ABSTRACT**

CONSULTANT: David G. McDonald

DATE OF BIRTH: January 15, 1932 GENDER: Male

DATE(S) OF INTERVIEW: June 4, 1997

LOCATION OF INTERVIEW: McDonald residence

INTERVIEWER: Jane O'Cain and Beth Morgan

SOURCE OF INTERVIEW: NMF&RHM X OTHER Geo-Marine, Inc.

TRANSCRIBED: Yes: June 4, 1998

NUMBER OF TAPES: Three

ABTRACTOR: Beth Morgan

DATE ABSTRACTED: May 18, 2001

QUALITY OF RECORDING (SPECIFY): Good

SCOPE AND CONTENT NOTE: The McDonald Brothers Ranch, along with the other McDonald family ranches, was leased by the Army in 1942, for use by Alamogordo Bombing Range (a predecessor of the missile range). These ranches and others were eventually taken for permanent use by WSMR. The consultant's father's struggle to keep his ranch—including an armed, 1982 reoccupation of it—or to receive adequate compensation and the emotional fallout from their losses are described.

DATE RANGE: 1830-1993

ABSTRACT (IMPORTANT TOPICS IN ORDER OF APPEARANCE):

TAPE ONE, SIDE A:

The consultant's parents, Dave McDonald and Mertes Townsend, met while both families were working on the Bursum Ranch at the northern end of present-day White Sands Missile Range (WSMR). They had three children, and among them, the consultant.

His great-grandfather Mike McDonald and his family (including Tom McDonald and siblings) first in the La Luz, N.M., area and probably homesteaded in the Mockingbird Gap area in the late 1870s or '80s. Tom McDonald eventually owned three ranches in the WSMR area. His son, Dave McDonald, was born in 1901 in Tularosa and attended school in Oscura.

Mike McDonald came to La Luz by wagon train from Texas but had come to the U.S. on a boat from Ireland as a stowaway around 1830. (Note: as stated later in the transcript, based on Mike McDonald's birthdate, he may actually have come to the U.S. at a later date). Mike and his wife had 22-23 children, 11-12 who survived, several of them having died in a fire on the Pecos River during the family's move from Texas. Tularosa became home base.

Mike was born in 1826, and his wife, Mary Ann Carter, was born in 1848. Their first child was born in 1865. Mike died in 1928 at age 102. His great-grandson, the consultant, was born four years later.

After Tom McDonald homesteaded in the Mockingbird Gap area, he acquired two more ranches to the south. He ran 5,000 head of cattle at one point, and when his ranches were leased in 1942, he moved 1,600 head off the ranch. Tom and his wife (née Jane Butler) had eight children over a period from 1890 to 1906. He raised Brahmas, Herefords, and hogs.

The Civilian Conservation Corps (CCC) worked in the area, in part, on his ranch.

The ranch headquarters had a bunkhouse, but the family lived in a dugout. A board-and-batten ranch house was built later. Water was good but had to be carried to the house.

TAPE ONE, SIDE B:

Grandmother Jane McDonald usually went to town when her babies were due.

Jane and Tom's children attended school in Oscura, about 35 miles from the ranch.

All of the children either worked on or owned their own ranches before 1942.

The children worked hard, sometimes staying alone in remote locations. Cowboys were hired during roundup.

Oscura, San Antonio, and Engle railheads were locations from which the various McDonald ranches shipped cattle. An 80-mile cattle drive to Engle is discussed.

Impact of the Taylor Grazing Act is explored. The drought of the early 1930s, which was of such magnitude that the government paid ranchers a dollar a head for the privilege of putting their cattle to death, may have fostered more stringent enforcement of the Taylor Grazing Act.

The ratio of patented land to leased land is mentioned.

Grandparent's dispositions are discussed.

Acquisition of the various McDonald children's ranches and their locations in relation to each other are described.

The New Mexico practice of valuing ranches based on patented land and related grazing leases was not honored by the government.

In the early 1940s, Rube McDonald sold his interest in the McDonald Brothers Ranch to Dave and Ross. Their arrangements for the business and housing are explored.

TAPE TWO, SIDE A:

Ranch improvements, especially dirt tanks to catch runoff for cattle, are noted. Cattle feed—grasses, etc.—available on the range is noted.

Ranch boundaries and their relation to other area ranches is provided. The brothers' fencing of pastures for rotation is explained; additional wells, water tanks, and ranch buildings are listed.

The brothers raised Herefords and had good bulls, though management differed. They raised horses for breaking and riding.

Cowboys were hired only for roundup and branding; "swap-out work" between neighbors was common. Ranchers they helped and who helped them are identified.

The consultant tells the story of his first saddle, a much-anticipated Christmas gift.

Moving off the ranch is described: cattle was driven to pasture or trucked out for selling. Much ranch equipment was left behind. The McDonalds didn't know the Army wanted the ranch until someone came out to look around. News that the ranches might be taken for the bombing range arrived by mail. The ranchers were shocked and learned that they would not have funds to allow them to start over elsewhere.

How compensation was determined is unknown and perhaps, arbitrary. Political influence, bribery, and better legal representation may have helped some ranchers. Dave McDonald, Sr., and brother Ross went to court and got the compensation raised, but not enough.

Four McDonald ranches were taken: Tom's, George's, Emma's, and the two brothers'. After George bought the Seven X farther north, part of it was taken. The aftermath of the taking is discussed. The Army renewed the leases until the 1970s, when ranchers learned that they would be kept for use by WSMR, and their purchase would be based only on the patented land. Lawsuits followed. Ranchers had to vacate their ranches quickly; those ranches of those who refused government offers were condemned, and the owners still had to leave within the allotted time.

TAPE TWO, SIDE B:

Ranchers understood the need for use of their land during wartime, but they feared losing their livelihood; compensation was too low to allow them to start over elsewhere. Cattle prices

dropped. The families did not receive funds for lodging or food during the move but funds for restoration were offered when the ranchers were allowed to go back, and during a co-use in the 1950s.

While Dave McDonald still had to vacate by the deadline, some who accepted the Army's offer may have left sooner; some left later—all were scrambling. Ranchers left equipment behind, believing it would be there when they returned, but things were stolen by locals or allowed to deteriorate.

Co-use lasted two years, although ranchers in the extension area had permanent co-use.

The taking was in constant court battles from its beginning, and in the '70s, the government announced the ranches would not be returned. Even after his father's 1982 standoff, nothing was done. Dave McDonald and his niece, Mary, had staged a widely reported armed reoccupation of the ranch to call attention to the ranchers' plight. Government officials promised to do something for the ranchers.

Fulwyler was commanding general of WSMR during the taking of the lands and McDonald's reoccupation.

Lawyers were hired to represent the ranchers in the Court of Claims, but nothing happened.

Fulwyler told McDonald that if he returned to the missile range, he'd be arrested. He refused an invitation from Fulwyler but later returned with the consultant.

The McDonalds got only about \$60,000 for their patented land. Later, the McDonald ranch was appraised at \$1.6 million. [Historically, grazing leases on ranches in New Mexico are considered ranch assets.] Ranchers whose land was taken for McGregor Range were treated differently. Consultant believes the government did not originally intend to keep the WSMR ranches.

The ranchers were devastated by the taking of the ranches—they lost trust in the government and children and siblings in the war, in addition to their homes. The consultant's father believed concerns over inadequate compensation would die with the ranchers. The taking affected people both physically and emotionally and may have caused early deaths. It affected the consultant's and his sister's quality of life as children.

TAPE THREE, SIDE A:

The consultant's children's relationship to their grandfather also was affected by the taking of the ranch. His mother simply bore it.

Consultant discusses the belief that something should be done for the ranchers. Personal pleas to Congressmen Domenici and Skeen did not help. Few ranchers are left to fight; their children don't have the motivation or knowledge to pursue it. Meetings with lawmakers and lawsuits have been unsuccessful. Many ranchers could not afford to pursue it.

Dave McDonald paid out considerable legal fees but had resources and was frugal, thus, financially reasonably comfortable.

There were a few mines in the area of the ranches; Rube McDonald passed his on to his daughter, Mary, who was trying to get compensation for her mining interest, as well as helping the ranchers

in seeking additional compensation. Whether mineral rights for their land belonged to the ranchers, as did water rights, is unknown.

TAPE THREE, SIDE B: Blank