

9-24-2008

Interview no. 1592

Marion Haynes

Follow this and additional works at: <https://scholarworks.utep.edu/interviews>



Part of the [Labor History Commons](#), and the [Oral History Commons](#)

Recommended Citation

Interview with Marion Haynes by Brady Banta, 2008, "Interview no. 1592," Institute of Oral History, University of Texas at El Paso.

This Article is brought to you for free and open access by the Institute of Oral History at ScholarWorks@UTEP. It has been accepted for inclusion in Combined Interviews by an authorized administrator of ScholarWorks@UTEP. For more information, please contact lweber@utep.edu.



THE UNIVERSITY OF TEXAS AT EL PASO INSTITUTE OF ORAL HISTORY

Interviewee: Marion Haynes

Interviewer: Brady Banta

Project: Bracero Oral History Project

Location: Blytheville, Arkansas

Date of Interview: September 24, 2008

Terms of Use: Unrestricted

Transcript No: 1592

Transcriber: _____

Discusses interaction with Mexican laborers. The Mexican Barracks on the Stallings farm and the 'frame time'. Activities of the laborers.

Length of Interview 15 minutes

Length of Transcript 6 pages

Name of Interviewee: Marion Haynes
Date of Interview: September 24, 2008
Name of Interviewer: Brandy Banta

All right. Got this started. It is Wednesday, September 24, 2008. We're at the – in Blytheville, Arkansas. This is Brady Banta, and I am conducting an interview with Marion Haynes. Mr. Haynes, before we get started, I wanna make sure that you are aware that I am tape recording this interview, and that I have your permission, your consent, to tape record the interview.

MH: Yes, Sir. You do.

BB: All right. As a way of getting started, if you would, would you just tell me a little bit about your background, who you are, when you were born, where you born, what your education and work background is, so we have an idea of who you are.

MH: Okay. Well, I was born in Blytheville, Arkansas, October 13, 1949. But I lived – my family lived in a little town north of Blytheville called Yarbrough. We lived on a cotton, soybean farm. My dad started farming up there with my grandfather. He originally started farming with mules at the turn of the last – late past – turn of the last century. And I went to school to Blytheville High School, and went to several colleges. And now I've worked for – well, I was a cotton farmer until about 1995. And, of course, I had a college background, but I got interested in archeology because that was the stimulus that I would see on the farm, was the artifacts and things in the fields.

And so I got interested in archeology, and I started working – holding off with Arkansas Archeological Survey, basically, first as a volunteer. And then when the job came up here, as an archeological assistant at the Blytheville Research Station, I was able to obtain it. And now I've been working for them ever since.

BB: Okay. And growing up on this cotton farm, did your father employ Mexican migrant labor?

MH: Well, my father, he didn't bring or contract any to be brought up. That was, basically because of my uncle, the gentlemen's son you will talk to here in a little while, Don Stallings. He was, basically, the person that I understand – of course, I was a young man – a young boy, I didn't really know what was the interactions. But my dad contracted whatever through my uncle to have some of the

laborers brought out to our field to chop cotton, I remember. And they also picked cotton. Of course, the mechanical cotton picker had just basically gotten a foothold in here. And that was the way we ended up interacting, the way I understand it. Don may be able to tell you more later about that.

BB: Okay. Did you actually observe the Braceros working in the fields?

MH: Yes, I did. I watched them – well, of course that's been a long time ago. But I know I saw them working. I know they picked cotton, and they were here in the Spring, evidently, to chop cotton – of course, we call it chopping, it just means hoeing cotton, or weeding it. They were very, very hard workers. And there was not a one of them that slacked off or anything. I mean, they had a work ethic that, evidently, came with them, of course. And, as a matter of fact, to pick 400 pounds of cotton was, especially at that time when the cotton wasn't this – not hybridized cotton we've got now that's really growing wild and tall and great – back-breaking labor.

My dad, I remember him saying that one of them had actually picked, I think, 450 pounds in a day, and that was like 100 pounds over what a normal person – or person, people we were used to picking cotton. So that made me turn my head, and go, "Whoa. These guys are really here to get ahead, to work." And also, I remember, in the spring, a story – I don't know if I was exactly involved with this. But we had rented some land off the natural levies here, back in the back swamp, and it was the first time we really came heavily in contact with a weed called the Cocklebur.

And they took a group of the people down there – men down there – to chop cotton. And they had never seen it, evidently, or had never experienced chopping cotton, even though they were from probably Northern Mexico and Southern Texas. The cockleburs had come up about as thick as the cotton did. And they got out of the truck, and everybody got them a row, and started chopping. They were chopping down the cotton, initially, and were leaving the cockleburs. Now that's embarrassing to say, as a farmer, that you let things get in that kind of shape, but anyway. Of course, my dad, or whoever was there, stopped them.

And, without being able to – I don't know if he had an interpreter there with him or not, but he got them straightened out. And once he put them on that the cotton stood, and the cockleburs fell, they

went on, no problem after that. And that's basically what I remember about the field experiences with them.

BB: Do you have any firsthand memory of what their living accommodations were?

MH: Well, Don could tell you a whole lot more about that because his dad, within a mile of his house – they're near the **Reese** Community, or Clear Lake, Southeast of Blytheville – they had the barracks, they called them. The Mexican Barracks is what they were called. And they were long wooden sheds. I can vaguely remember them. Built kind of long shotgun houses, probably with a hallway down the middle. I don't know that I was ever in them. But they were tin-roofed. And, if I remember right, there was only one shade tree there. It was kind of just placed out in the middle of a cotton field on a gravel road.

Like I say, that's who we got the labor from, was my uncle. And he's the one that had the barracks, so Don will be able to tell you more about that.

BB: Okay. And when they came to the fields to work, what would they bring with them for their noon meal?

MH: Well, I remember them coming to our house there at Yarborough. And the thing was, they were in these open trucks, what we called them farm bob-trucks. I can't remember if they were double axel, or single axel, and I remember their cowboy-ish looking hats, straw hats, and that was something you didn't see a lot around here. And it was amazing me that they rode up from down that far – and actually, if you'll think about that, that was on two-lane roads at that time, not the interstate – in the open trucks. And these trucks were not your normal Arkansas soybean truck, they were decorated somewhat. They were fancied up, as I recall it.

And then they came to our house, unloaded off the truck, and they put their meals on a shelf in one of our sheds there. And I remember them being in brown paper bags, and seeing the grease or oil soaking into the bag, which is not necessarily a bad thing because it kind of looked pretty good to me. But one of our dogs actually pulled one of them down. Of course, we stopped her. But she had already torn into one, and it was a – first time, I guess, I had seen either a burrito or whatever it was, but it looked like it was soft, flour tortilla type, with a white bean paste in it, and they smelled wonderful. And, of course, we never – I didn't get to sample any of them.

But I do remember talking to some of the guys the best I could, just with visuals, cues and things. But, no, I never got to eat any of it, but they really smelled good, they looked good, and I guess it was – except for eating canned hot tamales, and things, that was my first experience with any Mexican food. There were no Mexican restaurants here at that time.

BB: Roughly, what time of year was it when these people arrived?

MH: That I don't really remember because we only had limited interaction with them. Of course, you knew they were here – oh, something just came to me about food. They would always trade at Safeway stores. Now I don't know why that was. I asked my mom. I said, "You didn't see them at Kroger, you didn't see him at –" we have a local store called [Hayes](#). I think they were here then. But they would go to Safeway. And she said it was – she had heard it was because the Safeway store chain was in the Southwest, too, and they knew it, and they would trust it, and they would go there. But that's just something just came back to me.

They would trade and you would see the trucks parked at the Safeway store down next to the courthouse here in Blytheville. That's basically all I remember about that.

BB: Do you have memories of going to Blytheville on Saturday and the Mexican laborers coming to town at the same time?

MH: I remember seeing them in town. But of course, again, we didn't react, interact with them very much in town. And I really don't know what was there to entertain them because I imagine all the movie theaters were in English. There were three in town at that time. And I remember seeing them in town, but it was just a passing thing with us. We knew they were going back. Of course, they didn't bring any of their children or wives with them, so it was just the men. And that limited you kind of on the interacting with them, being an 11, 12-year-old boy. At least I think I was 11 or 12. It might have been a little earlier than that. It might have been in the late 50s they were here.

Of course, Don could tell you more about that. No, I don't remember a whole lot about them. I remember seeing them in town, and knowing that that's what they were here for, was to – for labor.

BB: Do you have any memories of any difficulties between the Mexican laborers and the local residents?

MH: Of course, I didn't live in Blytheville. I was protected out at Yarborough. But the thing is I do not remember any stories in the paper or anything of troubles between any of the groups of people that lived here. I think they were fairly well behaved. And the people here understood that they were here for labor. And maybe the people that were resentful of it didn't really say much about it. I do remember stories. At least a couple of times I heard that there had a couple of murders out at the barracks. And it was them on their selves. They had gotten drunk, probably the only entertainment they had, and gotten in gambling fights and things. And I think it was stabbings.

BB: But that wasn't anything that would have been particular to the Mexicans. Any other group of laborers might have done the same things.

MH: No. You take any other group of 100 men, and stick them out somewhere, and give them some alcohol, and give them some dice, and I think that's what you're gonna get. And, basically, if they're 1,000 miles away from home, or whatever – no, it's not particular to them. But I remember that happening. But nobody worried. I didn't worry about it. I didn't hear anybody worrying about them coming through, or bothering anything, or anything. We weren't worried about them.

BB: You weren't worried about the situation?

MH: No, no, no.

BB: Okay. To the best of your recollection, what was approximately the last year that they were here in sizeable number?

MH: I can't really remember the day because I had my mind on other things, but it seemed like the late 50s is when it tapered off. Then I'd heard something about some laws, or something had been changed. And it either – hadn't just petered out on its own, it just got stopped. I'm not sure whether that was true or not.

BB: Okay. Any other vivid memories that come to mind, experiences in having these people here?

MH: Well, the only thing I – it's not vivid, but I remember people saying that it was remarkable that one of the first things the men,

especially the most responsible ones of them – and I think they were all pretty responsible – they would try to buy a foot pedal, of course, at that time, Singer brand sewing machine. The way I understood it, I don't know if they took them back on the truck with them, or they boxed them, boxed it up, and paid to have them shipped home. That was one of the big items they wanted. And the only thing we could figure out is if they sent the money home, they were afraid that it might not get used for the right thing.

Or they wanted these machines to go home so the women could start a cottage industries, and make a little bit of money doing seamstress work, and such. But that's – like I say, I only had a limited experience with them. But I do remember people remarking – everybody's gotta always watch everybody else's behavior. And we watched what they bought, like going to Safeway, buying the Singer sewing machine. And other than that, they would just pretty well fit in. They were no bother to most of us, that I knew of.

BB: All right.

[End of Audio]

Duration: 15 minutes