HANDOUT

Title: Sugar Beet Oral History of William Miller 1988

Handout #: 16e

Content:

Excerpt from 1988 oral history: William Miller, Superintedent of Hondo Ranch

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Johnston: Well, was she a good cook?

Miller: Oh, she was a woman from Texas and she was a dandy. She always made biscuits for breakfast, and I still remember those biscuits. She never served breakfast without biscuits. Her meals were wonderful.

Johnston: She had to get up every morning and make the biscuits; I mean, they didn't have Bisquick or frozen biscuits, of course.

Miller: Right. A very good woman, a very wonderful woman.

Johnston: Let's see now - I led you astray. We were with the blacksmith and got his name. We were talking about wages - three dollars a day for the workers. Oh, I wanted to know, were they Anglos, Mexicans, Latinos - what different types of people worked? What different races?

Miller: Most of the fellows that worked on the ranch, that grew the cane, and later on tractors, were all white men. But they had a few Mexicans. They did have a camp and quite a few Mexicans lived in this camp. They were married and had families. Their work consisted mostly of just hoeing weeds and taking care of the crops, like piling the beans; before the beans were threshed they had to be put in piles. The Mexicans did all that.

Johnston: Did they get less than three dollars a day then?

Miller: No.

Johnston: They got three dollars a day?

Miller: Yes, three dollars for a 9-hour day.

Johnston: Ooh, nine hours! Hard work.

Miller: They'd come to work at 7 in the morning and quit at 5.

Johnston: Oh, that's a long time, isn't it? I have heard that there were Hindus in the beet fields. Did you ever see Hindus? Do you remember that?

Miller: Many. The first sugar beets that were planted, and for several years. it was all hand work. They had planters that planted them, but from the time that they came up the sugar beet had to be thinned out to where each beet was probably anywheres from 6 to 10 inches apart, so the beets were always

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