**Archaeology & History in Your Back Yard**

**Delbert Redfearn & a History of Mountainair’s Grocery Stores**

Hello Everyone! This is Archaeology and History in Your Back Yard and my name is Dixie. X 88.7 FM and the Torrance County Archaeological Society are pleased to bring you a series of programs designed to acquaint you, our listening audience with little known people, places and events that took place in the past, right here in your own back yard. For the most part, we will be covering interesting facts, stories and legends about the past, and people that lived right here in the Estancia Valley and surrounding areas in central New Mexico. Our goal is to inform, educate and possibly enlist your help in preserving and protecting our past.

Our show today will focus on Delbert Redfearn and a little history of grocery stores in Mountainair.

This program was written by Dixie Boyle and produced by Bill Simms. Thank you for joining us today.

In recent years, with the closing of grocery stores in many rural areas throughout New Mexico including Mountainair and Estancia, it is hard to imagine that there were fourteen grocery stores in Mountainair when Delbert Redfearn first moved there in the late 1930s.

It is surprising today that Mountainair would have been able to support that many grocery stores, but the town’s population was much larger and people traveled near a hundred miles in many cases to shop in Mountainair.

He would soon become an important grocery store owner in Mountainair, as well as the mayor and pillar of the community. He left behind an interesting account of his years in Mountainair.

He wrote, “I came to Mountainair in 1938-3. Well, call me stupid, but I came here to run a grocery store and there already were fourteen grocery stores in town. Before coming to Mountainair, I was a truck driver who hauled for a produce company.

Then my dad bought the store in Mountainair and asked me to run it. He said if I was worth $2.00 to my boss I was worth $5.00 to myself. I said, “Are you crazy?” but he offered me $100 a month, a place to live and groceries. People now would laugh but those were big wages in ’38 and ’39. My wages as a truck driver were $18.00 a week.

So my wife Vera and I moved to Mountainair to run a grocery store. I ran it two months for dad. He asked if we were making money. I said, “Don’t have any idea!” He said he would like to sell it to me and I bought it.

Redfearn explains how 99% of their business was on charge accounts. People ran accounts from spring to fall and then from fall to spring. The majority of his customers were bean farmers. They would pay their bills and then got their feed and seed loans for another year. There was no interest on these loans, and the wholesale grocery houses in those days backed the stores.

Redfearn wrote, “So much Staley’s corn syrup was bought that it was shipped in by the carload on a train. All the store people would go down and take what they ordered off the train car. They called these drop shipments. We got coffee, salt and sugar like that too. My flour came in by truck from Monte Vista, Colorado. We were selling grape jelly in ½ gallon pails for 35 cents. It came in a dark blue pail with a colored stripe around. I sold a carton of matches for 16 cents. I can’t believe we ever sold anything for those low prices.”

According to Redfearn the reason there were so many stores in town was that there was a huge trading territory. It stretched from Corona to Vaughn, south to Bingham, Claunch, Gran Quivira, Torreon, Abo and Scholle, down south on the road between Bingham and Socorro—all bean growers.

Redfearn wrote about the atmosphere of Mountainair during these years, “We had a volunteer fire department. All the fellows in business were members of the fire department. If you served as a volunteer, it lowered your insurance. The fire department is where the city hall is now. Recreation and dances were held upstairs. We had a dance floor up there, a kitchen and a bedroom if someone needed to stay at the fire department.”

He explained that during the years he was mayor, he mainly took care of town business though the first sewer and gas systems were brought in during his term. The water system had been set up in the 1920s by a fellow named Perkins.

The Volunteer Fire Department sponsored many town activities in the 1930s and forties. Redfearn told how much fun the community members had. “The volunteers had doings all the time. About eighteen of us got together. Vera belonged to the Woman’s Club and the couples socialized through that and with the fire department group. Friday night there was always someplace to dance. About 4 am Sunday morning, 10 to 12 couples would go to somebody’s house for breakfast after dancing. There were lots of entertainers at the Bean Festivals and rodeos, usually two nights of dances. Glen Campbell played here a lot. I danced many a miles to Glen Campbell. He pretty much got his start in the Albuquerque area with his Uncle Dick Bill’s band.”

In the late forties and early fifties the beans stopped growing. We lost seven hundred families out of the trade territory.

Besides the store, my dad and I handled quite a few cattle and never gave that up.

People talk about the good old days. And we thought we had it pretty good then. Then ten years more would go by and we thought we had it a little better. I wouldn’t trade what we had today for what we had then Redfearn pointed out.

Redfearn has given us a peek into Mountainair’s past when pinto bean farms were located on every quarter section of land throughout Torrance County, and when the grocery stores in the county were vital businesses that helped to support the farmers.

This has been Archaeology and History in Your Back Yard, a series that will take you through our area’s history in future episodes.

The Torrance County Archaeological Society meets at 7 PM the first Tuesday of every month from March through November. We meet at the East Torrance Soil and Water Education Building at 700 S. 10th Street in Estancia. Please come and join us.

You can listen to Archaeology and History in Your Own Back yard Monday at 1 PM, Tuesday at 7 PM, Friday at 10 AM and Saturday at 4 PM. Thanks for listening!

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