

The University of Arizona College of Agriculture
and
The Arizona Historical Society Oral History Programs
Narrator: William E. Crone
Interviewer: Ray Weick
Transcriber: M. Susan Paul
March 19, 2000

Today is Sunday, March 19, 2000. I am at 1615 Seventh Avenue in Yuma, Arizona. This is Ray Weick and I am here for the purpose this morning of recording a bit of the history for the College of Agriculture's Oral History program. The interviewee this morning is William E. Crone, but we're going to use "Bill" because that's what he is known as much of the time. The purpose this morning is to try to pick up some information about an era that has not been included in any of the other oral history events. That is, what happened to students and some of the things before, leading up to World War II. I was Bill's neighbor in Yuma, Arizona for a number of years and I got bits and pieces of what happened to Bill, in this case. He was an example of people who got caught up in World War II. As we did these events, these histories, I thought this is a piece of the story that hasn't been told and that is our purpose here today.

Weick: Bill, I understand that it is your intent to give this recording and its typed transcript to the Arizona Historical Society for its records. Is that correct?

Crone: That is right, Ray.

Weick: Good. Bill tell us a little bit so we get a better picture of where you were born and some of your early history. I understand that Tucson is your birthplace.

Crone: Yes. I was born in Tucson at the Methodist Hospital.

Weick: Do you want to give us the year?

Crone: That year was 1916.

Weick: OK.

Crone: So that makes me eighty-three years old.

Weick: Well, you wouldn't know it Bill if you didn't confess it but — alright, you were born in Tucson. Where did you grow up? Give us a little background on that.

Crone: I grew up about forty miles south of Tucson there's a place called White House Canyon in the Santa Rita mountains. My grandfather, William R. Martin, and an uncle, Mike Hayhurst, went together and bought a cabin out there, which they remodeled it to where the family could have some place to go, most generally in the summertime. Through the school year we all went back to Tucson. That was probably, I would say, my permanent home or whatever you want to call it. There the closest buddies that I had were three miles away on the Charlie Procter ranch.

Weick: That buddy was who?

Crone: George Procter.

Weick: George Procter. I knew George Procter myself. I used to work with him some when I was working with Extension in Santa Cruz county.

Crone: George is quite a boy. You might say that the two of us are almost brothers.

I was always kind of included in the family and that's where I learned a little bit about ranching in southern Arizona.

Weick: When you were spending your summers down there with George, and who were some of the other fellows your age that you rode with and worked with down there, Bill?

Crone: Charlie Procter was one, he was the oldest brother. He was a little older than we were. I guess when we were about fourteen-fifteen, somewhere around in there, there was (today they would call them a "gang", course we weren't a gang at that time) myself, Charlie Procter, Warren Husted, Harold Box, all got together one day and we went horseback to Elephant Head saddle from the Procter ranch. It took us about two attempts to climb to the top.

Weick: You got off your horse and started climbing?

Crone: Yes, and first we went around on the side and we couldn't make it, we ran into a dead end. Then we came back and went right up the hog back and we all sat up there and the buzzards would come "whoosh!" right after us. (Weick chuckles) At that time we all wondered if we might have been the first white men up there on top of that because from what we could see the main trail coming out of Mexico right underneath Elephant Head and going into the Tucson presidio.

Weick: This would have been when you were about how old Bill?

Crone: I guess I was about fifteen, something like that.

Weick: So this would have been about 1930, something like that, 1930-31.

Crone: A little more than that, 1933.

Weick: You spent the summers down on the ranch and then you'd go back to Tucson and go to school...

Crone: I started school at Holiday, which is where I went to kindergarten.

Weick: I am not familiar with that name now.

Crone: No sir, that's where the old — Tucson senior high school is there now.

Weick: Ah, that was the Holiday school and you went to kindergarten there. Where the high school is today, is that right?

Crone: Yes. Somewhere there, I forget just when it was, they wanted to build a high school there where the Holiday school was. Across the street was the old Roskruge. We went over there after they tore down the old Holiday and started building the high school. Then I went through high school there and, I think it was 1935 or 1936 I went to college.

Weick: You started at the U of A (University of Arizona).

Crone: U of A.

Weick: That is some of the story we want to get to now. There weren't a lot of students at that time, I guess?

Crone: The University of Arizona was not very big at that time. I'm trying to say four thousand, but it was probably more than that. I guess I always wanted to be a cowboy but never could make it. That's why I went to into animal husbandry.

Weick: Let's cover who were some of your professors there when you went to school in about you figure 1936 with some names of the faculty.

Crone: Dr. Scott was department head. And then Stanley, and Bill Pistor. About 1937, maybe 1938, Warren Husted and I and Jim Anderson went to the Tucson fairgrounds at that time and ranchers were bringing some of their registered Herefords in there and the three of us were washing, drying, cleaning, taking care of them, halter-breaking them and all that. We did that two years in a row. Dr. Scott was our boss you might say at that time. Then, after that, Scott went someplace and we never went back.

Going back to the school, I'm trying to remember the year, George Procter and I participated in the first rodeo, the University of Arizona rodeo.

Weick: Is that right?

Crone: Yes.

Weick: What did you do then? Where did you get your stock?

Crone: The stock came from a ranch outside of Tucson, not too far out — came off the old Franco Ranch. George Procter and I, our horses were up at White House Canyon at his dad's ranch. So we went up there and got our horses, came back down and participated in the rodeo. In order to get the cattle back George and I had to have a Mexican who was kind of the keeper of the cattle, we took them down the old Nogales highway about ten miles and went through a gate. We opened up the gate and scattered the cattle.

Weick: So you drove them home?

Crone: We drove them home, right down the old Nogales highway.

Weick: That's the end of the rodeo when you got them home.

Crone: Then the next year Jim Armour and I participated and that was the end of it, as far as rodeo-going.

Weick: You know last night, Bill, I sat right across the table from Jim Armour's son, Tom. I didn't know that Jim had passed away. He was another one of these guys we should have got on interview.

Crone: Yes, we should have.

Weick: Well, let's go back to the rodeo a bit. That's always exciting, the first collegiate rodeo and you were there and some of you guys started it. Husted, Procter, Bill Crone, and some others I'm sure. Now you had what, bronc riding and roping both?

Crone: We had it all.

Weick: You had it all. You talked about going down to get your horses, you were in Tucson, how would you move your horses up? Did you have trailers then?

Crone: Well, we didn't have a trailer. I had an old 1930 Chevrolet and we just went down the highway and one would ride and lead the other so far and then we'd swap over...

Weick: So you rode your horses back up to the rodeo, how many miles would that have been?

Crone: I guess forty miles. Then after the rodeo was over and we delivered the cattle back to the Franco's ranch we did the same thing going back. Then when

we got all through we took the horses back up to the Procter ranch and we came back down in my old Chevrolet and George said, "Stop, I want to show you something." So we stopped and he said, "When we were bringing these cattle along here there is a coyote hole right there." It was in use, so we went over there and stomped it out and got three baby coyotes which he raised two of them and I raised one.

Weick: Is that right? Is that right?

Crone: That's right. I had it there in Tucson and ran it on the clothesline and ...

Weick: That was — where did you live then in Tucson? Euclid or did you move?

Crone: 728 East 9th Street. I kept it for about two years, I guess it was and it disappeared. I don't know whether someone came and took it or what. He never would get very domesticated. My grandfather was an old-timer and he always had a bunch of chickens and that coyote would hide down in the little holes that he dug until a chicken got within range and it was gone.

Weick: You weren't too popular with your grand-dad then? You and your coyote.

Crone: Well, he never had a son and I guess I was his son. My father, Joe Crone, died when I was two years old and me and my sister, Jo Beverly Crone, were raised by my grandparents.

Weick: Your father, I think you told me, influenza or what was it? An epidemic?

Crone: Yes. Yes, the flu epidemic of 1918. I lived life to the hilt, I guess you might call it. George and I were always roping and riding, doing something.

Weick: Was there a rodeo somewhere about every weekend in those days, too?

Within riding distance anyway?

Crone: Well, if we could find somebody's cattle to work, why we'd take care of that. Continental was where later I pastured my horses down there. I had, I don't know, three mares, a yearling, another one, and then I had my saddle horse. Just before the war, well, let's go back to school. I went to University of Arizona in 1940. In 1940 I received my ROTC commission. I could just ride anything the army had and there was a horse out there. We rode horses. One year our whole ROTC unit participated in the Tucson Rodeo.

Weick: ROTC and the Tucson Rodeo. That's different.

Crone: Yes. We had some movements, drills and we put on a little twenty-minute show and that was with the rodeo.

Weick: Your military unit was giving a presentation or show?

Crone: Yes.

Weick: You don't have that anymore either, do they?

Crone: No sir, they don't. — I was called for the service in September, 1941.

Weick: Now you were still in school?

Crone: Yes, I was still in school.

Weick: What was it like? What did you guys talk about? Here you all knew this military thing was heating up, now this was before Pearl Harbor...

Crone: Yes sir.

Weick: You guys kind of knew that this was coming? Did you feel it in the air?

Crone: Well, you could kind of feel it, you'd listen to the radio news and you'd wonder about it and then old Hitler got to stirring up Europe. Then was when we began to worry about it.

Weick: Yes. So you were activated before Pearl Harbor, September, 1941 they called you up, is that right?

Crone: After Pearl Harbor.

Weick: Oh, activated after Pearl Harbor.

Crone: Yes, we were called up.

Weick: Oh yes, I think you told me earlier that was January of 1942 or something like that. Was it?

Crone: February. I went to Fort Riley, Kansas and then I went to Fort Jackson, South Carolina to a National Guard force. It was kind of an elite society, but the officers that were taking in the replacements to build the unit up to war strength were polo players, society drinkers, and what not. Us boys from the West and the Mid-West were called "mavericks".

Weick: That was the nice name for you probably.

Crone: Yes. There was enough of the old mavericks that rubbed off on to them and some of their society polo-playing and what not rubbed off on the mavericks.

Weick: Well, that's what the war did a lot of, isn't it? Stirred things up, equalized things a lot?

Crone: It brought people from all walks of life and joined them into one unit for one purpose, which was to win the war, which was accomplished.

Weick: Were any of your old rodeo buddies, George Procter, or anybody with you yet or had they all scattered?

Crone: They had all scattered different ways.

Weick: Did they get all caught up in the war, too?

Crone: Oh yes, George Procter went to the Pacific, I went to Europe in February 1942 and I guess George made quite a name for himself in the Pacific. I think he came back with a, I don't remember what it was, but he went back to school and he finished his schooling and went into the Forest Service. Over the fifty or sixty years we have stayed in close contact.

Weick: I knew George when we used to work with people, ranchers, down in Santa Cruz county and he was still active when I was still working down there.

Crone: During my school years I hired out to the Southern Pacific Railroad in June 13, 1937 to help me along with my tuition...

Weick: What did you do with the Southern Pacific?

Crone: I was working in the clerk's department. First I was a warehouse check-clerk or whatever you want to call it, moving freight and unloading freight cars. Then there was an opening bid for a job in Yuma, Arizona...

Weick: You're back out of the army now?

Crone: Oh yes, I'm back out of the army. I moved from Tucson to Yuma in 1948 with a wife and a son.

Weick: Where did you meet Jacque?

Crone: I met Jacque at Continental.

Weick: You were down there yet?

Crone: Yes, now that was before the war — August of 1941.

Weick: Is that when you and your wife were married?

Crone: Yes.

Weick: Now how did Jacque get down there? I thought she was a Texan?

Crone: She was. Her family moved down there from Texas and her dad was the pump man for the Continental Ranch, it is all irrigated land. He was the pump man, pump supervisor, foreman, whatever you want to call it.

Weick: So you didn't spend all your time looking over the cattle, you spent some time looking over the fillies, too? Is that right?

Crone: Yes, yes. You do, but that's life I guess.

Weick: That's part of growing up. So you left Jacque home most of the time while you were off at the war, Africa, Europe and so on, is that right?

Crone: I did thirty-eight months in Europe during the war and she lived in Tucson. When I came home we had a place on Eighth Street, I cannot remember the house number. Then we moved to Yuma and, I don't know, I guess maybe I kind of got out of the animal business or thought, or something like that and just stayed with the railroad. At one time I was the agent, then they abolished the job and I bounced back to chief clerk and retired as a chief clerk after forty-two years with the Southern Pacific Railroad.

Weick: All in Yuma, Arizona?

Crone: All in Yuma, Arizona.

Weick: Well, Bill Crone, this has been an interesting morning here. I thank you a whole lot for sharing just with the people of the future (because that's what we're doing here today) is recording things for history that will become part of the record that people subsequently have had to live through some of the things you have had to live through or you and I both lived through. It will give them some insight. What we wanted to do today, and we've accomplished, I think, wanted to hear about what happened to people growing up in southern Arizona in the early days. That was a time when we called it the "Depression" didn't we?

Crone: Yes, we did.

Weick: Nobody had very much, but you all enjoyed life and...

Crone: A fellow asked me one time, he said, "Bill, you know, during those depression years we had Hoover strawberries every day."

Weick: What is Hoover strawberries?

Crone: Hoover strawberries were pinto beans!

Weick: Poor old Hoover, he got blamed for everything then, didn't he?

Crone: That he did! 1929, I guess, was his bad year. I don't remember too much about that as to the hardships. It seemed like we had enough to eat and all.

Weick: You're ahead of me, but I know what it was to grow up, and like you say, we knew we didn't have much but we didn't know how much we were supposed to have, so we were pretty well satisfied with what we did have. Took care of it, appreciated it, appreciated our friends, I think those are

some of things sometimes that are different now.

Crone: Yes, yes. They are all going...

Weick: Yes. You never made it back to college, so the war did change your life, it definitely did.

Crone: Yes it did.

Weick: Well, I'm glad it did in some ways because we got to be neighbors, Bill.

Crone: Yes we did.

Crone: Otherwise we probably wouldn't have, but anyway, this has been an interesting morning and I want to thank you, Bill Crone, for sharing these things with us. Do you have anything else you want to put down for the record? Now we didn't get — Your wife's name is Jacque and you have two children, let's get their names.

Crone: My wife's name is Jacqueline. Ronald William is my son and Nelda Jean is my daughter.

Weick:; I knew them both, they were little stripers when we were neighbors but still good to keep in touch. Well, thank you very much, Bill.

----- End of interview -----

Post Script: Major William Crone was called back into service during the Korean War and served there from March 1952 until the Fall of 1953.