
THE KLOBASE FESTIVAL OF DEMING, NEW MEXICO: A Time to Celebrate and Remember

Stephan Moore

The history of the Czech and eastern European community of Deming began in the 1920s with the arrival of many immigrants from south Texas, who were for the most part poor cotton farmers of Czech ancestry looking for better farming lands. Most immigrants brought a strong sense of Czech community and culture, and for a time, Deming was considered a trilingual community of English, Spanish and Czech speakers.

The first Klobase Festival was held in 1928 to help provide financial support for The Holy Family Catholic Church. It was organized by Frank Kretek Sr., Rev. J. Yannes, Victor Kostelnick and their families.

Klobase is a Czech word for the Bohemian sausage that is the main food served to participants in this event. Men smoke klobase and barbecue beef overnight, while women bake pies and cakes and make potato salad.

The Festival occurs on the third Sunday in October, a day that includes games, a large dinner of klobase and beef, traditional Czech and eastern European polkas and hops, and bingo.

The Festival has developed through the years from a small gathering of families to a large public event. In 1991 close to 3,000 celebrants attended the Festival. During the early years of the Klobase Festival all of the food was prepared at home, usually on a farm, but now, due to new health regulations, the food must be prepared in

a central location. The central location actually increases the socializing attendant on the event.

The Klobase Festival provides an occasion for members of the community to come together and to celebrate the end of the cotton growing season. Some Festival participants live in other counties and even other states, but every year they make the trip to Deming.

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Men spend several days preparing sausage for the Klobase Festival in Deming. Photo by Stephan Moore

killed deer here until you couldn't rest. Just big packs of people came. And the bears, they got them too, you know. Not much chance of anything to increase. And the mountain lions, if they hear about them, they'll be on their trail, too....The hunters, sometimes they tell me to get off my land. Oh, I have a helluva time with 'em. (Parsons and Garney 1987: 15-16, 42-43)

Family ranchers like the Pankeys hardly ever make ends meet; their average profit margin over a ten-year period is about one percent. They continue to ranch because they appreciate the wholeness of a life traditionally adapted to a diffi-

cult but compelling landscape.

Family ranching has been substantially altered by the industrialization of the beef industry. In some places in the state cattlemen use helicopters to manage vast ranges, and some elements of cowboy culture, such as saddlemaking and bootmaking, have become high art, priced beyond the reach of working cowboys. But many of the values and practices of traditional cowboy life can still be found on the small family ranches that survive in New Mexico. In some areas family ranchers work together on spring and fall roundups, with the men doing the branding in teams (rather than using the mechanical brand-