

Ben E. Kemp Homestead Video Transcript

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Title: Ben E. Kemp Homestead

Location: Catron County, New Mexico

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Featuring: Brenda Wilkinson, BLM Archaeologist, Socorro Field Office
Jewell Ruth Derrick, Ben E. Kemp's Granddaughter

Kemp Homestead, 1910

Catron County, New Mexico

BRENDA. There's something about just the shapes and colors and textures of the rock and the form of the landscape that just feels right. There are rocks and scattered juniper creeping in, and it just...hugs you, it's a landscape that just hugs you.

BRENDA. We are about due west of the Cerro Pomo cinder cone, which is kind of a prominent feature on the landscape, oh, about fourteen miles from the Arizona line. We are here in this particular spot because there's a little homestead here that was homesteaded by the Kemp family in 1910.

JEWELL. Ben E. Kemp and his wife, they called her Jo, raised ten children and never lost a one. My grandfather did many things to support those ten children. He drilled wells.

BRENDA. And at one point, he decided this was a good spot to drill a well and he drilled a well. That was in 1910, and he hit water and it was a good well.

JEWELL. Somebody said to me, "Well, I didn't think they had well drills back then." Well they didn't have one with a motor on it, like our well drills now, but he drilled them with a pair of Spanish mules.

BRENDA. He was going to sell it. He drilled it on speculation. But, times were hard. It was a drought. It was a real good price, but nobody had the money, and so he was afraid he was going to lose it, and they decided to file a homestead claim here, so he wouldn't lose his investment.

BRENDA. They had no idea what they were doing. They were young men. They didn't know how to build a house, and he said it's a wonder they didn't kill themselves trying.

BRENDA. I think they did a darn good job. Even a little style; I think the fireplaces are real nice. I love the way they built the some of the bedrock into the structure, and the little window. There's a fair amount of the roof remaining on that northern room. The juniper won't rot as fast as most of the other woods. I think it's held up amazingly well, especially considering that it was abandoned almost a hundred years ago.

BRENDA. The little rock homestead here, they lived in for about four years and then they...maybe times were a little bit better for them... they built a house 600 feet to the south that was something of a tribute from Ben E. Kemp to his wife, Weltha Josephine.

BRENDA. [*holding a letter*] And this is a love letter from Ben E. Kemp to Weltha Josephine proposing marriage.

JEWELL. I do not have...ohhhh.

BRENDA. I know it gives me goose bumps.

BRENDA. [*reading*] "Miss Weltha, you said if I was in earnest, my love was not in vain."

BRENDA. I'm sorry if I get choked up. [*Ruth laughs.*] "If you doubt my love just give me a chance, promise to be my wife, and name the time for me to come."

JEWELL. Oh! I've got to have that.

BRENDA. It's in the folder.

JEWELL. Thank you, Brenda. I appreciate you so much. I never knew such a thing existed.

BRENDA. [*shows letter*] And the little love birds and hearts.

JEWELL. Yes.

BRENDA. They loved each other a lot. They went through a lot of good times, bad times, ten children, and I think that house was kind of a gesture of appreciation and something of a tribute to her.

BRENDA. Ben W. Kemp wrote a book, called *Cow Dust and Saddle Leather*, all about his father's life, and his life, and the time that they spent here. They went through a lot of hardships, but I would sure like to wake up every morning and look out at this.

BRENDA. One of the things I think that helped make them so successful and do well and be happy...they all had a sense of humor, and they all were artistic, and they played music.

[*Sound of Ben W. Kemp playing fiddle*]

BRENDA. I think all of those things enrich your lives and help you get through the hard times.

JEWELL. Take a good look at this country. You have to be pretty rugged to survive here.

BRENDA. I think it's highly significant because the people who lived here played such a large role in the settlement of this country. They drilled the wells that really made settlement possible out here.

BRENDA We see how significant this is because of what we know about the Kemps. But when I see another homestead where I don't know as much, it may be just as significant, and it's just our lack of knowledge. I'm kind of hesitant now to write something off because it doesn't look like much. It's really the lives of the people that lend significance to the location.

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