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LP2009.013.068

Garitson, W. P.

February-March 1967

Interviewed by Arlie Riggs

Unidentified speaker: This interview is taking place at the Community Building in Westcliffe, CO, in February or March of 1967. Present are Mrs. Riggs, who is doing the interviewing, and the subject of the interview is Mr. W.P. Garitson of Westcliffe.

AR: Mr. Garitson, will you please state your name and how long you've been in the valley?

WG: You mean here?

AR: Yes.

WG: Well, my name was Garitson, but I always went by the name of Billy Garitson, initials W.P., as far as that's concerned. I came over here, located here in 1948. But I located 20 miles south of here in October 1906.

AR: 1906, good. Now, I know Mr. Garitson has an interesting story to tell us about how he got over to this valley.

WG: Well, we moved out of the San Luis valley, crossed the Sand Dunes. The first time we come over, we come over with a bunch of 125 head of cattle. The wagons that was with us, they left us at Mosca Pass and we decided to bring them through Mosca Pass so they wouldn't get backed so bad cause we were going to turn them out on the range. But anyway, that was the year that Mosca Pass washed out, the toll road. It used to be a toll road to Mosca Pass. It washed out in July that year. We undertook to take them cattle through and did get them through, back, stove them all up and killed one cow getting them through there.

AR: Why was it so rough?

WG: The road went to pieces. There just wasn't nothing left.

AR: It's real rough terrain.

WG: Well, it was down in the crick bed where we had to jump them off into that creek bed and ride them up there and then get them out-

AR: Oh! Sounds like fun.

WG: [unintelligible] My brother and I was the only two there and we had the horses to take care of, two saddle horses and two pack horses, driving cattle, but we couldn't use them. We just had to do it [unintelligible]

AR: It was just too rough for a horse to-oh, that sounds like a good time [unintelligible] Can you back up

and tell us a little about the toll road?

WG: Well, I don't know too much about that toll road, only that the biggest number of people that settled in the San Luis valley at one time come through there. The horses and wagons come in out of the East. I know of several families that moved in there-

AR: Now, that's Mosca Pass.

WG: That's Mosca Pass.

AR: Every so often, you hear about it, about redoing Mosca Pass, and-

WG: Well, I've been working on it half the years to get that open and I think we would have if it hadn't been for the head man, head of the Sand Dunes project down there. He don't want it.

AR: Why?

WG: In some of the letters, he told us that he could have a road through there if we wouldn't trespass on the Sand Dunes.

AR: On the Sand Dunes National Monument?

WG: On the Sand Dunes National Monument. That's right.

AR: Uh huh. He just doesn't want the public coming through a national monument and that doesn't seem quite fair.

WG: Got someone's letter, I can back that up. I've got one or two of the letters from the original office in Santa Fe, New Mexico that were wrote to a fellow in Gardner, T.M. Hoxen? That was a, used to be [unintelligible] down there at the- Well, he was a [unintelligible] and always worked for Mosca Pass and he never give it up. So, he passed away.

AR: Well, that would make it so much closer to Have the Wet Mountain Valley and the San Luis alley-

WG: We worked on it when I was on the Soil Conservation. I was on the Soil Conservation Board in Huerfano County from the time it was organized till the time I left there in '48. We done a lot of work, lot of correspondence to get that road over there, but we never could accomplish nothing.

AR: Ok, Mr. Garitson, will you back up here and we'll go on to your first trip in 1906.

WG: Over, through the cattle-

AR: Right.

WG: Well, we landed there on the 18<sup>th</sup> day of September, about 3 o'clock and there was about 6" of snow on the ground when we left there. We'd gone about a mile and a half in the snow, and it snowed for three days. The cattle on the road for three days and couldn't have nothing to eat and we couldn't get it, nothing to them. We lost two or three just from eating willows and stuff. Just three feet deep of snow.

AR: Now where did you bring the cattle? What was your overall destination, ranch in the south end of the

valley?

WG: Well, we had two ranches. That's why I had a ranch [unintelligible] northeast of Delmar and one 17 miles further on down in what they call the sinks of that canal, Salt Creek.

AR: But when you brought them over here-

WG: We brought them right straight across the valley. We lived on the west side of the valley, and we brought them right straight across and stayed all night at what they called the A.B. & Durkee ranch and then come across the sand the next day to the Mosca Pass.

AR: When you got the cattle to the destination, no hope for them to get a bite of grass, right?

WG: Well-

AR: No hope for the cattle to eat because-

WG: Oh, no, they didn't get anything to eat for oh, a week or two.

AR: They must have been in great shape.

WG: They was. Of course, we turned them right in the midden and they wanted to look, big grass maybe stuck through, but not very much.

AR: Right. And cows aren't very good about rustling.

WG: No.

AR: What kind of travelling was it?

WG: Short ones.

AR: Ok. Then, after you had trouble crossing the cattle, did you back for your family?

WG: No. No, see, I wasn't married then.

AR: Oh!

WG: I was only 21 years old when - and just a few days after we got there. My father went back. We helped him cross the mountain and he went back over to my mother's. They lived in the valley and my brother and I stayed there. I basked?

AR: Did you homestead the land or did you buy the land in the south end of the valley?

WG: My dad bought it.

AR: I just wondered. That was about the time, lots of homesteading, wasn't it?

WG: No, it wasn't. That was an old place in there, and I don't know. I'd lost a ring and we run cattle up there Delmar, and then we had no- That was pretty well settled up and we was roping and range, and when we come over there and we turned them right out on the range. And that winter, time we had that

big snow, the 19<sup>th</sup> of October, it never snowed any more till the 19<sup>th</sup> of April. It started in and snowed off and on for six weeks, way up in-

AR: But at least, it was a nice open weather so the cattle could-

[unintelligible]

WG: It snowed practically all [unintelligible] We had them outside. We didn't have no hay to speak of. We lost quite a few the next spring when it started snowing in April. Everybody else did, couldn't get nowhere.

AR: Right. Paralyzing snow.

WG: Yes. Just kept it up, and the ground got so wet, you couldn't get around, just was bad.

AR: The cattle were much more used to rustling and not having hay fed to them in those days, weren't they?

WG: That's right. this [unintelligible] were all from here, from right out here till the JM Ranch down there. That's six miles other side of where I live. They wanted the camps on my side of the road.

AR: Now the fence you had-

WG: Not the fence.

AR: About what year did the fences start coming in, do you recall?

WG: About, well, 1917 and 1918, during, well, just after the first World War and during the first World War. When the homesteaders come in out there, start taking that up.

AR: How much land did you buy in the south end of the valley? How large was your ranch?

WG: Well, we had 180 acres, my dad had. He bought 320 to start with, and he filed on 640 and then he bought another place up in the hills. Then, I think he bought another one by tax title, so he had 1180 acres.

AR: Finally-

[unintelligible – overlapping voices]

WG: Afterwards, I bought, let's see, I bought 1200 acres. We had 2800 acres altogether when I left there.

AR: 2800 acres. That's a lot of land. Yes, and you were responsible for most of it, from the time you came over here at 21, right?

WG: That's right.

AR: Tell me, the life of a bachelor in those good old days.

WG: I don't know. It wasn't very funny.

AR: I bet not.

WG: I didn't bachelor all the time. The first year, in 1907, my brother and my sister-in-law was there, but they left, and then my mother moved over in 1919. They sold out entirely in the San Luis valley and moved over there. And I was married in 1910, March 1910.

AR: How about eating? What were your favorite things when you were a bachelor, do you remember?

WG: Oh, meat and bread, potatoes and stuff.

AR: No tv dinners, right?

WG: No.

AR: Not quite that simple.

WG: No tv, no telephone, no nothing.

AR: No communication whatsoever. Did you always have a pet, like a dog, for a companion?

WG: Oh, we always had dogs. We had some good dogs and some that wasn't no good.

AR: I think the story of all our lives if we'd admit it, don't you?

WG: That's right. They mostly got poisoned, the good dogs we had, got poisoned.

AR: You mean, that was on the part of people, or-

WG: Well, yeah, they put out poison for coyotes. Of course, the coyotes were awful bad. One time, one summer down there, we had three big timber wolves come in there and they used to kill, sometimes a cow, pretty near every week right around the ranch down there. Then they got the coyotes to follow them, and after they run the timber wolves out, why, these coyotes would just set out there and wait till the cow went to water and they'd catch the calves. They killed all the calves we had one summer.

AR: Now, do you recall about what year this was? [unintelligible] was asking me when they fought a war against coyotes, and of course-

WG: That was about, it must have been around 1914 or somewhere.

AR: Constantly 1914 and the ward coyotes and wolves, but mostly coyotes, until what, about the last seven or eight years?

WG: That's right.

AR: And then, most of the federal men haven't been around, haven't done this, and now where they want the coyotes again.

WG: None, there's one coyote where there used to 25, I don't think.

AR: Right, right. But this is the first year that they don't have them really attacking game for quite a number of years.

WG: [unintelligible] myself down there more, I met an old trapper. He was an old timer. He'd come in there in the 1970s [sic 1870s] and then I had him up to the ranch there and he started trapping. He got 25 the first winter. The next winter, I went out and killed a horse out north of the ranch and I got a receipt from a fellow who used to be supervisor here, Jim Langway. I made these, a bunch of poison balls and put them out around this horse and I caught 25 right there that one, that winter. Then I got this other fellow back the next winter and we got another 25. That was a big town. We got a whole lot more than that but we only found 25 of them.

AR: Did you get a bounty for them?

WG: No.

AR: No bounty.

WG: No, we just skinned most of them and they were [unintelligible] about four, five hours.

AR: For the skins.

WG: Yeah.

AR: Ah, that you had to take care of properly.

WG: Oh, yeah.

AR: Right. Do you remember [unintelligible] the old trapper's name?

WG: His name was Johnny Papin? He used to cook on the roundup, good cook.

AR: Tell me about a roundup in the early days.

WG: A roundup?

AR: Yeah.

WG: Well, they used to start the roundup about the first week in October. They started over on the Mosca Pass and come north, the road, what we called [unintelligible] down there two days right to come to the ranch. Then they moved up here on the stake, about 10 days up here on the Antelopes. Then moved to the top of the Greenhorn Mountain and stayed there about a week and they went back to Gardner and that finished it up, about six weeks. There was about 16-17 men rode, in 1907, 1908, and 1909. 1907 was the first year driving. Run on till about 1918, but I quit riding about 1915 because it just got to where my cattle didn't get over on this lower part.

AR: How'd you know it was your cattle?

WG: We branded them.

AR: [unintelligible]eth cows were branded and when you rounded them up-

WG: We'd start out in the morning [unintelligible] the boss man, captain, he'd send so many men one place and then another and when they all congregated in the bunch, certain place. Then let cows and calves and they all were separated and branded. Well, they just went in the bunch and roped the calf and took it out and put the brand on it that was-

AR: What if the cow claimed the wrong calf?

WG: They used to make mistakes once in a great while but not very often. If they did, why they, whoever these, would get together and they'd brand another calf some other place for them.

AR: You had to be kind of good time Joes, didn't you? You had to be sort give and take a little bit.

WG: Oh sure.

AR: You were branding about yearling calves, weren't you, or pretty big calves?

WG: Well, some of them were pretty big but [unintelligible] in the fall that we done abandoned and they probably were some May and June calves-

AR: [unintelligible] I'd rather brand them in a month, thank you. (laughing)

WG: For two or three years, I'd find some of them. They might [unintelligible] and we used to wrestle them calves [unintelligible]

AR: You held them down while somebody else branded them, right?

WG: That's right.

AR: You were the wrestler, the steer wrestler. I knew-

WG: Brand them, earmark them, and after it was done, why there were separated and each man took what he wanted home to camp. When they, after it got all kind of rogue, why then, they had what they called a cleanup day. In the pastures, they'd sort these cattle all out and each man take his cattle home.

AR: For the winter.

WG: Well, mostly, them days, what they wanted to sell, beef and the weaners, take the weaners home. Where it was close to home, we used to run them weaners\* right off away from the cows and take them home, down to [unintelligible] and the ranch, just go in, two of us and take a calf right out, just take him out on the highway, put him in the bunch and after we roped two, we'd take them to Crel?

\*Weaners – a weaned calf under a year old

AR: Sounds so simple. I'm sure it wasn't. Now about how long would you say this usually took, about a week, or would that cover it for your roundup-

WG: It was about six weeks, the first seven years that I rode.

AR: Gee, that took most of the summer, didn't it? Or early fall.

WG: We started about the third week in October was the general rule, and then we, long about the second week of November, we was through. Once in a while, we had bad weather. Come snow, we'd maybe lose a few daily, but we'd never, by the time we started, why, we never stopped on Sunday or nothing, just there.

AR: Now, I know you to be a real active person. Now, did you always know how many cattle you owned?

WG: Well, not exactly unless we got them in on the ranch and there, yes, we did, because the Forest Service would come in and count them for us. We didn't.

AR: So now you come to it, right?

WG: Of course, you take them where they run out the year round. Why, like the JM Ranch, they didn't know how many cattle they had exactly. They had an idea. When they sold the cattle, they guaranteed the fellows 2100 head and I helped bring 1250 of them over here and put them on the train. That was, I think, in 1917.

AR: I see.

WG: That's when that was.

AR: That's a real-

WG: By the time of the roundup, tie them up, there wasn't much roundup after that. They was just the [unintelligible] boys left us and they had so been to McKenzie. Then, let's see, there was three of them. McKenzie and [unintelligible] were the main two that country on top of Greenhorn out there.

AR: I see. Well, that's a real interesting account of the roundup which I haven't ever heard before. Now, I know that you probably have known lots of colorful characters in your life. But I'd like to hear what you could tell us about Herard-

WG: Ulas? Ulus Herard? [Ulysses Herard]

AR: Right.

WG: Well, I don't know how much I should tell.

AR: Oh, well. [unintelligible]

WG: He had one daughter and she married a fellow over down Lutsend? And then they had two what married in the canyon. Then they meant to move to town and they had two boys. His name was Williams, this son-in-law and I know he passed away. I don't know whether the daughter is glad of it or not.

AR: I see.

WG: The two boys may be alive. One of them was Richard Crumper? His wife after they sent Ulus to the asylum, why, they were living up at the canyon but she left him, and I don't know what become of him. He may be dead too. They might all be dead for all I know, but I kind of doubt it. I think there's probably one of them boys in there yet.

AR: About what years did you know Ulus?

WG: Well, it was 1906 the first time I ever seen him.

AR: Tell me about your first meeting.

WG: Well, we was coming through there. This was in July, I told you, when we moved over there. That was in October, but we come over and looked at the ranch in August. But we come through there and he was building the railroad over on that North Pass for a mining outfit. He had, I can't think of these

peoples' names, but I think their name was Beal? They was promoting a mine up on what they call Little Sand Creek and they had sold a lot of stock in it all over the United States, I guess. They were paying Ulus \$75 a month and her, why just the good palms? Well, at that time, they weren't no cattle [unintelligible] at all, but he got enough money out of these to buy a bunch of cattle and went into the cattle business. It run on till, I guess these people couldn't wrestle any more money because they'd stolen stock all over the United States. I understood that they got \$10,000 out of one woman, widow woman. They finally wound up by shipping in a carload of people on the railroad and going out here and selling them stakes for \$50 apiece. There was one fellow that got suspicious when they started back and he went to the land office and he found out his claim was in the middle of Bill Benson's, one of his places out there. It wasn't nothing to it.

AR: You don't know what year this is, do you?

WG: Way back in, it must have been about 1912-

AR: I just want an approximate date-

WG: [unintelligible] at that time, it was 1906 and that run on for three, four years before, they kept that going backwards and forwards, and the last trip, they hired an assay out of here, Troy Donohue [unintelligible] and he set them down by a fellow the name of Cal Thompson as a guard but it was only to go as far as the ranch. Well, they go down there and Ulus was supposed to meet them there but he didn't come and this fellow wanted to know if I'd go get him. Well, I had just got back from bringing the second bunch of cattle in from the San Luis valley [unintelligible] so I told him, I said, I'll go over there for \$5 and he said, alright, you go get him, and I started out and I never knew what was coming. I brought him back and when he started to talk to them, he got mad and he jumped up and cracked his fist. He says, the only way you can do any business with me is baby my children and that was the end of it. [unintelligible] Next morning, why these people started up and come back to Westcliffe and Ulus went home.

AR: Now, he wasn't doing the promoting. It was-

WG: He wasn't promoting, but he was working for them.

AR: But he was working for the mining company. Now, when you said that they had a carload of people coming in, and go out to stake claims, would you explain that a little more?

WG: Well, that was a different deal altogether. That didn't have nothing to do with this. It didn't have nothing to do with Ulus. That was their last trip in here that I know anything about.

AR: This same mining company?

WG: Yeah.

AR: Ok.

WG: I think their name was Beal? It was just a man and his wife.

AR: I see. Well, I just wanted to get this kind of quick.

WG: They went to the penitentiary, I know that.

AR: What kind of a mine was this supposed to be?

WG: It was supposed to be a gold mine. I don't think they ever-

AR: Adopted the mad knob? Did you say?

WG: It was on what they call a little mad knob? That's in below, you go below where Ulus used to live, over towards the Sand Dunes. I don't think, it's just a little hole in the ground and that's all there was to it. They never done anything, any work there. It was just a [unintelligible] that was all that it was. That's where Ulus got his start.

AR: I'd like to know, did you get your \$5 for going after Ulus?

WG: Yes, I did.

AR: Good.

WG: Because he wasn't going to pay me. He got all ready to close the next morning and I just walked around in front of the team and just kept looking at him. He finally got down off the wagon and walked around where I was and he said, how much do I owe you? And I said, just what you told me you'd give me. He pulled it out and give it to me.

AR: Well, good. That's a happy ending. Sure you were going to get taken on that, too.



WG: I used to look after this [unintelligible] once in a while. I used to come down there and meet Ulus and he wouldn't be there, and I'd turn around and go back. Sometimes I'd stay all night.

AR: And there again, there was no communication. And how far was it from your place on up to-

WG: It's 12 miles. It's six miles to come, and six miles down to where he lived.

AR: Right. That's quite a lay.

WG: He was quite a character. You couldn't talk to him hardly. He couldn't hear. I couldn't make him understand for the first three or four years I was in the country. Whenever I was around, and he was trying to talk to anybody, he always come and get me, find out what to say. He always carried an old cow horn he had hollowed out. He carried that with him and I could talk in that and make him understand but it got so I couldn't.

AR: I see.

WG: Before he left.

AR: Did he end up with quite a number of cattle?

WG: Oh yeah, he had about, well, one fall, he bought 200 head of cattle and brought them in there, which was an awful mistake. He took them over there and turned them loose, and lost about 150 head of them come back on this side and the Forest Service filed a trespass case against him, and he got them and took them back over there and turned them loose on Sand Creek. It was an awful hard winter, and he lost about half of them. But he had a lot of cattle.

AR: Yes, that wouldn't be very smart to buy in the fall.

WG: No, it wasn't. It was awful poor stock at that.

AR: Right. Because now levels run up there in the summer, right, and then bring them out in the fall-

WG: If he'd took care of that, he had a [unintelligible] there because he never fed a hoof, mouth full of hay or anything. He just run them in there for country in the summertime and took them down, turned them loose in the Sand Hills in the winter. And they very seldom have any snow down there.

AR: Where are the Sand Hills?

WG: In the Sand Hills, that's-

AR: Maybe the Sand Dunes, is that-

WG: Yeah, well I was right there and he had, they weren't in this, they were all open at that time, it seemed, weren't nobody in there.

End of tape