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**Summary of Oral History Interview with George Griffin**

1967

Interviewed by Arlie Riggs and Betty Munson

George Griffin was interviewed in early 1967 in Westcliffe, Colorado, where he shared his family history, experiences ranching on Oak Creek Grade, and insights into the region's development. Born in Cañon City, he grew up on his family's 6,500-acre cattle ranch, which had been established by his grandfather as a homestead. His grandfather expanded the ranch significantly, though erosion and changing water patterns reduced its hay production over time.

Griffin described the history of open-range cattle ranching in Wet Mountain Valley. In his grandfather's era, cattle roamed freely from the Arkansas River to the Huerfano River, with roundups held in the spring for branding and in the fall for weaning and selling calves. As government regulations increased, particularly through the Bureau of Land Management (BLM), restrictions on grazing forced ranchers to adopt new practices. Unlike in earlier times, when cattle could graze year-round, modern regulations limited grazing to five-month seasons, requiring ranchers to buy hay and feed their cattle in winter.

He recounted the challenges of living in an isolated area, including severe snowstorms that once left his family snowed in for ten days. He also spoke about road maintenance in the area, noting that his father worked as a road overseer for 30 years, keeping roads passable before modern county maintenance crews were established.

Griffin also touched on local history, including the presence of stagecoach stops and freight lines that once passed through the region. He recalled stories of freight wagons carrying ore, including one particularly valuable load from the Bassick Mine, and stage stations where travelers could rest. Additionally, he recounted tales of early law enforcement, the branding system for cattle identification, and the history of cattle breeding improvements.

Another topic discussed was wildlife, noting an increase in deer populations over his lifetime but the absence of elk in the area. He reflected on changes in cattle ranching, explaining that while modern cattle are larger, they are less hardy than those in his grandfather's time. He also described the importance of horses on the ranch, though fewer were needed in modern times.

Griffin shared stories about his grandfather's encounters with historical figures such as Chief Ouray and frontiersman Tom Tobin. He confirmed family stories about Tobin tracking down the notorious Espinosa brothers, who waged a personal war against settlers, and carrying their heads back to collect a bounty.

One of the more sensational events he recalled was the murder at the cheese factory in Westcliffe. In the 1870s, a man named Theodore Price fatally stabbed Reginald Nieve during a drunken altercation. Price was later tried and sentenced to life in prison, despite hiring an English barrister for his defense.

Griffin's interview provides a valuable account of ranching traditions, environmental changes, and the historical events that shaped Custer County.

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