

West Custer County Library District Local History Collection
Oral History Collection

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Griffin, George

1967

Interviewed by Arlie Riggs and Betty Munson

UI: [This interview is taking place in] Westcliffe, Colorado in the community building early in 1967. The subject of the discussion or interview is Mr. George Griffin of that community. Doing the interviewing is Mrs. Riggs of Westcliffe.

AR: This afternoon, I'm going to talk with George Griffin who lives on Oak Creek Grade. Is that the correct terminology?

GG: Yeah, that's where most people put it.

AR: Ok, and you are a native of this area. Were you born right here on this ranch?

GG: No, I was born in Canon.

AR: In Canon. But you've grown up on the ranch.

GG: That's right.

AR: And would you tell us, or do you mind telling us, what the acreage is of your ranch?

GG: About 6500 acres.

AR: And on that, you run cattle. What else?

GG: That's all. Cattle.

AR: That's it. Just cattle. You don't put up hay here.

GG: Some.

AR: But not too much.

GG: No.

AR: Now, let's try to get a little bit in history. Has this changed over the years? Did your grandfather, for instance, put up any hay?

GG: Yeah, more than we do now.

AR: Why?

GG: Had more acreage in these bottoms that hasn't washed away, along the crick.

AR: In other words, erosion has been a real big problem.

GG: That's right.

AR: Could you tell us a little about that and why we have so much, so many big gullies around here?

GG: Well, I think on this place, my grandad straightened this crick, instead of letting it zigzag around on its own course, he straightened it down through here and that give it too much fall.

AR: So, you think by straightening it out, it really caused a big problem.

GG: Yes.

AR: What is the creek, George?

GG: Oak Creek.

AR: Oak Creek, ok. I thought it probably was, but I thought we better get that on this little recording.

GG: Yeah, after he changed it, he saw his mistake all right by changing it, started to cut.

AR: But there wasn't anything he could do about it?

GG: No.

AR: Mmhmm. Now your grandfather homesteaded here? Or came and bought-

GG: Yes. He homesteaded down where those old buildings are down there.

AR: And how much did he homestead? Do you remember?

GG: No, I don't. I imagine 160 would have been all he would have been allowed to homestead.

AR: And did he build up most of this large acreage during his lifetime?

GG: About half of it.

AR: And then your father-

GG: My father, and sell. I homesteaded here.

AR: Oh, you homesteaded? And what year was that?

GG: In '31, I believe. We moved here in '34.

AR: I didn't realize we had homesteading, you know, in your lifetime, because you're not very old.

GG: Older than that.

AR: Why don't you tell us your age? We should get that on here.

GG: I'll be 54 the 25th of this month.

2 Griffin, George

AR: Ok. Can you tell us anything else about the big changes that you noticed or that you know have happened to the ranch from your grandfather's time to your time?

GG: You mean the-

AR: Other than the erosion and the fact that you don't put up as much hay.

GG: We don't get the moisture we used to, snow, is the biggest problem, I think.

AR: Now this is a very isolated place, right?

GG: That's right.

AR: And do you recall anything that father or grandfather had to say about big storms in this area, or how long they might have been when they couldn't get out?

GG: No, I never heard them say.

AR: How about during your lifetime? You ever had anything like a week long-

GG: Yeah, we would see it snowed in here 10 days at one time.

AR: Ok. What about the cattle? Now I know from talking with the Sparlings that used to be all open range during your grandfather's time, right?

GG: That's right.

AR: And how far did you go, do you know, on this open range?

GG: Well, it went from the river, there at Gardner, clear to Huerfano.

AR: The Arkansas river to the Huerfano River? That's quite a ways. A lot of miles. Did the beef have any fat on them after they'd run all that way?

GG: Well, there were lots of cattle then. They just run from here to- There was cattle all over this country.

AR: What was the maximum number that your grandfather had, do you recall?

GG: No, sorry I don't. I don't know that I ever heard him say.

AR: Was it up in the thousands?

GG: Oh, I imagine about a thousand, yes.

AR: What about roundup time? Can you tell us something about that?

GG: Well, they had one in the spring and the fall.

AR: Why in the spring?

GG: To brand the calves.

3 Griffin, George

AR: Oh, so they had mostly winter calves?

GG: No, the calves would come in the spring, you see, and it'd be small calves in the spring. And in the fall, they'd gather them and wean the calves.

AR: And did they then take everything home after they'd rounded them up?

GG: No.

AR: What'd they do? Just turn them loose?

GG: Just run on the range.

AR: They probably just took them, what they wanted to sell in the fall, right?

GG: That's right.

AR: Fall roundup. What did you do then? Drive them to Canon City?

GG: I think most of them were loaded at Florence or Westcliffe.

AR: This was probably during the era of trains in Westcliffe, right? Ok. What do your cattle graze on most?

GG: Grama grass.

AR: Grama grass, mmhmm. And now you spoke of having them out on the range all winter. Do you still do that?

GG: No.

AR: Why not? That's a big change, isn't it?

GG: Yes. Well, this BLM (Bureau of Land Management) won't let you. It's all under government control now.

AR: And you rent, what, for three- or four-months grazing period, is that right?

GG: It's five months I believe. May, June, July, August, September. Six months!

AR: Now is that talking currently too, George, that you have cattle on. Can you graze at all on BLM?

GG: No.

AR: No, not at all.

GG: We graze about 100 head [unintelligible] them

AR: And what did you used to have, enough to take care of the whole herd?

GG: We just used to turn them out, the whole herd.

4 Griffin, George

AR: Oh. It's very desirable because it's always been a rather small ramble, right, I mean grazing?

GG: Yes.

AR: And now without having it, it's pretty rough, right?

GG: Yeah.

AR: Ok, how many cattle do you have?

GG: Oh, I have about 150 cows at home, and then the girls have got a few, and Jean runs a few.

AR: They run over the 6500 acres?

GG: Yeah, we run them all together.

AR: Do you have to round them up in the fall?

GG: Yes.

AR: And bring them all in. Then what do you do, feed them during the winter?

GG: And [unintelligible]

AR: Do you have to do much feeding?

GG: Yeah, this winter.

AR: Is it normal, though?

GG: Well, no, not usually. We don't have to feed too much. Along about February till middle of May, that's about all we feed.

AR: But with the drought conditions and so forth, of course you run into problems. Can you raise enough hay to feed your cattle too?

GG: No, we have to buy a lot of hay, and we put up a lot of hay in the valley on chairs.

AR: When's your biggest work time? When do you have to do most of the work on the ranch?

GG: Oh, that's a year-round job. I didn't know most do that.

AR: Just constantly, don't they?

GG: That's right.

AR: Needs to be taken care of, right? Ok. You recall anything much that your grandfather told you about his early life in the old creek country?

GG: Yes, it's all on that paper there. You can read it.

AR: You're not going to tell me a thing.

GG: No, it'd take a long time and I- But, it's all there. From the time he came to Canon.

AR: Did he keep a diary or anything?

GG: No, he had it right up here.

AR: Right up there. I've run into a couple of people who have that diary and boy, it really helps, you know.

GG: But he could sit down. He could tell you that story tonight and he could tell somebody tomorrow night exactly just the same thing.

AR: Very same thing.

GG: I heard him tell it ever since I was a kid, you know. When I was a kid in school, I took Colorado history. In my version, my grandad tells a lot of that Colorado history that was just in that book, just like he told it.

AR: That's really a fantastic memory, isn't it? How old was your grandfather when he passed away?

GG: 86.

AR: And how about your father?

GG: He was, let's see, he's thirty years younger than I am, make him 84 now, I guess. And he's been dead 10-12 years, in '72.

AR: Round in there, yeah.

GG: Yeah.

AR: Did, do you recall any of the stories about the Oak Creek grade when the stagecoaches came up this way?

GG: Well, I've heard them tell a lot of stories.

AR: And Mr. Sparling informs me that now it's really a boulevard. It's really a top-notch road which I don't quite agree with.

GG: I know when we used to maintain it with the horses, this grade was in better shape than it is now.

AR: Now when was this, when you didn't hire county men, but every rancher when out and worked on the road?

GG: Well, my dad was road overseer on this road for 30 some years and he worked the ranch, the ranches around here. Mr. Sparling worked on the road down here with my dad.

AR: What'd they call that? I can't- there's a terminology, wasn't it? Something about, hmm-

GG: I don't know.

AR: I don't know. Pays off a debt that way than paying taxes is what it amounted to.

GG: No, they drew wages.

AR: Oh, did they?

GG: Yeah, the county paid their wages.

AR: Oh, well, then I'm thinking of back before they had a county maintenance probably on roads.

GG: They paid wages when, as long as Dad had it.

AR: You did that as well as ranching, right?

GG: Summer work mostly, in the summertime.

AR: When did they do most of the changing on Grape Creek? I understand that this was some of them of the, oh, dams and so forth, are relatively new.

GG: Well, I think the last big change on this road was, the last change that was made on it that's really changed the road was made in 1927. Put it on the north side of the creek and done away with two bridges. I think Mr. Sparling, I know he worked on that deal.

AR: On that one.

GG: Mmhmm.

AR: Ok. What about wildlife out in this area?

GG: Oh, there's more now than they was when I was a kid, quite a lot.

AR: More deer?

GG: Mmhmm.

AR: You don't have the elk down here, do you?

GG: No. No.

AR: And [unintelligible] down their way?

GG: We had a few elk on top of this mountain two years ago for a little short period, but they didn't stay. I think they was all-

AR: Migrating.

GG: Yeah, killed off in deer season.

AR: Oh, they shouldn't do that in deer season.

7 Griffin, George

GG: No, they shouldn't.

AR: They shouldn't do that to elk, period. Of course, we don't get such a high elk kill.

GG: No.

AR: There aren't any Rocky Mountain sheep down here, are there?

GG: No.

AR: Grouse? That kind of thing.

GG: Yeah, we have a few grouse.

AR: But no more. No big increase.

GG: No.

Tape stops. Then starts again.

AR: One day I would like to ask you about, Mr. Griffin, is the brands and the significance of brands, why they're still so important.

GG: Oh, for identification of cattle.

AR: I realize that but do you know anything about the reasons that they were developed, the original, of course, to identify, especially when you were open range and everybody ran together. But why have we always had such a source of pride in the ranching-

GG: Well, I don't know about that.

AR: How long have you had your brand? Would you know?

GG: I've had my own ever since I was two years old.

AR: Ok, now why'd you get it at such a tender age?

GG: That's when I started in the cattle business. My dad give me a cow with a brand.

AR: What is the brand?

GG: Triangle.

AR: Ok, and you still use that.

GG: Still use it.

AR: What was your grandfather's brand, do you know?

GG: Two z's. I still have that and I still use it.

AR: How many brands do you have?

GG: Oh, I just have the two now.

AR: Just the two. Your father didn't have one.

GG: Yes, I got it and then I let my grandson have it. That was my grandad Hodges' brand.

AR: So, it's still in the family? And you would almost miss a couple of meals before you'd let those brands go, right?

GG: That's right. I wouldn't. I think they're two of the oldest brands in Fremont County, or Custer, either one.

AR: Uhhuh. So, like I say, it's a sort of a source of pride, too, isn't it?

GG: That's right.

AR: Tell me a little bit about the cattle and how they've changed during your lifetime.

GG: Oh, they're bigger and just better quality of cattle.

AR: Better meat?

GG: I don't think so. I don't see that there's any difference in the meat.

AR: Oh, ok. Now they're more tender?

GG: No, I don't think it a bit.

AR: How about the cattle themselves, are they better rustlers now?

GG: No, absolutely not.

AR: Why not?

GG: Well, I don't know really. They bred 'em up, got 'em heavier and they just won't take these rocks like they used to. They get sore footed and then they won't get out and graze.

AR: Well, don't you think you look after them a little more than your former-

GG: They're pampered a lot more than they used to.

AR: Mmhmm. How about horses? How important are they?

GG: You need really good saddle horses but not as many as you used to.

AR: How many do you have? Three?

GG: Two.

AR: Two. Ok. All your life, I'm sure, you had your own personal horse, right?

GG: That's right.

AR: And nobody else rides.

GG: Oh, well, it may be a variety, one of the grandkids and some of the relations ride 'em.

AR: But you're pretty particular.

GG: That's right.

AR: You wouldn't let me run out and jump on him?

GG: No, cause I don't think you'd get along too well. (laughing)

AR: Tell me a little bit about your terrain down here. Like I say, I see all these gullies and gulches and so forth. Is it a little rough to get over in places?

GG: Yes.

AR: Do you have very many box canyons?

GG: No, I don't think we have any that I know of really.

AR: What's your deepest gulch, do you suppose?

GG: Well, Grape Creek's the deepest canyon around this part of the country.

AR: How deep is that?

GG: I don't know. It ranges from, oh, I wouldn't know, oh, 400, 500 ft I guess, be probably the highest place on it.

AR: That's pretty deep, isn't it? Now is this where the narrow-gauge railroad went right down the bottom of the gulch, right?

GG: Right.

AR: And how close was that to you?

GG: It's about three miles west of us.

AR: I see. Ok. Nettie, do you have an intelligent-

BM: Well, have you asked him about the early days, well his dad was and the freighters stopped and all about the great stops, any of that history stuff?

AR: I don't know anything about freight. Tell me.

BM: Well, there were freighters here, that stopped here, and they had a stagecoach line here.

10 Griffin, George

GG: Yes, there was a stagecoach through here but I don't know where the stage stopped really. But I would imagine it would have been down here at the creek place.

BM: Where's that?

GG: Well, that's just below our fence. We go out down the canyon. I think that was the biggest stage station on the line.

BM: Well, what about the Bassick freight line? They hauled ore over here, to the canyon. And did they stop out here at your place?

GG: I heard Grandad say that one load, Bassick's help with one load of ore stopped there at the old house and stayed all night with him. When he come back, Bassick throw him that load of ore, \$60,000, horse load.

AR: That must have been a little tricky on some of these steep grades, right?

GG: That's right.

BM: Did they have an armed guard with them?

GG: I don't think so. The driver and Bassick was always with that load.

BM: And he didn't even guard at night?

GG: No. He asked grandad if he thought anybody's bother him, and he just told him to pull it up close to his bedroom window there and if anybody touched it, he'd hear it.

BM: And that was it.

GG: And that was it.

AR: Well, I've always heard about the old maids out here having a stage station. Did your folks know anything about them and who they were?

GG: Yes, we knew them.

BM: You knew them.

GG: One of them's name was Fleming and I think the other one's name was Furnace.

BM: Oh, they weren't sisters.

GG: Yes. Well, one of them had been married.

AR: Oh, one had been married, I see.

GG: But they haven't been dead too many years.

BM: Oh really, did they live [unintelligible] when did they die? I expect they lived down there after I

lived down there.

GG: I imagine, I have an idea they was there after your grandmother-

BM: After my grandmother moved out.

GG: Moved there.

BM: Well, I would have liked to have met them.

AR: Were they colorful characters?

GG: Well, they was two women that run that ranch.

BM: They had to be rough, and they had an inn.

GG: Well, I don't really know.

AR: They didn't have-

GG: I don't believe they did.

BM: Well, I don't know. I was always under the impression that they sort of operated a restaurant, you know, people could stop and put their horses up at night.

GG: No, I don't think I ever heard anybody say that.

AR: What about, they stopped here a lot of the time.

GG: Jay Graner up here had a stopping place.

AR: What do you mean by a stopping place? What did this consist of?

GG: A place to put their horses and you'd get a meal.

BM: My grandfather, after he came out here, the upper country, you know, sort of made that, staying places at night.

GG: But they was Jay Graner and my grandad and then Creek and then Sorders and then Stulfus. They all kept grainers.

AR: Was this [unintelligible] school the first school here in the district?

GG: Yes, I think so.

AR: Was it? That may be Yorkfield school where you taught-

[unintelligible]

AR: Well, when did they start that?

GG: I don't know.

AR: Doesn't have a date on it either, does it?

GG: No.

BM: Of course, that could be, look in the records in Canon.

GG: But I think that that schoolhouse up there where it is now was built in 1910.

AR: 1910.

BM: That was the first school my mother taught.

GG: Yes, I imagine.

BM: And then she went back to Kansas and taught before she came back out, but that's the first place she taught was out here.

AR: The same schoolhouse where you taught later?

BM: I'm sure it was, wasn't it, George?

AR: Well, then she came out here and taught again after you were in school.

GG: Yeah.

AR: When was it closed, what year?

GG: Oh, let's see. '56.

AR: 1956.

GG: She taught there in '55 or in the spring of '56 and then she went to town in '57 and that's the last. My dad went to school in the house that set out over where that house is.

BM: Over here-

GG: Where Jeanie lived.

AR: Now where was Yorkfield?

GG: Right before you turn off the main road to turn in the lane.

AR: In the lane here. And how big a place was it? Was it a post office?

GG: Yes, it was a post office and a saloon and a grocery store and I don't know how many-

AR: What supported it, a mine?

13 Griffin, George

GG: Yeah.

AR: Where was the mine?

GG: Right through [unintelligible] some place-

AR: What kind of ore, gold or lead?

GG: No, it was just Galena lead.

AR: Galena lead.

GG: Mmhmm.

AR: And then there was a town of Galena too, wasn't it?

GG: Yes.

AR: How big was it?

GG: Oh, I think it was just a store and a saloon probably.

AR: Oh.pl

AR: That Bill Wolf's place?

GG: Yeah.

AR: Is Galena lead a special kind of lead or what-

GG: Yeah, it's different. It's pretty near pure, you know.

AR: Sure.

GG: Uh huh. It's very solid, you know, it's really pretty near pure stuff, not hard like that [unintelligible] the little white stuff. This looks just like, Galena lead, it's just what it looks like lead.

AR: Do you have many prospectors in this day and age, people that think they're going-

GG: Oh, yes, not so many in the last year or two as there was five or six years ago.

BM: They used to be, herald the spring, just like robins do, you know the spring whenever prospectors-

AR: Well, that was during the-

BM: Well, all of my life, even the vermiculite days.

GG: Well, we never had too much of that vermiculite-

BM: No, not too much. But I mean, all of my life that prospectors arrived in spring, like the swallows-

AR: Or the car salesmen?

14 Griffin, George

GG: When I was a kid, I can remember a lot of those fellows those brands belonged to.

AR: Yes, well, of course, a lot of the names I recognize because of the Custer County history. [unintelligible] And of course, this very first one on the first page, the Balmon Hook deal 87 is real interesting. I've heard the name Catlan. Catlan was president but I don't recall where or why I've heard it.

BM: Then it's the Executive Committee, did you get that.

AR: Mmhmm.

BM: George's grandfather apparently was the chairman of that.

AR: I've never seen a brand book like that at all.

BM: When was this published?

AR: 1899 in Westcliffe, I believe-

GG: By the Wet Mountain Tribune.

AR: By the Wet Mountain Tribune. Right! Now, this Dr. Bell in the Gazette building in the Springs, is he the one that founded, that promoted, was the promoter to get Westcliffe going?

GG: No, I don't really know.

AR: Dr. Bell from England was the one mixed up in the railroad some way or other.

GG: Well, it could have been.

AR: And his grandson or great grandson was Alscott?

GG: Well-

NG: From England. That Mrs. Griffin, Shrimpton, well her parents' name, you know, that was from England over here, at Armstrong's, Mrs. Shrimpton? Her parents' name was Griffin. Did you ever meet them?

NG: Well, she lived just a few miles from Westcliffe-on-the-Sea. I've always looked for it on the map and never could find it. I thought that was just a fairy tale about Westcliffe being named for that place in England, but she said it really existed.

GG: I went over there fishing, over at Armstrong's and they were there [unintelligible] I asked her if it would be alright to stay-

NG: [unintelligible] died after they moved that thing-

GG: Oh, they did.

NG: It was about respiratory cold or something that English fog [unintelligible]

GG: and I asked her if I could fish and she says, yes. And she says, ooh Ike Calcanna's in there. And I tell him, old George Griffin. Well, I won't be ordering [unintelligible] she said, it was my name before-(laughter)

AR: Well, about Tom Tobin who was a colorful Colorado history character, it says here something about your grandfather being well acquainted with him. Where did he live?

GG: In Canon.

AR: In Canon, uh huh.

GG: He was more or less a scout. He was all over the state, wasn't he?

AR: Well, I think perhaps he was but, now was it actually true that he carried the Espinoza's heads in a-

GG: That's right. I heard grandad tell of, I think it tells it in there, doesn't it?

AR: Well, I haven't found it, you know, I mean, just glancing through, but I just wondered if that was just really true or if that was a story for the history books.

GG: Grandad, I heard him tell that a lot of times. They was tracking the Espinoza's and the man that was with him got tired and was going to quit. They thought they was too far behind and he said, well, he wasn't going to quit, today they weren't very far behind and he kept a going and didn't go too far till the men heard a couple of shots and pretty soon, here he come back down the trail packing them men's heads.

AR: Mercy! What kind, what did he, it seems to me like it would be quite a hard individual to do that, even to an Espinosa. Was it out of character when he did that or not?

GG: No, I imagine [unintelligible]

AR: Did you read the article this winter by Espinoza's grandson that lived down in Trinidad country? Well, he felt that they were justified in the self-declared war on the Whites, you know, because they-well, there's Albert – captured their women, so they just went out after every White from then on, was fair game, you know, and that was his story. How true that was I-

GG: No, I believe Tobin was the only man them Espinoza's ever shot at that they didn't kill.

AR: That they didn't kill.

GG: It just went through the brim of his hat and just caught a little crease in his vest.

AR: Is that right?

GG: And shooting off a ledge and I believe it was Tobin-

AR: Well, was it the state governor that had the price on their heads? He got a reward, didn't he?

GG: I think he got a reward.

AR: He didn't want to bother to take them all.

16 Griffin, George

GG: He brought them back.dd

AR: Well, I would imagine – they had different ideas. They'd have wars over people mutilating the dead, you know.

GG: Yeah (laughter)

AR: But they still [unintelligible] different people, huh? This Father Dyer, says your father, your grandfather became quite [unintelligible] of a Methodist preacher that used to make the trek from Fairplay and Morale. He even went to Montana, I believe. Now was this when your folks lived up-was it your great grandparents that lived in Fairplay? Leadville?

GG: Yeah.

AR: Your grandfather, now I knew your grandfather, I mean, I vaguely remember him when I was a little girl.

GG: His parents-

AR: His parents that were there.

GG: And he until he was where, that's when he was a kid. He plaster mined with his folks.

AR: Father Dyer, you know, he was a snowshoe preacher, circuit rider. Now, was one of your grandparents a preacher?

GG: My, let's see, no, it would be my grandmother's father.

AR: Your grandmother's-

GG: Father [unintelligible] it would have been Shepherd.

AR: Shepherd. A Methodist preacher at that time?

GG: Methodist preacher.

AR: And where did he preach? Here in this part of the country?

GG: Yes, he preached here and then I think he preached-I believe that grandmother was born in Central City or else Kokomo, now [unintelligible]

AR: Mmhmm.

GG: Where'd Minnehaha go to school?

AR: Blackhawk.

GG: That's where grandmother went to school was there.

AR: Oh, did she?

GG: Yeah.

AR: And what was your grandmother's name?

GG: Shepherd.

AR: Shepherd. Your people, the Ripons, came from North Carolina?

GG: Ohio, I believe, Betty.

AR: Ohio.

NM: I don't-

AR: Did they bring cattle with them when they came?

GG: No, I don't think so. No, I know they didn't own what they was driving. They was driving-

AR: And how soon did they get interested in the ranching?

GG: I think about '65 [1865?]

AR: What kind of cattle did they have at the beginning, do you know?

GG: No, I-

AR: Longhorns or-

GG: Yeah, I think most of them came out of old Mexico.

AR: While it was [unintelligible]

GG: That's right.

AR: And Betty spoke the other day about you used to winter cattle down here, then bring them in from other places to winter here.

GG: Yeah.

AR: Now that sounds strange to me now.

GG: Oh, it does.

AR: But you had that much miles or winters, and they could always find something to eat, right?

GG: That's right as long as the snow don't lay on too long.

AR: Doesn't take nearly as much to feed a cow up here as it does in the valley, does it, George?

GG: About half.

AR: About half. You mean grama grass was that good?

18 Griffin, George

GG: That's right.

AR: It has, it's a high protein grass.

GG: That's right.

AR: And you can fatten, especially in the fall after it seeds, you can fatten them just like they're on corn.

GG: That's right.

AR: The ground here isn't leached out from irrigation either. It produces far more nutritious than your hay.

GG: Oh yes!

AR: How about that?

NM: You don't believe-

AR: No, it's a good thing I came so I could learn something, see? Well, and then, too, the grass is more nutritious and then the weather is milder than it is in the valley. It takes a lot more feed when it's cold and that wind, when they don't have any shelter-

GG: That's right.

AR: What's the shelter?

GG: These pinyon trees and these little draws they can get in out of the wind cause the draws run every direction, whichever the wind blows, they always got-

AR: Natural windbreaks.

GG: One they can get into.

AR: They're smart, that way, right?

GG: They sure are.

AR: Learn. Your grandfather or great grandfather I saw the name Ouray, that Ouray lived with his tribe in Canon up to 1875, and that your grandfather, Mr. Griffin, is that your great grandfather?

GG: I don't know.

AR: The Mr. Griffin knew Chief Ouray very well.

GG: Oh, that was both of them.

AR: Your grandfather and great grandfather?

GG: Yes.

AR: Now there's another, a relative of yours, Mr. Shepherd, I think you called him [unintelligible]

GG: Yes.

AR: Well, and he told a story about going to the valley with the Germans, and did they come up over Oak Creek?

GG: Yes.

AR: They came through Oak Creek, didn't they? And I think I remember that he told was that they, well, I don't know why a German had a bagpipe, but he was talking about them playing bagpipes and did he lead them in here, or was he just along-

GG: He was just along with them.

AR: Just for fun, uh huh. But they came over Oak Creek.

GG: I heard him say lots of times he even carried horns and he couldn't play a tune- (laughter) He carried horns.

AR: Uh huh. Now, I have heard in doing these interviews now I've had the people come in from all directions. One of the last ones told me they came up to Pueblo and up the Huerfano River and into the Gardner country.

NG: Why would they go from Pueblo to Gardner for heaven's sake?

AR: Don't ask me! I think they helicoptered them in here, if you want—

GG: No, I'm sure they came through Canon cause Uncle Eames' folks was living there.

AR: They camped down there, didn't they? That was the story he told me. They camped down there in Canon or down in that country-

GG: The Shepherds homesteaded on Lincoln Park.

NG: Yes.

GG: That's where Dorothy lives there now. That was part of their old-

NG: Was that part of their-

GG: Yeah, that, on the abstract, shows that that goes back to the Shepherds.

AR: Shepherds. Well, of course, now maybe we're talking about two different ranches in this German thing. The one I'm speaking of is the one from Chicago.

GG: Oh, I don't know which one he was with.

AR: And then I understand there was a migration straight from Germany, is that right, Betty?

BM: I don't know. The only migration I ever knew anything about was the one from Chicago. They came from Germany and then came on to Chicago and they named their first colony Colfax because there was someone, Schuyler Colfax was a, had a high office in Washington and I think maybe he had something to do with the Department of Interior. I'd have to look that up. Anyway, Colfax was named for him.

AR: OH. Well, there should be some really good stories about this Oak Creek grade and traffic on it.

BM: About what?

AR: About Oak Creek grade and traffic on it. Surely, there was a wagon or two that went over.

GG: Oh yes. I've heard that.

AR: Mrs. Balick went off and her husband, I imagine, or her- I read the other day of a Balick in Coal Creek dying and I'm not sure if it was connected to that, the connection. You remember the back door [unintelligible] down here above the picnic grounds, wasn't it? On that little high-

GG: Yeah, right across [unintelligible] just this side of the bridge.

AR: Yes. She backed her horse off; did it break her neck?

GG: I think it did.

AR: She broke her neck. Broke her neck and killed her. And she was the wife of one of the Westcliffe Balicks.

GG: She'd have been Lyle Baldick's great grandmother, wouldn't she?

AR: Well, I suppose so and then some of her people moved to Coal Creek because I met, there's a girl in that family that teaches and I've met her at college in various places and she's a relative of the woman that went off the-

GG: And I heard dad talk about a freight outfit went off a, what you'd call a cave down there, sharp corner, brake, broke and he went straight off over there.

AR: That sounds like a-

GG: That was a good one, I guess.

BM: Then there were two automobile accidents on Oak Creek.

GG: Yeah, but you know, there's only been one or two real serious -

BM: No

GG: This side, the other side of the grade or this side?

BM: The one I remember was the man, wasn't there a Davis family that lived up here?

AR: Davis. Well, didn't he get killed?

21 Griffin, George

GG: No, killed the other two men.

AR: Oh, killed the other two. Two men.

BM: But it was hunting season, wasn't it?

GG: Uh huh.

BM: And they drove off in the fog.

GG: They drove off over Cape Horn? too.

AR: Uh huh, off Cape Horn?

GG: And he rode that car clear to the bottom.

AR: And he didn't, they scalped him, didn't it?

GG: Scalped him. His head [unintelligible] was all laying out on the back of his head. His name was Lawrence.

AR: Yes, I remember but he was-

GG: His brother-in-law did it.

BM: Well, Alma Jane wrote that rode a car off there too, didn't she?

GG: But that was furniture that was put on the other side.

BM: Oh, on the other side.

AR: Would you mind marking this Cape Horn and I will go slower, you know?

GG: Well, at the last sharp corner going down the grade after you going down the other way.

AR: Towards Canon.

BM: Oh yes. I can believe that. That's quite a grade, isn't it?

AR: Mmhmm.

BM: I thought we were only supposed to have such and such a percent but I think that goes along the yard.

GG: Well, the steep part is up just right there by the cattle guard, really, according to survey. That's supposed to be a 19% grade there by that cattle guard.

AR: When you're going up it, you believe it too, don't you? (laughter)

GG: Yeah.

AR: A lot of people put trains on there, don't they?

GG: Some of them don't like me.

BM: My dad too.

GG: Her husband come along and pulled me out of there one time and I was sure glad.

AR: Who did?

GG: Dan.

BM: Oh, did he?

GG: Yes. That's been five or six years ago. Mother was still alive.

AR: Didn't know quite what you were doing down there, right? But Dorothy drove Guy's car over that, [unintelligible] didn't she?

GG: Yeah.

AR: Donna drives it every day twice a day with the kids, right?

GG: Yeah.

AR: Let's get them out the bottom of the grade where it's really no trick to drive.

GG: No, and then the school board says it's too dangerous [unintelligible] the grade with children and there's been more accidents-

AR: On the other side!

GG: The canyon than there ever was on the grade.

AR: Remember when I was in high school, the kids that got killed on the other side of the grade. Betsy Blythenap got killed and then Debbie [unintelligible] Wallace, kids that got hurt.

BM: They got down the grade. They put, they had the brakes out of the car, why it all happened and so they blocked the car with rocks all the way down the grade and knowing the brakes were out, they had to be speeding. Because I thought I had taken my car out of gear at the top of that dopey hill and it cannot pick up enough speed by itself to wreck, cause I tried it, you know, just to-and they were, just must have been going like the wind, but anyway, they got it down off the grade, and that always seemed-that's a miracle to get it off the grade and then get some of them killed after they got down that.

GG: Yeah. If they'd made one more corner, they'd have been alright.

BM: They'd have been alright.

GG: That was Dill Berry's boy that was driving.

BM: Yes. Uh huh. He was the most notorious driver we ever had in high school and you know, they, that parkway used to be in front of the high school down there, and he just go around and round every noon. I'm surprised he didn't wreck down there on Main St. inside of coming up here to the mountains to do it.

AR: Why do you think we don't have too many wrecks on, well, pretty dangerous roads, George?

GG: I think people just drive more carefully.

BM: And respect those mountains.

GG: Yeah.

AR: I think that's very true because we get down on the flatlands where there's that 70 miles an hour and we're forever having big wrecks and so forth.

GG: But most people, especially tourists, when they get in the mountains, they don't drive as fast.

BM: The only trouble is they want to hug that bank something awful and want you to hang over-

GG: They don't always want to stay on their own side of the road on the curves either.

AR: Right.

GG: They're afraid to get out-

BM: They come too fast around those [unintelligible] sometimes.

GG: Yeah. I have a rifle in here that belonged to my great grandad. He brought it out here with him when he come from Ohio.

AR: What is it?

GG: It's an old muzzle loader.

AR: Muzzle loader?

GG: Double barrel.

AR: Doesn't have a brand name?

GG: I think that's the fellow whose name is on it – B.C. Wood.

AR: Oh. Have you every fired it?

GG: No.

AR: Would you be afraid to fire it?

GG: I sure would! (laughing)

AR: You wouldn't even know how to start loading it, would you? I wouldn't.

24 Griffin, George

GG: They say on that, you just put a cap on this. It's already got the lens at the bottom of the barrel.

AR: Oh really! Have you always kept that pretty high up away from the kids?

GG: That's right. There up on the wall-

AR: That doesn't sound like anything to fool around with, does it?

GG: No, they sure like guns. It's in perfect condition.

AR: What kind of guns do you use now?

GG: I've got a 22 and 30 aught 6. I don't use any of them.

AR: But men have to collect them, is that right?

GG: Oh yeah, you always got to have one or two.

AR: Mmhmm. What, was either your father or great grandfather a hunter, really enjoyed hunting?

GG: Oh, my grandad did and so did my great grandad. Dad never cared about it.

AR: And evidently, you don't much either.

GG: No, I used to hunt a little and I haven't hunted for, '47, fall of '47 was when-

BM: We had a big deer hunt over here.

GG: That's the last year I went hunting.

AR: Mmhmm. George, I can't find it now, but I think perhaps in here, there's something about a murder at the cheese factory in Westcliffe. Do you know anything about that?

GG: No. I don't believe there's anything in there about that day.

AR: I thought it was this paper, the last, I thought maybe you could-

GG: No. I don't believe; I don't ever remember hearing grandad saying anything about it.

AR: Uh huh. I wish you could think of that or we could track that down because someone else made reference to it. No, I read it in something about the history of Custer County recently and it made some reference to the untimely murder of so and so at the cheese factory, you know? And that's all it said. So, that's a good mystery. We're going to have to trace it down.

BM: Oh, in the '70s, a cheese factory was started in the Wet Mountain valley close to Westcliffe. It was in charge of a master by the name of Reginald Nieve and his family were friends of a family by the name of Price. They had a son named Theodore who was the black sheep of their family and had been in South America and in trouble there. Consent was given and he arrived. Well, uh, he stayed there for a while, and then one night, this Price stayed there for a while, and then one night, the men were having a smoking and drinking party at the factory. Much liquor was consumed, Price taking more than the others. During the

evening, some of the men had laid their pipes down on the table. Price picked them up and placed them in his pocket. Then they just had [unintelligible] on the table. Nieve wanted a smoke and seeing his pipe in Price's pocket, reached over and took it. Price woke up and asked what he was doing. Nieve replied that he was just taking his pipe. Price said, you'd better be careful how you put your hands on a gentleman's pocket. That gentleman might get nasty. Nieve answered that he didn't care how nasty he got, so he walked, Price got up and walked out of the front door of, he was seen to pass the door a few times, then called to Nieve to come out, saying, come out here, old man. I want to talk to you. Nieve hesitated and went out. He immediately came back with a folding dirk knife in his hands. He was trying to close and remarked his cufflink. He walked on through the house and fell head on into the glass door then. He'd been stabbed in the heart.

GG: I'm sure I don't remember reading that in there.

BM: Price came back in the house and made a statement that he had [unintelligible] the life and had not stabbed Nieve. Later on, in the night, when he had sobered up a little, he said, I've cut many a man but this is the first time that I ever cut a friend. In his trunk, they found many dirk knives which evidently had been used in other affrays. He was brought to trial. George Griffin was called for jury duty but didn't serve. However, he attended the entire trial. Tom Maken, an attorney from Canon, is in the prosecution. He had been a close friend of Nieve whose friends paid Maken \$1000 for his services in the case. Price was defended by Henry Keller, later senator from Colorado, and an English barrister who was sent over from England by the Price family who were very rich. Tom Maken, to the surprise of many, did not ask for the death penalty. Price was found guilty and sentenced to the penitentiary for life.

GG: Well, I don't remember-

End of tape.

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