The following transcript was provided to Archives and Special Collections by the Upper Swan Valley Historical Society with its associated audio recording.
Suzanne Vernon: (Discussion about Bar 33, Barber Creek area.)

Robert Martin: Babe and Eva they took care of the ranch and the White’s took care of the Lodge. They built the Lodge, they owned it jointly. Babe had the sawmill. Where they go the lumber. But then they split up. Babe took the outfitting business and the horses, and the ranch. The Whites took over the Lodge.

The ranch was just an outfitting business. They had, as many as, forty, forty-five head of horses. Always twenty-five or thirty. That was their business, was taking parties into the Bob Marshall Wilderness. The summer. . . almost always over Holland. In those days, they had to go clear up almost up to the lookout to get across. Then they built that trail up the canyon and I helped on that trail. I helped locate that trail. I had a short pack string. A government pack string. I packed the supplies, the gasoline, the dynamite. When I wasn’t doing that I’d help the boss locate trail. So that’s when the trail went up the canyon. They started that in ’37. I went to work on it in ‘38. I quit the Forest Service in ’37, and I worked for the Gordon Ranch. Then I went back for the Forest Service in ’38, that’s when they finished that Holland Canyon trail.

SV: Now did it go up the bottom from the side where the packer camp is?

RM: It went up about to where the Foothill Trail takes off. You could see it, where they go around, quite a ways above the lake. And there’s places there, if a horse falls off, he’s gonna end up a thousand feet below, practically in the lake. That trail goes around there almost level, until it comes into the canyon, above the falls. It crossed the creek above the falls. Then it crossed back over up about two and a half or three miles farther.

SV: So the first trail was the lookout trail. . .

RM: It was a lookout trail, only you didn’t have to go clear up to the lookout. But it was that trail, you probably omitted 800 to maybe a thousand feet of climb to where you could get through a little notch in there and come down on the Bob Marshall side.

SV: Did you ever go in with the Wilhelms?

RM: Yeah, but not on their. . . well, I did. After I got out of high school I went in with hunting parties. But I got in a few times when they’d have a trip in the fall, after I got off the Forest
Service, well I got in there a few times. I got in on the hunting parties quite a few times. And I took people in for Art White, and also went in with Babe’s outfit.

SV: Did Art White take hunters in then, too?

RM: Well, they had the Keewaydins. You’ve heard of them. That was their big thing. They’d have twenty, twenty-five, thirty, maybe thirty-five girls there. That was an interesting thing for us young fellas around. We took notice of it. But then Art took parties in in the fall, too. They didn’t have much of an outfit. I took three guys in one time. I took two guys in another time. Then I took one guy in. You always got your elk if that was what you were after.

SV: Were they trophy hunters?

RM: Some of them were. Well, they wanted horns. At that time, the season opened the fifteenth of September and it was bulls only until the middle of October, then it was anything. But they had that early bull season. I never had anybody that was set on getting a huge rack.

SV: The pack strings were bigger with the Wilhelms?

RM: The Wilhelms had the pack strings. They could put up two or three pack strings. Art had enough horses for these girls, and enough for a few pack horses. They probably had about the same amount of stock. But they weren’t in that business. That Keewaydin club was about all they could handle while they were there.

SV: They would have taken care of them completely at the Lodge?

RM: Yeah, then they took them through the South Fork.

SV: They came out at Ovando?

RM: They had, see I forget the name of the outfit that had the boys. They crossed in the South Fork. Then they’d have the boys there for just a short while. Then the girls would be over there for just a short while. Quite a number of my friends packed for that outfit. (Can’t remember the name.)

But, Babe’s packing was fishing trips in the summer and hunting trips in the falls.

SV: And fishing was pretty good?

RM: Oh, yeah. I haven’t been in the South Fork for a long time.

SV: Did they fish mostly with flies?
RM: Anything. It was wonderful fly fishing. If that was slow, why lures, anything. When I worked for the Forest Service, all I had with me was a little short, steel casting rod and a pocket full of daredevils. Would catch all the fish I needed anywhere I happened to be. Then the little creeks, well you could catch grasshoppers and just use a plain hook.

SV: Did you ever run into bears?

RM: I never really hunted for a bear. I had no desire to kill them. I’ve killed quite a few bear. Yes. The first summer I was here, (1934?) I was on a trail crew. We cut out the Fatty Creek trail, cut it out to Cedar Lookout. The Foothill Trail over to Piper Creek. Then we started working, on the -- they were building the trail to Van Mountain, and I worked over there. They got a big fire up there in the Missions (August?). They shipped our trail crew, there was four or five of us, up on that. That fire. It was west of Hemlock Lookout. That was the end of the trail. It almost took a mountain goat to get over there. They couldn’t get stock over there. So all the food was carried over there on their backs. Anyway, I ended up over there. I’m able bodied and climb mountains and so I ended up packing water for the fire. The fire was on this hill. . . it was what they call a little hanging valley. The fire was up here. They had sixty, seventy men. . . They had twenty men crew from Bigfork and they had, I don’t know how many three C’s they had from Goat Creek. Maybe thirty, forty. So these three C’s, these boys are from the East. The guys on the fire line, sometimes they didn’t get a drink of water all day. So they put me packing water and I made two trips. Everybody got a drink the forenoon, and everybody got a drink in the afternoon. The extra water I left up on top for the cook. They camped right on top.

Anyway, there was a little trickle of water that came out of this rock cliff. This little hanging valley. Grassy bottom, oh, as wide as from here to the shop (100 yards). Smooth like a park. A little trickle of water. So I had a piece of bark propped up there. I’d carry a five-gallon backpack, and two one-gallon canteens. It would take a half hour to fill these up. So I’m sitting there about half asleep. And I never saw a grizzly bear, but I knew darn well what it was when I saw him! He’s walking right up in front of me. He’s about as far as from here to that woodshed there (50 feet). I’ve got my back up against a cliff. There isn’t a tree, till you get up on the hill on the other side. So I’m not breathing. He’s limping on one front foot. He wasn’t a real big grizzly, that high (three feet) at the shoulder. I knew what he was. That hump on the shoulders. So he’s limping and he got right opposite me and he stopped and he could hear the axes and shovels up the hill. He’d listen quite awhile. Then he turned and started back down. When he got, oh, about as far as from here to the shop, I let out a big war whoop! I later learned that that could have been a mistake. But that broke him into a run. He quit limping and he ran and then he left. I had no gun, my back right against the wall. After that I hadda have a gun when I went out. So that was my first grizzly. He was grizzly colored, the hump on his back. You could tell. I’d seen lots of blacks and brown bear.

So, I packed water, two trips a day down this mountain like this probably a thousand feet elevation. until they decided the fire was okay and they all pulled out. So I stayed over at the lookout (Hemlock Lookout). I came across here and patrolled that fire everyday by myself. That
went on for about two weeks and I had to go to school, so anyway they pulled me off of there. They thought it was safe. See, I’d report on how many smokes I saw or how many hot spots I dug out of the fireline. Actually, that was my first job. I knew better than to leave that fire. That’s what I shoulda told them. “You gotta have somebody here.” Because I knew that if a big wind come up and, in these little deals that come right up outta the bear grass, right in the edge of the fireline. I’d dig them out. I’d dig out two or three, sometimes a half a dozen a day. But there was two days that I didn’t dig out any hotspots and that’s when they decided to bunch it. So, it wasn’t a week until a big wind come up and blew it out of there and it burned up about twice as much as it already had.

SV: That was late summer, too?

RM: Yeah, I had to go to school about the tenth of September.

SV: It’s not uncommon for a big wind in that area?

RM: Oh no, on that mountain?

SV: So then they had to start all over with the crews . . .

RM: Yeah. And you couldn’t get pack stock in there. There was quite a bit of grub in there that they left. They usually just walk off and leave that so each day on the trip back to the lookout I’d take back a load of food, to the lookout. So when the fire blew up they got ahold of me and they wanted to know where the food was cached. I told them I packed it all back to the lookout!

SV: That’s one thing everybody remembers about the Forest Service, is the food.

RM: It was good food. People who had been there awhile, (then) everybody was kicking about (food). . . but it was really good food. The same way with the Army. Everybody kicks about the food but it’s really good food. And any guy that ever first went in the Army probably put on about fifteen or twenty pounds right away. Because they had to go to bed early. They quit tomcatting around and they ate three big meals a day.

SV: Were you in the Army?

RM: Oh yes. I give them three years, eight months and eight days. (WWII) All through North Africa and up into Sardinia. I was in a bomb outfit. I was a gunner. But I went to mechanics school, too. I could have been an engineer. But I wanted so bad to get out of where I was, the gunner deal came up first. So I went to gunner school and got in there. I made it back. . . and over half of them didn’t. Half of the flying crew, 53% didn’t come back. We lost almost half of those in the states in three months training. They had a brand new ship and a brand new engine and it had lots of bugs in it and they had nobody, didn’t have enough people qualified to
fly that hot a ship. It was a B-26, Martin-Rodder (?). After they got the bugs out of it well, it turned out to be a pretty good outfit. So anyway, I came back.

SV: Were you married before you went in?

RM: Yeah. About the time I went in the Army. . . see I hadn’t planned on getting married for a long time. About the time I was going in the Army well, I knew this sweet little girl over there (points to his wife in the room). And I kept track of her for five or six years. She was a freshmen and I was a senior. I kept track of her for five or six years. So I thought well, I better make my move. She might not be around when I get back. So, I got a ring for her. We were married in Fort Wayne, Indiana just before I took off overseas.

SV: Was she from Missoula?

RM: Yeah. 1942 we were married. Had two boys, later. One (Robert Norman) was in the military, retired as a full colonel the summer before last. Took a job with Weyerhauser as an engineer. Ronald L. lives up on Little Bitterroot Lake.

[Break in audio]

SV: Between 1934, and 1935, you were still finishing school. Then you kept working for the Forest Service the next spring?

RM: Yeah. They wrote me a letter and wanted me to come back. That year they set a date I was supposed to start. It was a week before school was out. I didn’t know how to handle things like that. So I went around and took my exams a week early, and got out a week early. But the next year I stayed for graduation.

SV: So you would have been about 17?

RM: Yeah. Well, they sent Johnny Hulett and I up to a smoke chaser school up at Coram. When we came back. Johnny went on the trail crew, but they put me on Jim Lookout. They just built the 50-foot tower the year before. Standard lookout on the top of it. But they had a two-story log structure. The flooring, the planks were hewed out with an adze, and a map board up above. So I tore that down and cut it all into firewood. I had to paint that darn lookout twice. It didn’t have any paint on it. It had 180 panes of glass besides what was in the door. I had to paint all those styles. That was a tedious, miserable job. But I painted it twice. A dark green. You know, so it was restful on the eyes. But the lookout, on the outside was painted white. But the shutters were painted dark green. Everything you looked at except the catwalk railing, was dark green. Fifty-foot up. When the wind blowed, it would sway a little bit. You couldn’t tighten those guys up too tight, because when it got cold it would tighten up too much and maybe pull into the wood. When it was hot, well, there was enough slack. . .
SV: Did you get a lot of wind up there?

RM: Not too much on Jim. It was a low lookout. It was down on a ridge kinda overlooking the valley. But we didn’t get a lot of wind there. But these high lookouts, sometimes it would tear all the shutters off of them.

SV: What could you see?

RM: I could see the whole valley and the canyons on the other side.

SV: Did you get any big storms that summer?

RM: They had a deal then you had to record all the lightning strikes. Night after night, we’d set there so sleepy you couldn’t stay away. You’d put a tissue paper over your map. You’d take a reading on it (each lightning strike) with the aledaid, and you’d put the time down on it. They give that up though. Not only was it miserable for the guys doin’ it but the bookkeeping must have been, I think they probably threw it all in the wastebasket. But the idea was we’d all synchronize the watches. So, he takes a shot here, gives a reading on it, I give a reading on it. When I put the dot I put the time. So they could pinpoint that spot. When you get a thousand strikes and you get ten fires, or five fires, well what’s the point of having . . . ? Anyway it didn’t work and we all knew it didn’t work. They wised up.

If you saw a flare-up, you took a reading on that. After every storm well everybody turned in a flare up, so. They could pin point that then if two people got a reading on this flare-up. That’s when a tree crowned out. Like a candle.

SV: What were the trees like around that lookout?

RM: Well, it wasn’t any big old growth. But up the ridge in back, where it broke over was lodgepole and cedar and everything so thick you could hardly crawl through it. But my water was a level trail around the hill. For about a little over a quarter of a mile. That was level. There was some decent size larch in there, kinda opened up. Lot of huckleberries. Huckleberries, sometimes I’d carry two five gallon backpacks. Then the next time I’d report in for my water hauling, I’d go pick huckleberries.

SV: Bears?

RM: Oh, yeah. There were bears everywhere. Plenty grizzlies in the Missions at that time. You were more apt to run into them up in the high country. Harry Harmon manned Cedar for years. He saw a lot of them. He had a few run-ins with them and he claimed his old airedale saved his life a couple of times. Probably he wouldn’t even have known a bear was around if the dog hadn’t . . . .
But anyway, one time the dog saved Harry and that bear hit ole Jack and knocked him thirty, forty feet. (Dog’s name was Jack) But Harry got up a tree and the bear left. The dog kept the bear busy till Harry got up a tree. But the old dog, he’s still laying there when Harry got down. He went over there and he checked him over. He finally decided he was still alive. So he emptied out his packsack and put the dog in his packsack and packed him home. That dog, he had a ridge a quarter of an inch where his skull was mismatched. Now, how that dog could have... it cracked his head. How could that dog live? A definite ridge. You could feel it. And then he had other places that weren’t too good, either. He lived to be an old dog.

SV: Airedales must be tough.

RM: Oh they’re tough. They’ll fight anything on the face of the earth.

SV: You didn’t have a dog with you on the lookout?

RM: No.

SV: The Cedar Lookout he was on was high?

RM: High, yeah. Right on top of the world. I was up there a few times. In fact I cut the trail out up there. Clarence Preston and I in 1934 cut the trail out to Cedar Lookout. Harry was there, then.

SV: The bears must have liked something up high.

RM: I don’t know. I guess you had them down low, too. It seemed like you’d see more of them, the grizzlies, up high. This old dog of Harry’s, I don’t remember what year it was, the fire season ended rather soon. So we were going to cut out some trails that hadn’t got cut out in the spring. So they moved us over Elk Creek. Harry was there, and I, and I think there was four of us. Oscar Southern was probably one of them. A darn bear was in the tent camp. Had to leave one guy in the camp to keep the darn bear out. So Harry went home on the weekend. I don’t know where he’d left his dog. So, Harry went home on the weekend and he came back with his dog. The dog was well behaved. He’d tell him to stay there and he would do that.

[End of Tape 1, Side A]
RM: (from notes, then on tape. . . ) So dark came, and here came the bear. So the dog took to
him and put him up a pine tree that was rather clean, and about this big (30 inches?) The bear
went up there thirty, forty feet, and he hasn’t found a place where he can rest yet, and he’s
grumbling. It was a big brown bear. The dog he was trying to climb the tree, ole Jack was. So
Harry had a twenty-two special, Winchester slide action with a hammer. So he went around it.
The bear was hanging on like this. (?) So he shot through the front foot. The foot came loose
and the bear almost fell. But he finally got a hold. Harry went around on the other side and shot
him through the other front foot, and down he came! He just missed that dog that much. He
would have drove him clear into the ground. We all thought that bear would be dead. Because
when he hit, he was a big bear, but he wasn’t no higher than that. He hit right on his rump. But
he was on his feet and the dog had him right on his rump. That’s the last we saw the bear, the
dog. . . the dog was hanging on. That bear never came back! It was kinda exciting and funny.
But it would have killed that dog if that bear would have hit him, falling thirty, forty feet.
Straight up. He came down, I bet his nose wasn’t that high from the ground. But it didn’t bother
him. Shot through the front foot, that didn’t slow him up either.

SV: That was some dog. . .

RM: Oh, he’d tie into anything. He had a hold of him right in the rump, and he was hanging on.
That bear was giving him a ride. We used to have a lot of trouble with bears, and they were
protected in those days, just set for hunting season. (They became a game animal, could only
shoot them during hunting season.) But they had a way of handling these things. I was on Jim
Lookout, and Lloyd Smith, who became a very good friend of mine, even down here, he was on
Windfall Creek. There was a tent camp there. They had a little platform about ten feet high with
a map board and phone. He was in this tent, and he heard a little noise. This bear, and he was a
big one I guess, and he came in the tent flaps in the front. Lloyd didn’t have a gun. Lloyd rolled
out under the tent on the back side, and got up on his platform. But he took an axe up with
him. So Lloyd and I were on the same phone and we could visit anytime we wanted to, when
they didn’t plug it in at the station. We had our own little signals. One flip, and just one ding. So
along, two o’clock in the morning, my phone dinged. You know, when you are living alone like
that you hear anything. So I got up and I wondered what. . . Well, Lloyd was up on the platform
and the bear was tearing up his camp. He stayed up there until the bear left. So, anyway, we
visited quite awhile, and Lloyd said, “I think I see a fire!” It was that Goat Creek fire, that Napa
Fire. Burnt that whole thing off up there. They figured huckleberry people camped up there set
it, let it get away. Before long I could see the glow of it. About two o’clock in the morning was
when that fire was discovered and Lloyd discovered it, because the bear had him treed!

But anyway, the tent and everything was torn up. And so, Rudy Kaser brought a packhorse up
to bring him some more grub, and whatever he needed. I think it was part of the settlement
that Lloyd would have a gun. Rudy brought him a .45-90, Model 86 Winchester. We never heard
about this bear anymore. . . When they got too troublesome, well, something happened to
them and nobody talked about it. How could a guy live out in a tent with a bear? He didn’t even have enough food for breakfast! He cleaned up everything. They’d mess it up. They chomp the cans, see. Lick the juice out of them. Crumple all the cans. One that’s educated with this kind of food. So that’s how that Napa Burn was discovered at two o’clock in the morning.

Lloyd’s been dead for many years. We were good friends for many years, even down here. He wasn’t from up there. But Lloyd and I worked, I had him on a trail crew one spring up there. Just Lloyd and I together, up there, we had a lot of fun. Cut out all those trails around Lindbergh Lake. Camped at the Guard Station there at Lindbergh lake. Only then it was Elbow Lake. (Before the blow down of 1949). I think that Blow Down was in 1949, because Ting and I went up there on snowshoes and looked around, thinking to get a timber sale. The whole country was blown down. But shortly after that, I moved to Swan Lake, so it had to be, I’m sure it was ‘49, maybe even ‘48.

SV: When you were cutting out trails up there, where were they to?

RM: There were trails all over. Mostly you had trails, you’d have a foothill trail up out of the valley floor. That would go along and all the other trails would cross it. Would hook up. But the trails went to the Lookout, and the trails, well, starting at the upper end. You had a trail to Summit Lake (can’t remember the name of that lake) but you had a trail in on the south side of Holland Lake, and the Gordon Trail and then the trail up the canyon. Then you had a foothill trail that took off down this way, up out of the valley floor, 500 feet or so, maybe sometimes a thousand. You got down to, past Cooney, and you got down to Smith Creek, see the trail over the top, then you got down to Lion Creek, the Foothills Trail is coming, but the trails over the top... all hooked up with the road in the valley. You had Lion Creek, then Squeezer Creek, that trail didn’t go up too high. Goat Creek, that trail went clear up over the top. Soup Creek, that trail goes up over the top. Then Cilly Creek, that trail hooked up with a trail up on top. That’s that knob up here. South Lost had a trail went over the top. North Lost was here, the trail didn’t go over the top, just up into the canyon. But the Wire Trail on this side of it went clear over and up to Thunderbolt Lookout.

SV: What about on the Missions side?

RM: They had trails everywhere. The Missions side is more, it’s not a clean range like it is over here. See, this was all glacier. This is the sunny side. So it melted off. And your canyons are more or less straight. But over on this side, you had these little glaciers pushing out of every canyon. The big glaciers moving this way. So all of these canyons over there, on the lower end of them, bend downstream. That’s because the glacier was moving while these were moving out. But this side, see, is more... there was glaciers coming out of here. But it was on the sunny side and you didn’t end up with a lot of foothills like you did over there.

SV: When you were working on trails near Lindbergh, did you remember where the burn area was then? There was a fire in there in 1908.
RM: Well, yeah, you hit that old burn that came practically over to Lindbergh Lake. That road, before you broke down to the Lodge and the Forest Service Guard Station, the edge of that was in that burn. It burned up that canyon a ways, the one that’s just north of that lookout. It burned up to the Divide, looking into Glacier Creek. This was an old burn when I first came there. Then the big burn, the ‘29 burn, that burned the whole west side. When I first came here in ‘34, we used to hunt horses over there. Because there was no fences. You could get up on a knoll and you could look all over that whole west side. It took everything. You had a few standing larch trees, snags and once in a while one was still alive. It burned everything. It was hot. They had the fire camp there at Wilhelms place. They felt pretty good because they had the fire camp there. It crossed the river a time or two. But they managed to knock it down.

SV: When you were up around Lindbergh, were there bears?

RM: I didn’t put in any trails in there, we cut the trails out. Maintained them in the spring. The only trail that was put in here after I was here was that Van Mountain trail. I worked on that in 1934. We got it about a third of the way up and then they run us all off on fire.

SV: You ended up hiking and packing a lot of these trails.

RM: You did a lot of it in those days. Like a postman’s holiday, you know. You’d go out and climb a mountain. But hunting, everybody was a hunter.

SV: Were there very many elk on the Missions side in the valley bottom.

RM: I think, and a lot of people think it, that that early bull season in the South Fork, put elk over the top, see. You got a bunch of elk up high. A bunch of hunters get in there and shoot them up and some of them come over the top and they stay there till the snow gets so deep and they don’t go back. So then they come down this side. That’s what put the elk . . .

The Fenby’s (?) was a friend of mine. In fact I logged for him for quite a few years. Was down here at that time. He told me the first time he ever saw an elk down here was 1936. They saw two or three head up Bond Creek. Up there there were elk on Spook Ridge, that ridge between east of the highway, south of Barber Creek, and north of Holland Creek, Lake. There was elk in there. Then there finally got to be a bunch on the other side. They just gradually spread.

SV: Elk Creek was probably named for elk at some point.

RM: Probably was.

SV: Do you ever remember seeing wolverine?

Robert “Bob” Martin Interview, OH 422-091, 092, Archives and Special Collections, Mansfield Library, University of Montana-Missoula.
RM: I saw one wolverine and it was in a trap. I was logging over across the river here. One of the guys working for me, one of the sawyers, trapped. In an old high-water wash, he’d taken a deer head and stuffed it back under this, so the trap wouldn’t be snowed under. You’ve got a problem of trapping in the winter. So, we all knew that there was five or six guys working for me, and we knew this trap was there. One morning that trap was all torn to pieces. Course, Joe knew about this. He said, if you see a wolverine track, in a week or ten days or two weeks, he’ll come back over the same route. They travel and they travel pretty fast. You got a wolverine in that number 4 Victor trap, and he tore it all apart. In that trap, on the jaws on that trap, had grooves that I know had to be five or six thousandths deep. I mean, that’s just paper thin, right in the metal, and they were white from the teeth. From his teeth. He could bite hard enough that he put a groove in the jaws on that trap. So Joe got a bigger trap. He set it, and he said, He’ll be back in a couple of weeks. Well, it probably wasn’t but another one at least came by. So I’m first this morning and I got a couple of guys with me. “You got a wolverine there!” And that trap was hooked on about eight foot of wire. So we got out and we’re waiting for Joe to come along. All the time we were there that wolverine was trying to get to us. He was pulling and scratching. That trap was on a hind foot. He wanted to get to us. And a deep growl that sounded like it musta come from a big animal. All he wanted was to get to us. There was no sign of fear or anything. So Joe came along and had a twenty-two.

(Joe Lawrence. Now, there was a family of them here. Billy Lawrence. They had the ranch on Soup Creek. And I worked with Billy up there, they come up there one spring. Billy and Harry Harmon and I cut out a lot of trails on the Missions side. We had two pack horses and we just packed up each morning. They’d tag along, because there was so much distance, you’d spend all your time walking back to camp. So that was Billy Lawrence. That was the old man.)

SV: Do you remember seeing lynx?

RM: Oh yeah, I’ve seen them. But to see their tracks in the snow you might not know a lynx from a bobcat. I’m sure I’ve seen a lynx or two, they are tall and higher behind. But the same thing applies to a bobcat. But you gotta be up close. I guess a lynx has got bigger tassles on his ears. There was a lynx cross the meadow here, one of the Lawrence boys was driving cat for me, but Peggy and the boys saw it, and he saw it. That was in May or so.

SV: This is a nice spot here. Lots of wildlife. Any bears?

RM: That bear took this house apart, see the tracks? (He has a bear paw print painted on the window.) They were muddy prints and Peggy painted them. But she didn’t, it was a grizzly, but she didn’t paint the end of the claws. The claw tips would have been out to about here. Boy he tore the house up. All these cupboards. Every window, except this, he knocked three or four panes of glass out of this one. He didn’t get there because he hit that big electric range and knocked the whole works over here, so that frig was in front of the window. So he didn’t get that one but he got everything else. Tore those cupboards up there. They didn’t fit too good

Robert “Bob” Martin Interview, OH 422-091, 092, Archives and Special Collections, Mansfield Library, University of Montana-Missoula.
when I put them back. He bent that hood up and tore it down. He went clear around the house looking in. Cuz all the glass was on the inside.

SV: Why did he want in so bad?

RM: Food. You should have seen this whole cupboard full of food. All down on the floor, a mess. And the cans, he chomped them open to get at them. There was lard and flour and beans and you name it. All kinds of canned vegetables and fruit. He tore the place up. We were working over in the Yellowstone, working for the state. I had to come back, we came in here late Friday night after driving from over around Bozeman. Got in here about two o’clock. I knew what it was. There was stuff scattered all over the front yard and the front door was tore down. At that time I generally carried a rifle cuz Peggy was scared of bears. But all I had was a pistol and the two cell flashlight was played out. I figured if I could get to the light switch I’d have a better chance than he did. But he wasn’t here. We scared him away. About an hour and a half later he tore the windows out of Buster’s house. But this place was a mess. So I just boarded it all up with plywood. When we finished the job we put new windows in.

SV: Where did you get the big fish? (Taxidermy on the wall.)

RM: I caught that up in Little Bitterroot Lake. That’s a Kamloops trout. It weighed 17 pounds and its 34 inches long. I let my, Ronnie, talk me into having it mounted and that was a mistake. It cost me $243.

SV: I bet you caught some in the South Fork that were that big?

RM: They had big bull trout in there, but 17 pounds is a big bull trout, too!

SV: Some people have told me stories of the Indian families. They used to hang the fish over the saddle horn. The tails would touch the ground?

RM: I kinda got a notion that was one story about one fish. But it was a fish story, I’m sure. That takes some. . . the biggest one of these Kamloops is around 35 pounds. Buster caught a 16 or 18 pounder (bull trout). I’ve caught many 10 pounders. Somebody says, “how come these are all ten pounders? You guessing at it?” No, I said. That’s as high as my scale goes! So that’s why I had a lot of ten pounders. Chances are some of them might have been twelve, fourteen pounds. I don’t know if I heard of a bull trout over 30 pounds.

SV: When did the fishing start to change around Swan Lake?

RM: Well, it was better when we first came down here (1950s). There’s more people fishing all the time. People are moving in here. And they come to this country because of the scenery and
the outdoors and the hunting and fishing. An awful lot of these people who come here are fishing enthusiasts. There’s just so much more fishing that it just won’t support it.

SV: Did you catch salmon?

RM: They put them in, there was no salmon in Holland Lake. But they planted that. When I came back after the war there was salmon in there, and in here. (Date is in the FWP records) So the fishing has been getting less every year. The people that catch fish now are the ones that know where to fish, when to fish and what to use. So a person comes in here, unless he can get a lot of help, it’s just pretty poor fishing.

SV: They’d have to come and ask people like you.

RM: I wouldn’t say I wouldn’t help them. But as a general thing, a fisherman is pretty close mouthed about where he caught a fish.

SV: Are you a bird watcher at all?

RM: No. We look at anything we got around here. Hummingbirds.

SV: Do you remember hearing very many owls when you were a kid?

RM: When we first moved to the lake, I can remember a big ole great horned owl, would sit in the cottonwood there right above the house. We lived down on the lake. Just once in a while you hear an owl.

SV: What about the buildings at the Bar 33 and Holland Lake Lodge? The lodge at Underwoods looks real similar to the Holland Lake Lodge.

RM: I helped build that (Underwoods, Pennypackers). When they bought that place, the little lodgepole cabin was there. We built the big one, that’s larch logs. The big one.

SV: Don’t you think that was similar to Holland Lake?

RM: Well, I suppose logs kinda look about the same anyway. No, I think they used a lot of slabs for the first lodge (Holland). From the sawmill. (More sawn lumber.)

SV: Did Babe build the second one, too?

RM: No, at that time it belonged to some people by the name of McKann’s (sp?). See Art White died, and they sold out and moved to Missoula. McKann’s came up there for their big opening. They worked there for two weeks, getting everything ready. There was a great big range in the cook part of this lodge.
(Off tape discussion)

That range got hot, the tin under the fire box. It burnt a hole in the floor. The whole thing was on fire underneath the stove before they realized what it was. The whole thing went up in smoke. About 1947. They built the new lodge the next winter, about 1948.

(Pennypackers: Bob and Peggy helped build the lodge at Pennypackers. Babe took a contract to build it. Babe always had plenty of husky help. Hank Holmes built the fireplace there. It was later torn down and rebuilt.)

[End of Tape 1, Side B]
SV: How was the Bar 33 built?

RM: Babe built that. He just built it. There was a thing about this building up there that you’ll notice, it’s pyramid, but the top is bopped off? Well, they wanted a third pitch roof, so these four that went from the center out to the corner they put those on a third pitch. But that made the sides, it was just like this... and after they got up there and could see what it was going to look like... well, they cut the top off. It was just a miscalculation there. See, this, you got a roof like this... the one that goes out to the corner is flatter than the one that goes up the side.

I helped, they had an old fella there that built the fireplace. Trying to think of his name. Anyway, I broke rocks for him. He’d want a rock of a certain shape, take a hammer and a chisel, get it marked and try to break it. Sometimes it would break where you wanted it to, and sometimes... Kimball was the name. He was good (at rockwork). Blackie was his son. He was a really a card shark, but he was entertaining to have around. They was there quite awhile. Most of the summer, I think.

SV: The building is designed to accommodate a lot of people. He knew when he first started building that ranch that he wanted a dude ranch?

RM: Well, he had a dude ranch. Yeah he built that so he had a lot of room. They came here with that idea. See, Art and Babe were brother-in-laws. They got that 99-year lease on Holland Lake. I don’t know if they got that to start with or not. This (Bar 33) was the old Halpin Ranch as I remember. The hill up there on the road was Halpin Hill. (sp?) The buildings were there. So that was where they kept the stock. And that’s where they put up the hay for the stock. That’s where they set up the sawmill to get the lumber to build the lodge. So they came there with the idea of going into the dude business.

But then, they split up. Babe kept the outfitting business and Art kept the other. Kept the lodge.

SV: Babe must have known horse stock.

RM: Oh yeah. And all the boys knew stock, too. My stock was on the farm, I could go out... when I was 12 years old I could go out and harness a team, go out and plow all day, mow all day or whatever it took. So I had that part, but I wasn’t into saddle horses and pack horses.

SV: Did you help with haying?

RM: Oh yeah, if I happened to be around.

SV: Were there bears around camp?
RM: We were over in the South Fork, and Babe was supposed to come in with a party. We’d taken one party out and there was four or five of us in there to cook. Three of us young boys and another young fella. So we waited and finally along on evening before dark we decided somebody oughta go out and see what the problem was. This outfit was supposed to be in here. Party of five as I remember. So we drew straws. I got the short straw. So I’m heading outta there about dark. Down below Shirttail Park, down on the Gordon. After the new Holland Trail was in. So I heads outta there. I had a dandy horse. He was a dark bay. Easy riding. So I’m coming down the canyon. Down there just before I got to the upper crossing, and this horse stopped. . . and he let out a snort. It’s so dark I can’t even see him. So I’m just hanging on. I don’t want to lose him. So I gripped the saddle, and I got the horn. I’m trying to hold him, and I don’t want to pull him over backwards. And he jumped off of the trail. It felt like he probably went down about six or eight feet. I’m petting him and talking to him and trying to calm him down. It’s so dark I can’t see! Finally I wanted to get up and lead him back up outta there. But I was afraid that if I got off I might lose him. So finally I coaxed him a little bit, after he calmed down and a couple of lunges, he was back up on the trail. He hated to go on down the trail. But I didn’t hurry him. Kept nudging him and talking to him. After we got down the trail a hundred yards it was fine. That was a bear, but I never knew what kind. That’s the only time I ever had trouble with a horse, when I thought it was a bear. But it kinda spooked me. I didn’t even have a flashlight. But that’s the way we were. You know, you didn’t think anything. All night coming outta the South Fork. The horse knew where to go, he was headed home. But something sure spooked him. I was scared because I was afraid I’d lose him. If he’d fall, and I couldn’t hold him. There I am, sure there’s a bear around, no horse, no light, no gun?

SV: You guys weren’t afraid, much. . .

RM: No, the time to be afraid was afterwards. I remember another night, Babe and I, camped over on Penant (Pendant?) Creek. Some people we knew, friends of Babe’s, course we knew most of the guys there. They had a party there at Shirrtail Park. Babe wanted to go down and see how they were doing. Babe and I went together. Babe was on a horse he just got from Nat Harmon. A white horse, tall, lean. They called him Eagle. I was on this same Jack again. We went down there and they had a, in fact they had one guy there, he was an alcoholic, and they had lotsa liquor. So we had dinner with them and we had a few drinks. So it’s dark. Babe and I decided we’d better get back to camp. We made it, but there again, just once in awhile I could see Babe’s horse. But there was no light. because a flashlight, unless you got a good one and lotsa batteries, it’s a detriment. You can’t walk out on a trail. . . you can walk better on a trail in the dark without a light than you can with one. Unless it’s just absolutely black.

SV: Boy you guys had some experiences.

RM: When I came back up here in ‘47 I got a job with the Wineglass. I was their master mechanic. A friend of mine, we’d worked for Cat together down in Boise. So I wrote and offered him a job. Well, he came up and left Emma there to sell the house. Andy and I did a little fishing. So we were gonna go up to Beanhole Lake. We went, what the heck is that other lake?
Bunyan Lake. We went around Bunyan Lake, and headed up to Beanhole Lake. I had a .22 pistol. Andy didn’t have anything. .22 automatic with ten shots. So we’re in one of these spruce bottom, where the ground is. . .not making a sound as you go along. There was weeds up tall, patches of them. All of a sudden this bear got up off the ground. I think we caught him asleep. He was about as far as from here to that door. I got my gun out. Didn’t want to have to tie into him. He wanted to leave, but he turned, in just a minute, and you couldn’t see but just like that! He’d face us. He’d whirl around and face us. Each time he did that all I lacked was just time enough to get a good bead before I pulled the trigger. He did that about four times. But anyway, after the second time, I had a pack sack on. I felt Andy was behind me. He was clawing at this pack sack. I thought, what did he panic or something? I had no experience with Andy and bears. Well, as it turned out I had a little Christmas tree axe. We were gonna build a raft. Andy was getting this ax outta my pack sack. After about four or five whirls, getting farther away each time, then he finally turned around and left. But each time I was preparing to shoot him. But I wanted to have good aim. He was grumbling and chomping. Clicking his teeth. He was a big bear. .Probably that big. Brown bear.

It’s amazing that we got so close without him knowing. Well, and then there was another thing, too. A lot of wildlife, especially mule deer, but a lot of animals, and a mountain lion. . . they’ll not move on the strength of not being detected. See, a cat, very seldom ever runs. When you come on a mountain lion, he’ll just crouch down and let you go by. Well, there was that possibility, this bear the last forty, fifty feet was hoping we wouldn’t come by where he was at. But it acted more like we’d startled him. It was kinda scary. I was wishing I’d had a bigger gun.

SV: Pretty close quarters.

RM: Course if I coulda even stunned him, Andy woulda had his head split open the minute he hit the ground. But at first, I was puzzled. I don’t dare look. I’m out here ready to face a charging bear, and someone tugging at my shoulders. I thought, what the heck, is Andy panicking or something. Finally got it settled, that Andy had the ax!

SV: Were there bears around the Wineglass Mill?

RM: Yeah, there was bear around most of the time. Course back then, there was a long bear season, spring and fall. So, people that wanted to kill a bear they could generally do it. That kinda kept them thinned down. Now we got more bears than we had then, I think.

SV: Some of those old trappers kinda concentrated on bears?

RM: Yeah, a bear. . . I remember talking to George Larson. They had a cabin camp down here on the lake. George was in here many years before they settled in there. He told me about coming in here in the spring hunting bear. They’d picked up a couple of crippled horses, horses that they’d bring em in out here and drop them somewhere. Wait till the bears get to using them. They trapped bear. As I remember, he and a couple other fellas, they’d come in here and get
twenty, twenty-five bear. In one spring. I assume, probably they spent maybe a month at it. Whatever. They were worth some money.

SV: People didn’t eat bear meat then, too much, did they?

RM: No. There was a time when the Fish and Game said you had to bring out the meat, but they soon got over that notion.

SV: Did you eat lots of venison?

RM: We lived on venison and elk.

SV: They had some milk cows there at the Bar 33.

RM: It wasn’t a stock ranch. Some of those people had cattle. Fred Kaser raised cattle. I knew Fred when I first came in here. He played the violin. Rudy, his brother, was the alternate ranger, so I worked for Rudy. Fred’s mother was alive at that time. So Fred ran the ranch and raised the cattle and put up the hay. Their dad was, I guess, senile. And this happened just before I came up here. They were still talking about it. Everybody in the valley helped on the search to try to find him. They never did find him. They were still talking about that search when I first came into the valley. So Fred raised the cattle. Fred had the ranch. Rudy had a homestead next, there. I’m not fixed in my mind, there was a trail went through that place. I cut that trail out. But I’m not sure how they (properties) fit to each other. That trail went up to Teepee Ridge. And the trail going to Jim Lookout took off at Fred’s gate, but it didn’t go into Fred’s place. That was the trailhead for the one to Jim Lookout. Fred raised quite a few cows. Here in recent years, when we moved to Swan Lake. . .course that’s a long time ago now. . .(1950s). . . Fred, being a bachelor, each spring. . . well branding time. That turned out to be quite a party with lots of beer. Cases of beer, and probably plenty of whiskey. All the bachelors and all the guys they got together and branded Fred’s cattle and I suppose had all kinds of food and everything. But one day I was down at the store there and Fred was getting some papers notarized. He had to get a paper notarized to say that this critter with this brand in the wrong spot was his! And hadda explain how come that brand was where it was. After the party really got wound up they didn’t care. They’d get a critter down and grab an iron outta the fire and slap a brand on him. Fred had, he had a stack of those, sworn affidavits, to send to the stock inspector, so he could sell his cows. So it was quite a party, I guess. Well, everybody enjoyed it probably. Fred was probably a little put out at the time. But Fred, he enjoyed a party just as well as the next guy.

SV: I hear fun things about the Kasers, different stories. Fred stayed here, but Rudy moved up north?

RM: Rudy was still here the last year I worked for the Forest Service. See, that was ‘40. In 1937 I quit them and wrangled dudes for the Gordon Ranch. ‘38 I packed and worked on the new
Holland trail. ‘39 I spent on Elbow Lookout. ‘40 I spent on Elbow Lookout. And ‘41 I was in the smokejumpers. I was one of the first ones, yeah.

SV: Did you train at Missoula?

RM: We trained out at, Ninemile. Back of the old Remount. See they had four or five guys they hired the year before. So they finally decided to give it a go and they hired twenty four of us. I was in that group. Well, there was only two guys from the Flathead Forest. I was one of them and a guy by the name of Dick Lynch. He was the dispatcher up here while I was on Jim Lookout. So, Dick and I from the Flathead. And one of the Bernoski’s. (sp?) They had a place up here close to Lion Creek. But I don’t know of anybody else here in the valley. And the next year, most of us guys were in the war.

SV: You didn’t stay stateside for very long?

RM: I went from January to about the first of November. I went through airplane mechanics school, and aerial gunnery school. I joined an outfit. Oh, and Dobb found out where I was at, over in Tunas (sp?) Dobb found a Jeep and came over to visit me. I got a pass, and we did Tunas in. That was after we’d got Tunas. And we had quite a party.

(Tape off then back on later.)

RM: Up at Pierce Lake, Fred Messer, he lived over the hill on a little lake, was Pierce Lake. He later moved his cabin out by the road. He started to build a barn out by the road. But he lived up, there’s a little lake just over a little ridge. Then you go down in there south of Holland Lake, the homesteads. The Hartwicks, Bob and Mary. Now Mary’s the one that wrote the book. I have it. Then the Zimples. . . Ted and Dorothy Zimple. There was another guy up in there. His name was Jack. A bachelor. He wasn’t there very long. But then you go across the road there. You had ole’ Charley Anderson. With the crippled leg, the crooked leg?

SV: I’ve got some stories about him.

RM: Charley was in the rest home, I think. Columbia Falls, the veteran’s home, whatever. So he was very unhappy up there, so he got somebody to take him down to Pete Rovero’s. You know, to get away for a while. So after he’d been there awhile, he just told Pete he was goin’ home. He had a little .22 single shot pistol. But, to get back a little farther, he always said when he was ready to die, they wouldn’t be planting him in... he had a place where nobody would ever find him. So, after quite a while somebody checked in up there and he wasn’t there. They said he was at Pete Rovero’s. So he checked in with Pete Rovero’s and he’d been gone a month. So they did a little looking around. How could you look? So that fall, in hunting season, I’m hunting just out over the Summit and I come across a pile of bear manure. Big one, you know, like that? It had some... about four different kinds of cloth in it. When I checked with Pete, it had some of all the garments that Charley was wearing. It had heavy wool underwear, khaki pants, it had
a plaid wool shirt and a blue chambray shirt. It was all in this pile of bear dung. So this was all dried out. I brought it home and gave it to Pete. But anyway, they went back in there where this was. They looked around. I guess they found a skull and a few bones. So that was the end of Charley.

SV: That’s the most of that story that I’ve heard. I didn’t realize you were the one that found the evidence. How did it make you feel?

RM: I knew that Charley was missing. So the instant I saw that, I knew that’s what it was. It was dry. I shook it out and put it in my pack, took it home. But I looked around. Anywhere around there would be a nice place to finish it off, you know. For a guy that had no family, no ties.

SV: He didn’t like the veterans home?

RM: No. He had a leg busted up at the knee, and it was just about that crooked, bowed out to the side. But he was a tough old bugger.

SV: He did a lot of trapping.

RM: I have heard that he was the sole Forest Service employee here in the valley, years and years ago. All he had was a few tent camps around. A saddle horse and a couple of pack horses. And when they got a fire, well he’d record it in his notebook and keep an eye on it. Estimate how big it had got. One man, they just let ‘er burn. So that would have been quite a job. Go to all the best fishing spots.

SV: He was around here pretty early then?

RM: Musta been.

[End of Tape 2, Side A]
RM: We hiked up to Fred’s. We figured Fred would have a spot chopped out of the ice for fishing. Fred didn’t have a spot, he had a double-bitted ax he let us have. He showed us where to go. I thought he just played a trick on us. Three foot of ice with slush and water on it. You’re trying to chop a hole down through that much water. I know we were soaked through the skin, and probably spent an hour and a half getting that hole in there. So we had some venison or elk, and pushed the hook down through the slush with a stick. So we fished awhile, and finally we got a long stick to measure it and there was only that much water under the ice! (Two feet?) So we took home, and it was dark before we got home. Tired and hungry. Fred hadn’t fed us dinner. We hadn’t caught a fish, and we were wet. Anyway, we got over the cabin fever!

So you got Charley on the other side, and you get down towards the lodge and you got Art and Ada (White) and you had the Lundbergs over there. I forget the name of the place that Pennypackers bought. Burch came to mind, but I think the Burch place is up there beyond the Lindbergh Lake road (See Gordon Ranch history). I think that was the Burch place because Andy Kopra and I got some timber over there when there was about that much snow, for the Wineglass. That’s after I quit them. Oh that was miserable. Lugging a big chainsaw around and all the tools. Fall one of those big yellow pine and it was laying on the ground, have to shovel with a scoop shovel on both sides. Anyway, that’s beside the point. We’re comin down now, to the Lundbergs. Of course you’ve got the Wilhelms. Course then you had the Pine Ridge School. The Holmes’ lived in the teacherage there, Florence Holmes, and Hank. So then you went on down the line and got down to Barber Creek, the Huston’s were down there Glen and Clara. You went on down a little farther and you got to the Jack Johnson Place, that’s just beyond where the school is now. The place where Joe lived, there was nobody on there, it belonged to Walker by the time the boys (Wilhelms) got ahold of it. I logged it the first time. Then you go on down the east side, Charley Courtney and Edith Courtney, then you went down a little farther, and you had the Rumble Creek school. Then the road went back in there, Maurice Thomason, and some people by the name of Ricketts. (See Bud Wolfe interview) Thomason was a trapper, too. There was good money in those days. I was just trying to think, there was nobody on the west side from Jack Johnson, till you got down to where the settlement was. Stoms’ and Oscar Southern lived in there. Forsters, Maloneys. Maloneys lived west of the river. I knew who Maloneys were, they taught me how to dance. I never knew how to dance when I came to Montana. So all of these girls taught me how to dance. But I spent most of my time playing, so I didn’t get to dance as much as I liked.

The Salmon Prairie. Fred Kaser. The Johnsons, Buck Kesterson’s wife. Uno Strom’s wife was a Johnson. Emma Johnson was Uno’s wife. Hulett’s over on the other side. Johnny and Tom. He had a sister, they called her Peaches. She lived over around Polson. And I missed, of course the Andersons had Art, Mark and Vern (?!) Tuff and Helen. Another was Russ Fox’s wife.

SV: Did you know Maki? Did he trap, too?
RM: I don’t know that he did. There was another guy down there that trapped, that’s all he did. Jalmar Wirrkala. That’s a Finn name. Across the river, there at Condon, was Pete Rude. He’s the one I told you cooked for Babe on summer trips. Oh, and Ole Semling had a homestead over there across the river. He was a bachelor. And then later, Kettlesons had a homestead over there. Chip Dunlap’s got that. Deegan’s, Rosemary and Kathryn and Evelyn. You come on up and you got the Roll’s. And Lundbergs. John Roll was a . . . John, and Dobb and Ting and I took a fishing trip up there in the middle of the winter. Camped out under a spruce tree, up on the Missions side. Up on Glacier Sloughs. And then over in there was Stoner’s, an older couple. A find ole couple. They were living on a shoe string. That’s the first time I had any connection with this family (Peggy’s family). Her dad was a rehabilitator, but he also worked on these other things. He came up to go over and see how Stoners were doing. I think Joe went over to show him the way. When he came back he had supper at the Wilhelms’. When he came back he remembered that when I first met Peggy and I went to a party at their house. Her dad remembered me. So, then the Kettleson’s were on the Gordon Ranch, Martin and Bess.

SV: Who was the caretaker when you worked there in 1937?

RM: Arnold Westcott. And Jack Doherty was running the Dude Ranch. I worked for Jack. It was a fun summer. I was only getting $55 a month. They’d been paying $40. I was shooting for $60. I got him up to $55. But I was making $85 for the Forest Service. I found out that I was getting $85 and there was other guys there that weren’t doing as good a job as I was that were getting $95. I didn’t understand this about seniority, you know. So I said okay, you’re paying these guys $95, I ought to get $95 or I won’t work here. They said they can’t do it, so I said okay and I went back up to Jim Lookout and got my stuff and came down the next day and went to work for the Gordon Ranch for Doherty. The next summer the Forest Service came and got me and I worked on that new trail and packed.

They’d get a fire somewhere and they’d give me a couple of guys and we’d go out and chase smoke. Then I’d help Wilbur, the boss, that was a Fox too. Wilbur Fox. He’d have me be his helped. Then Joe Evanson down here. Joe was good on the saw and I was experienced at that. Joe and I would fall the timber ahead on the right of way. That of course wasn’t a full time job. The job was taking care of that big mule team to pull the compressor. They had a gasoline compressor to drill and blast the rock. So I packed gasoline and dynamite and groceries. Then I moved the camp. Then I’d stay down at the Guard Station. Course all the dudes around and swimming parties every night. Once in a while they’d have a dance up at Lindbergh Lake. Elbow Lake it was then. Cap Laird, Cap and Tyne. Bob was away for a while, but then he was back. Bob Laird he was the son. Marie and Bob were brother and sister. Marie married John Stark. Tyne was a stepmother to Bob and Marie.

SV: How did you guys get around to all these dances?

RM: Oh, team and a sleigh if the road was open. A lot of time the road wasn’t open up to Lindbergh Lake. They’d end up with five foot of snow up there. When the road was open they’d
have a party up there once in a while. I can remember going up to Holland Lake with a team and sleigh. You stayed till daylight. A lot of time you stayed and had breakfast.

SV: In between times you didn’t see people a whole lot.

RM: You played cards a lot, but around close.

SV: There must have been a lot of people around the ranch?

RM: In the summertime. Well, Bess and Martin Kettleson were there (Gordon Ranch). And Arnold was there. A lot of times he was the only one on the ranch int he winter. He hired a cook one time. It didn’t work out. There was too many of these young guys going up there to visit Arnold. So, she had a sister and her husband down at Seeley. So Arnold would haul her down there about three nights a week to get her away from the competition. Oh, I forgot the Halls. Where Jettes lived. I saw Arnold there oh five or six years ago. Zella was a sister to Arnold, and what was the other guy. Hall, he was a railroad man. They were up there in the summer a lot. They had a girl. The girl played the piano. She’d come up and we’d play the violin and piano.

SV: When did you start doing the dances at the Community Hall?

RM: Well, that wasn’t built until many years later. That wasn’t built until the tail-end of the war.

SV: So you weren’t around when it was built?

RM: No I wasn’t around when that was built. When we came back up in 1947 it was new.

SV: There are a lot of stories that Babe built that.

RM: I don’t know that he did. I wouldn’t doubt what maybe Forster had. . . . Forster was a specialist in that. I think Forster is the one that gave them the land. I never heard that Babe built that. I think if he did I probably would have known about it. But I think it was probably the whole community, pitched in. I wouldn’t doubt that Forster. . . .

The Maloneys, they were up there in the summertime. The older boy wasn’t there much. But they had Jackie and Jeannie. The little guy Russ, they were up there in the summertime. They lived over beyond Forsters. But Monrad’s had the place over on Elk Creek. Gyda was going to high school at the time that us guys were going to high school.

SV: Did you know Jens?

RM: Oh yeah. Jens was killed on the AlCan Highway during the war. Got a lowboy stuck. Had a D-8 on it, was gonna walk the cat off it. When he unchained it it slid off and rolled over him. Yeah, Jens was here.
SV: He worked for the Forest Service, too?

RM: I'm sure he did. But not at the time I worked. See, I worked there six years. He worked for a transfer outfit in Missoula for some time.

SV: Did you hear how the Condon Ranger Station got that Condon name?

RM: No. I came into the country with Ed's brother (Ed Beck). I came into Montana riding the freights. I walked from Missoula out to Bonner, and there was a guy waiting there, that was Earl Beck, that was Ed's brother. He was heading up here. There just wasn't any travel on the road. I had bought a five-cent loaf of bread in Missoula. That's all I had to eat for several days. So we ate bread. But Ed had worked in this ACM camp up there at Greenough, on the hill between Greenough and Potomac. Anyway, we stayed in an old...we got up there and he went to the cook. The cook was awful grumpy. He (gave us) bread, but all he put on hit was butter. We'd been eating bread all day. So anyway, it was getting pretty darn cold. We went in an old shack there. The camp, the big camp was practically abandoned just a short crew there. So we had cots with just the springs. It was cold. There was a stove there. We found a couple of chunks of stovepipe, and one elbow. We broke the pane out, and set that stove over there with a pipe going out the window. Broke up a bench and got a little fire going in there and got thawed out. So we got out of there at daylight the next morning. Hiked over to the foot of the Sunset Hill to the Morris Ranch. Big ranch there. That was relatives of Hap Morris which you probably run into. Got a dandy breakfast there. They had quite a crew on there so we had a dandy breakfast. We walked, took off walking. We got a ride just as we broke over into Salmon Lake. People at the Double Arrow, so we got a ride about five or six miles. Then we walked and we walked. We got up past Seeley Lake and we overtook Ma Grover. And Ma, she knew everybody in the country. When she found out who I was, she knew my mother, and she knew...but Ma took charge. So Fred Herrick was cooking at the ranger station. Ma hiked down to Seeley lake probably to have a drink or two...and was headed home. She said we'd go in here. This was about, probably, 3:30. She told Fred we needed something to eat. So Fred got out some bread and was gonna give us some more bread and butter. Ma got on him. You know how she could do that. She had him open up a, she said he had to get some meat in there, he opened up a can of ham and cut nice...so we had a couple of good ham sandwiches. See, we'd walked clear from Sunset Hill. I was awful lame. Tacks were working up on the heels of my shoe. I'd stuffed grass in there to try to raise it up. But there was blood in my shoe. So, we called up and Dobb came down in the old Studebaker and got us. He dropped Ma off at her place. Took me home and took Earl down to Ed's place. That was the 26th of April 1934. So everybody knows Ma Grover, and she knows everything and everybody. “God love ye, you dirty devil!” Come up and put her arm around you. “God love ye, you dirty devil!” That's what she called us kids. She was a character. There was a fund thing. I missed it, but it was a fun thing.

The Wilhelms had an old magneto, and a high tension magneto, when you spin it will throw a spark about this far. And they had put a belt pulley on the end of it for some reason or other.
You’d wrap a string around there and give it a tug and it would throw fifteen or twenty sparks that far. So they had wired up a chair and wove this through. And the davenport in the corner. So Ma was in the kitchen when she got there. So they rigged it up for Ma. And Ting got back behind the davenport. He got this all wound up and got Ma to sit in the chair, and he lifted her. She was so impressed. Herb was going to stop by and pick her up. So she wanted Herb to sit in that chair. So they got it all rigged up, and Ting’s back behind the davenport. Herb came in and, she overplayed it, see. She insisted to get Herb over and sit down in this chair. He said, well, what’s the matter, is it going to cave in? No, no, just sit here and I’ll sit over here. He said, well, what’s wrong with it. She said, nothing, I’ll show you. So she sat down in the chair to show him it was all right, and Ting busted her again! She coulda killed him but she couldn’t get ahold of him! But the old lady was a lot of fun to be around. When she was sober.

SV: Eddie Coyle got one really good picture of her.

RM: Peggy’s dad knew her. Norman Smith. He, for many years, was the state chief liquor inspector. He was in police work. He was an undersheriff in Missoula at one time. He was a rehabilitator for the Flathead Indians. He worked in that kind of work. That’s how come he was up there at Stoner’s. But Peggy’s dad, everybody was a friend. Anybody needed help, he’d help them. He run into Ma Grover in town and she had no place to stay and had to ride out the next day, back up. So he said, okay, we’ll stay at my house. So he brought Ma Gover home. Peggy’s mom is fastidious and fussy. I guess it was almost a little much for her, but anyway, Lucy and Peggy slept in the same bed, and Mrs. Grover they put her in the other bed. But I guess all night, every little bit, she’d wake up and roll a Bull Durham cigarette and smoke it. Anyway, he’d help people like that. So Peggy knew Ma Grover, for one night!

“God love ye, you dirty devil!”

SV: There were a lot of characters around then. Everybody was pretty independent.

RM: And I think some people, the early timers, were maybe in here to kinda get away from where they come from. (Ma Grover) She was a World War I (veteran). She was an ambulance driver over in France. Hard rubber tired trucks. She was an ambulance driver in France. And she was a nurse. A good one. She delivered lots of babies. She took care of Molly (Wilhelm) the youngest Wilhelm girls. Molly came along in 1940. I guess bright and early one morning, they were expecting Molly but not so sudden. She said, I guess you gotta get me to town. So Dobb, and Babe and Mom (I always called her Mom, Eva.) headed toward Missoula. Well, they got down there someplace past Gray’s Mill somewhere. Maybe the mill wasn’t there. I don’t believe it was there. She said stop the car. Babe was, Babe and Dobb were both shook up so bad. . . So Babe said, “You get down to Ma Grover’s! They got to Ma Grover’s, but the baby was already born! Molly was born in the back of a Studebaker on the road to Seeley Lake!

[End of Interview]