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Oral History Number: 009-018
Interviewee: Ray Catron
Interviewer: Edd Nentwig
Date of Interview: July 18, 1981
Project: Fur Trappers Oral History Project

Edd Nentwig: Today we're in the home of Ray Catron in Hardin, Montana, and it's July 18, 1981. Ray, I'd like to start the interview with you, and what we basically do is start at the beginning, like in a lot of things, and I'd like to know where you were born and what year?

Ray Catron: Missouri. 1893.

EN: What part of Missouri?

RC: Cameron.

EN: Cameron, Missouri?

RC: Cameron, Missouri.

EN: Did you spend a lot of your childhood there, or did you move?

RC: No, when I got old enough—I think I was about 20 years old—I come to Montana, and I been here ever since and I'm 88 now.

EN: Did you come to Hardin, Montana, specifically?

RC: No. Come to Billings.

EN: Oh, to Billings.

RC: Homesteaded up on the head of Canyon Creek.

EN: When did you first get interested in trapping?

RC: When I was seven years old.

EN: In Missouri then.

RC: In Missouri. On civet cats.

EN: On civet cats?

RC: Civet cats and possums.

EN: How did you learn how to trap?

RC: Just myself.

EN: Just yourself? Nobody showed you anything?

RC: No, none of my folks ever trapped or didn't care much for it.

EN: I see. When you first got started trapping, what was your intuition, or why did you begin to trap?

RC: I don't know, I liked it, and I always was out looking for sign or something like that when I was little—before I was seven, before I started trapping.

EN: How was your first season? Pretty successful?

RC: Well, I think I got five civet cats that winter.

EN: I see.

RC: Let's see...and I think the second winter, I caught some possum, I caught a coon or two, a fox and civet cats. I got sent home from school once.

EN: What for?

RC: Them civet cats. They smell just like a skunk, only they're worse.

EN: The teacher didn't go for that?

RC: No, when I got into school and got warm, you know, it showed up.

EN: (laughs) What'd she say to you?

RC: She said, "Well," she said, "I'm sorry, but," she says, "I think, maybe, you better go home and change clothes." Which I did, you know. I come back to school, and everything was fine and dandy. But after that, I was awful careful.

EN: About getting any scent on you?

RC: Yes, about getting around them civet cats.

EN: When you came to Montana when you were 20 years old, did you begin to trap right away in Montana?

RC: Not too much. I had to build me a dug-out first. I built me a dugout, and that took practically all winter, and then I cut enough cedar posts to fence a 160 acres.

EN: Did you farm the land or cattle?

RC: No, no. I was too ambitious, and after I was there about, oh, couple of a years, I went into Billings, and I was going see if I could get some work, see, because I sold the homestead. I got a little out of that. I went into the barber shop there—I had to have a haircut—and I told this barber in there. Well, he said, “Why don't you come in here with me a little while,” he said. He says, “I'll learn you the trade.”

I thought, well, I'd try anything, you know. So I put in my application at the Northern Pacific on the railroad. So I told them where to call me and everything, and I started in there one day at the barber shop. The next morning, they called me to go to work for the Northern Pacific at passenger train. See, they were short a brakeman. So I went to work for them. I was with them for, oh, about ten years, and then we was on the extra board. That's when things were getting kind of tough around the '30s, you know. I was on the extra board, so I don't know...I never did and I don't believe I ever had no more than three jobs in my life, and I was never out of work, ever. A lot of fellows today'll say, well, the times was different. It was different, but we tried. We worked. We had to.

EN: Did you trap at all when you worked for the railroad?

RC: A little bit on the side.

EN: What were you trapping for?

RC: Up in there in Canyon Creek—up at the head of Canyon Creek. But see, I went to work for Bateman there. That's predatory animal control. You might remember him.

EN: Yes, I've heard of the man.

RC: Yes. I was up in Hoskin's Basin there, and I started from Hoskin's Basin there...Well, how it happened, he come up there one evening. I had three or four dogs around there, you know—

EN: Up on your homestead?

RC: No. This was another place I had. This was north of Billings, up that Hoskin's Basin. He drove in there, and he says, “See you got dogs.” He had dogs too. We talked a little while, and he says, “How would you like to go to work for the government on predatory animals?”

“Well,” I said, “It’d be all right.” Times were getting tough.

He says, “How’re the dogs? Will they catch a coyote?”

I says, “Well, they better catch one.” (laughs)

EN: What kind of dogs were they?

RC: They was greyhounds—greyhound and stag cross. So I talked to him, and I says, “When do you want me to go to work?”

He says, “Any time.”

I believe that Harms was up there. I schooled them. It was two brothers Harms...Harm...Harmon?

EN: Oh, Harmon? Was that their last name or first name?

RC: Last name. So they went out with me there for a lesson or two in trapping, and of course, in them days, people was different. You tried to help each other. But today, if they’ve got any secrets or anything, they generally keep it to theirself. Well, I went up the next morning. I took them dogs. He told me, he says, “You start in the morning if you want to.”

I says, “All right.”

He says, “I’ll tell you, up there at Fosters, north of Billings,” he said, “They’ve got a lot of turkeys there,” and he said, “The coyotes is killing turkeys for them.” He says, “I’ve got to do something. I haven’t got no trappers available right now.” He says, “Why don’t you go up there in the morning and see if you can pick up one or two of them that’s doing the killing.”

I went up and took my dogs. Went up there that morning, and by god, by noon I had six coyotes.

EN: That’s a pretty good morning.

RC: You bet. I cleaned them up. Yes.

EN: How did you get onto the coyotes with dogs? How would you go about doing that?

RC: Well, I’ll tell you. A coyote is something that you can tell a fellow, or show him maybe—some fellows—and then they never learn it. You’ve got to have it in your head. “In other words,” I says, “You got to be like a coyote yourself,” to learn their habits and everything as you

go along. Well, I cleaned them up. Then in them days, we had lots of prairie dog towns. I had a prairie dog set which, if I was trapping today to speak of, I'd use it again. But you'd have to chain-proof it. They've poisoned off all our prairie dogs. Once in a while, you'll find maybe a few straggling places where there's one or two or a few prairie dogs. But I used that. You wouldn't remember that back...what they call a backing set.

EN: Where you had a clump of brush or something in back of where you made your set?

RC: No, no. You go in the dog town...well, you could do it with one of these ground squirrels just as easy as you could them. I'd dig a kind of a V...or like that [motions with hands] more like a U like that. Here, I'd take a prairie dog and stick his head down to the stake that I had there. Then I'd stretch him out that-a-way, and his legs would come out like that [at the head of the U] and then his tail like this [the opposite direction]. Then I'd take all that loose dirt, and I'd cover him up, except in maybe just a little of the back end and leave the tail out.

EN: So he would be at the head of the U and pointing down.

RC: Yes. Then when the coyote come up there, he's not going to come in here from the side where the trench is. Now he's not afraid of that trench. He figures that another coyote or something has buried that prairie dog there, and he's come around and he'll come in on the back side every time. Then I have two traps, one on each side of the prairie dog there, and extend out pretty well past the prairie dog. He'll come around, and he's a-watching that prairie dog. He's not scared of that set. I always used, generally, on that country up there, it was all sage brush. I never dyed any traps, never changed anything from natural. Then on scent sets, I'd use that...well, I wouldn't use the U, but I'd generally...You know, you've got to figure which way that coyote's going to come in. The only way you can do that is through your own thoughts.

EN: By studying the animal's habits.

RC: Yes. Yes.

EN: How long did you work for Bateman?

RC: Oh, I was with him about ten years, I guess it was.

EN: Did you work just coyotes for him?

RC: Coyotes and cats, and that was all. Then I worked bear too. In the summer time, I was up there out of Martinsdale when Ingersol had that ranch up there. I had three dogs there—coyote dogs—the best bear dog that ever walked.

EN: Oh? What kind of dog was your bear dog?

RC: They were mostly stags [staghound]. But they was good on coyotes too. Of course, it was getting old, and I had one old dog there called Smoky—big, black stag, you know. I'd go through the mountains up there—the Crazy Mountains there. They had that all horse trails through there where people could use. Not people, but what I mean, rangers cut them—trails—to go through there. I used saddle horses all the time then, and that old dog, he'd go about 30, 40 yards ahead of the saddle horse in the trail. Whenever he stopped and threw his head up and went sniffing the air, you know, you wanted to stop because pretty soon, off he'd go and the rest of the dogs right with him. Maybe in five minutes or so, barking tree. The bear'd either tree or he'd go in a washout, which is kind of bad that he got advantage, then, of the dogs.

EN: Why were you hunting bears? Were they causing problems?

RC: Oh, yes. Killing sheep. Yes, they'd come in on them sheep ranches there of a night. There was one time there old Charley Bier (?)—you remember him—up there on the Martinsdale? They killed 500 there one night.

EN: Five hundred sheep?

RC: Run them over a cliff.

EN: Holy cow!

RC: Yes.

EN: Was it just one bear that did that?

RC: One bear. They sent word to me down at the camp right away. I went up the next morning and got into the sheep herders' trailer there, or camp it was, just after daylight. He says, "Boy," he said, "I'm glad to see you." He said, "They was into the sheep again last night."

I says, "Which way'd they come in?" He told me, you know, and I says, "Well," I says, "I'll go see."

"Well," he said, "No," he said, "I just got breakfast ready now." He says, "You wait and eat some breakfast." In them days, they wanted to be sure that you stopped and eat with them. It was enjoyable to work for.

So I took my dogs and went down there, and I see where they'd killed some bear. Well, I told him, I says, "That bear ain't going to be far," because he'd eaten most of one. I figured just one bear, and I got so I took my dogs and left camp and went down there. I wasn't gone, I bet you, 15, 20 minutes until old Smoky barked treed. I says, "There's your bear." Went down there, and sure enough, they had him up a tree though. It was an old dead tree there. He seen me coming.

I thought he was going to get out once and jump out, but the dogs surrounded that tree and he was a little afraid of the dogs. So I went down there, and I got him and cut his scalp off. Took it back up to the herder, and I says, "There's your bear. You won't have no trouble now." But I thought maybe they might be more, see. But it seemed like that...this was a male, and it seemed like it was just that one.

EN: Was he a big bear?

RC: No, he was about a, I imagine, three-year-old.

RC: Yes.

EN: You shoot the bear out of the tree?

RC: Yes. Yes.

EN: What kind of rifle?

RC: 30.30.

EN: Oh an old 30.30?

RC: Yes.

EN: When you would chase coyotes with these dogs, would you ride on your horse behind the dogs just like with the bear, and they'd chase the coyote?

RC: Yes, you bet you.

EN: How would they get the coyote run down? I know they're fairly fast.

RC: They'd either get him right away, or they didn't get him at all.

EN: Oh, I see. They were short-distance runners. Did you shoot the coyotes, or did the dogs kill them?

RC: No, dog would kill them. Oh, some of them I'd have to.

EN: What did you do then after you worked the bears and stuff for Bateman?

RC: (Unintelligible) go back on coyotes in the summer. Up in the mountains there in the wintertime, that snow gets tough. About the only way you can get around much up there is snowshoes. But you can't cover the country like you should, but in the summertime then it was

“denning.” Lots of pups. I was on a roll there, one year twice, for the state on the number of coyotes for the month.

EN: How many did you kill in a month?

RC: Oh, I think it was around 60.

EN: Sixty in a month.

RC: Yes, in a month.

EN: When you say “denning”, what do you mean by “denning”?

RC: That's getting the pups. Find the den.

EN: How would you go about doing that?

RC: Easy. Easiest thing in the world. Just ride along the hills there, or coulees, wherever you're at. One or two or three tracks don't mean nothing. But you see where they're going back and forth several times, you know that some place is a den there pretty close. Just follow that up, and they'll take you right to the den.

EN: Then how would you get the pups out.

RC: Had a little wire-haired terrier. Yes.

EN: You'd send the terrier down the hole?

RC: Send the terrier down in there. But when I first was a-breaking that terrier, I used a collar and a rope, knotting it so it wouldn't get tangled up or something. She'd go in there—it was a little female—and she'd go in there, and once in a while I'd jerk the rope. But when I done that, if she was in where the pups was, you know, jerk that rope once or twice, and she'd grab one of them pups. When you hear a pup squeal. I remember the first den I got was up there in what they call...not Pine Ridge, but part of the Bull Mountain country there. She had a den under a big, flat rock. Had six pups. I had my jacket on, and I threw it down on the ground there. I sent this little dog in, got them pups and bring them out. There was six of them, and, oh, they was only about that tall [gestures]. That was the hardest thing for me to do in the world was kill them pups, because they'd lay there on that jacket, you know, and kind of whine. But I don't know, it was something that was hard to do.

EN: Did you den quite a bit?

RC: Quite a bit, in the summer time. Well, that's all we had to do, mostly, in the summer time.

EN: I see. After you worked for Bateman, what did you do?

RC: I went to work, opened up a gas station for Dougherty (?) that used to be in Billings there. He was in the fur business there for a New York outfit. One day he said to me, he says, "How would you like the fur business?"

I said, "Well, fine and dandy." I says, "I'd always around it quite a bit." So I opened up a station in Sheridan for him down there. Got it started good. Then I come to Hardin and I had a station built there, and he opened up in Hardin. Then finally, he had a chance to sell them and he sold them, and he says, "Why don't you go in the fur business?"

I said, "Well, it sounds all right." I says, "I'd be willing to try it." So I bought for him for one or two years. Awful good. Then I thought, well, why can't I go to work for myself? If I can work for them, why can't I work for myself? So I went to work and opened this station up in Hardin.

EN: About what year was that?

RC: Oh, that was...that must've been '43, '44. Then I was there ever since, until here about three years ago. I retired and give her up. She got so it was too much work for the age. If I'd have been about 20 years younger, see, I'd have been your age, I'd-a stayed with it. (laughs) Well, and then I quit one year too early.

EN: Oh, you did?

RC: Yes, year before last when we had the big year.

EN: On coyotes.

RC: Yes. They just went out of sight. And cat, look what cat's done. I remember I caught them up in that Lavina country there, cats up there in them dog towns there, worth about, I imagine, dollar, dollar-and-a-half apiece. Big old toms.

EN: In the '20s and '30s?

RC: Yes. In the '30s. Yes.

EN: Now they're worth 350 dollars.

RC: Yes, 350.

EN: Isn't that something?

RC: I believe, though, that them cats is going to taper off. They got too high. They got out of reason. But we're in the stage now that we don't know what the future's going to be.

EN: How do you feel about that uncertainty about the future?

RC: I think if I was a young man today, I'd do the same thing.

EN: As you did?

RC: I think the future it's a-going to be more complicated and everything as we go along. But just like this association you got there, I think it's the finest thing in the world, if the young people will take to it. 'Course they get so many...I tried to call one here today. I wanted you to meet him. Dave Shaft (?). You remember him?

EN: I've heard of the man's name.

RC: Yes, he's quite a trapper. Then they got an awful good trapper over here. I broke him in when he was a boy. It's getting so it's hard to remember names.

Unidentified Speaker: Roger Brower (?).

RC: Roger Brower.

EN: Roger Brower.

RC: Yes. He's a trapper.

EN: Yes, they're both members of the Montana Trappers Association.

RC: I believe they are, yes. I'm pretty sure they are. Yes.

EN: Let's talk about you buying fur. How did you get started knowing how to buy fur?

RC: You get hurt once or twice, and you'll learn it quick.

EN: I see. You make a few mistakes and learn from them?

RC: You bet you. From the grading and such as that.

EN: When you were trapping, did you only trap coyotes, or did you get into water animals as well?

RC: Yes.

EN: You trapped water animals?

RC: Yes.

EN: What kinds?

RC: Beaver.

EN: You trapped beaver.

RC: Yes. I don't know whether he belongs to it or not...Bill Haney (?), up there out of Grass Range?

EN: I couldn't tell you. Name sounds familiar.

RC: Yes. We trapped there one spring at a little over a month. I think it was around 300 coyotes we got, wasn't it, Sid?

US: Beaver, you mean.

RC: Beaver, yes.

US: Yes. (unintelligible)

RC: Then they was one winter there—that's been a long time back—when you could use them gas guns? Wayne Miller (?)—do you remember him that used to be at Radersburg? He's dead now. We got 365 coyotes in 30 days. Now that's hard to believe, ain't it?

EN: That's a lot of coyotes.

RC: But you know how we got them?

EN: How?

RC: With the gas guns.

EN: How did you work those?

RC: Well, that's been long years ago, but that'll clean the coyote. You can take gas guns...But the main thing now is the right scent. If you get the right scent, then you can exterminate the coyotes with gas guns.

EN: What is a gas gun? Is that—

RC: It's a cyanide.

EN: Cyanide?

RC: But that's outlawed.

EN: Are you talking about the spring device you put in the ground, and it shoots the cyanide into their mouth?

RC: Yes. Yes, but the older style was the best guns.

EN: How were they designed?

RC: Well, just kind of about, oh, about that long and put it in the ground there and then that—

EN: About seven, eight inches long, then.

RC: Yes. Then your shell and everything is right on the top of it, and that's got the cyanide in it.

EN: What size shell did they use to fire those off?

RC: I think it was 38s.

EN: Then you set the cyanide on top of the shell?

RC: It goes in there, clamps down right on there, and then you screw the cap that you've got your shell in and that's covered with wool. Wool is about as best you can get for that. Some of them use a piece of cloth or something, but that's no good. You take it off and get it wet, and you can smell it yourself. Or paper. A lot of fellows would cover their traps with paper. Well, that's no good. You get it wet and it—

EN: When you put the cyanide gun in, then you put your bait on the wool?

RC: You put the...yes. Yes. Then that shell like that, about that long. Then you wrap that wool around there and right over the top. Dip it in paraffin. Then when you get that done, then take your brush and your scent and paint that all around there with that scent on there.

EN: On the wool.

RC: And if they got the right scent, a coyote will never pass it up.

EN: Did your own scents or did you use government scents?

RC: No, the government scent wasn't as good as what you make yourself.

EN: Oh, is that right?

RC: Yes.

EN: How did you learn how to make your own scents?

RC: Well, it comes to you.

EN: From watching coyotes, I see.

RC: Yes.

EN: When you began to buy furs, did you buy a lot of furs at first or just a few?

RC: She was kind of slow because coyotes then was only, I think, two and a half.

EN: Dollars?

RC: Yes.

EN: What year would that be? That would be 30 years ago?

RC: Oh, yes. Yes, that'd be 30, 40, right? Forty.

EN: At 40?

RC: Yes.

EN: Your first few years, were you pretty prosperous at it?

RC: I made a living.

EN: You made a living?

RC: Well, a lot of them didn't.

EN: Did you have a family at that time?

RC: No, just my wife and I. She's dead now. Been dead about four years.

EN: What year did you marry her?

RC: In '31 or '32.

EN: How did she feel about your trapping?

RC: She thought it was good.

EN: Did she?

RC: You bet. 'Course the women was different in them days than they are today. She'd skin a coyote and think nothing of it—any kind of fur.

EN: She helped you out quite a bit then?

RC: You bet she did. That's the reason I miss her today.

EN: She's not there to help you out?

RC: You bet you. If I'd put anything away, lay any papers away or something, and I'd forget where I put them, all I had to do was ask her and she'd tell me.

EN: Did she become pretty active in your fur buying business too?

RC: Well, she wasn't too much on the buying, but like preparing them for market or something like that, she was awful good.

EN: About what was your volume your first year? Did you buy a lot of fur?

RC: Well, I bought all there was, but there wasn't too many then, because the market was...Let's see, what year was that that they outlawed that 1080?

EN: Boy, I couldn't tell you for sure.

US: 1976?

RC: You remember there was a while there, after they'd used that 1080 for a year or two, that we didn't have very many coyotes. They got pretty slim.

EN: You talking back when Bateman was using it?

RC: No, no. No, Bateman wasn't using it.

EN: You mean later on.

RC: Bateman had dogs too. But we used strychnine quite a bit. He got orders there from... 'Course he's dead, now, so it don't make any difference. He got orders for to have me drop baits up in the mountains there, you know, out of Martinsdale. I says, "Gollys," I says, "That's going to be kind of bad." I said, "I got them dogs."

Well, he said, "I got dogs too," so he says, "I thought I'd tell you," but he says, "You just suit yourself." He knew what that meant. "Don't put it out." Which was good.

EN: So he got the orders, but he didn't put it out.

RC: That's right.

EN: How did you get along with Mr. Bateman?

RC: Fine.

EN: Was he a pretty fine fellow.

RC: Yes, you bet he was. Yes.

EN: He was your boss, then?

RC: He was the boss. But it got to the point...He's got a boy that lives up there out of...Robert, I think it is now. I get a letter from him once in a while, wants to come up there. He was retired from the fire department.

EN: You were buying furs here in Hardin, did you buy just local furs or out-of-state furs as well?

RC: They was some out-of-state furs that come in. But I didn't travel. What I mean, oh, I covered this locality like north of Billings and west of Billings and Forsythe and down in that country there, you know. But I had to stay at home quite a bit and take care of the door trade.

EN: What was the name of your company?

RC: Ray Catron Hide and Fur. Darn! If I could find them...I got them papers—the newspapers. They come out there, the whole front page, on my fur dealing.

EN: Maybe you can find it, and we'll come back and look at it some time. Did you buy mostly predatory animal skins or all types?

RC: All types that was in season, I bought them. Of course, the Indians here they don't have to have no license or nothing. But you've got to keep a record of all that stuff, regardless.

EN: How did you go about learning how to grade water animal fur?

RC: Just get hurt once or twice, and you'll remember. You'll learn quick.

EN: By getting hurt, you mean make a big mistake?

RC: You bet you. When it cost you a few hundred dollars, you learn quick.

EN: Who did you then sell your fur to after you bought it?

RC: When Sid was in Billings with the Pacific Hide and Fur, I sold him a lot of furs.

EN: Oh, you take your lots in and sell to Sid then?

RC: Or he'd come down.

EN: So you were kind of a middle man there for a while?

RC: Yes.

EN: Did you trap on the side?

RC: Once in a while if I seen any good prospect of putting out a set or something where I would catch something, why, I'd put her out.

EN: Which animals was your favorite to trap?

RC: I always liked coyotes.

EN: Always coyotes?

RC: Yes.

EN: Did you trap muskrats and mink as well?

RC: Oh, yes.

EN: And raccoons?

RC: Yes. Try everything once.

EN: When you had your business, was that your sole income?

RC: Yes. The harder you work, the more you're going to do, make.

EN: The harder you work, the more you'll make?

RC: You bet, yes.

EN: Your wife and you, did you do pretty well during your life buying furs? You and her, you had a good living?

RC: Good, yes.

EN: When you moved out here, you say, three years ago, you retired and closed down your business?

RC: Yes.

EN: Was this your original home site?

RC: No, no.

EN: Lived in town?

RC: Lived in town.

EN: Oh, I see.

RC: My home was built right onto the fur house. So I never missed no business.

EN: What street was that on?

RC: That was on Second Avenue West.

EN: So they either came to the back door or the front door?

RC: They generally come to the front door. But I had an awful good Indian trade. Awful good. Because I was one person that got along with the Indians. I never had an enemy among the Indians.

EN: What tribe is this that's here?

RC: Crow. Crow, and then I had the Cheyenne too, both of them.

EN: How did you get to know those people?

RC: Just...I don't know. Buying furs or when you open up there, they come in. If they know you once, they'll know you again. They never forget, but the main thing is to treat them like anybody else, which I did.

EN: Don't be prejudiced—

RC: No, no, don't. They knew that they were welcome, see.

EN: Did they have nice furs?

RC: Not too good, generally unskinned.

EN: I see Were they pretty good trappers?

RC: No. They shoot most of the furs that they get are all shot. Well, that's quite a job on them, skinning them and then sewing them up.

EN: They'd bring them to you in the carcass. Did you skin them then?

RC: Yes.

EN: How did you learn how to take care of furs in the way back? Did somebody teach you how to stretch and handle fur?

RC: No. Just...I don't know. No, just watching different fellows that had furs, you know. You get on to it quick. And then starting with the civet cats down south there in Missouri, I had to stretch them and skin them. Clean them up and everything. Well, that goes on up to the other furs.

EN: What was the reason you moved from Missouri to Montana? Why did you pick Montana?

RC: I wanted to come west. Well, I first went to Hawarden, Iowa.

[Break in audio]

RC: —fellow there. I got off the train there. It was awful tough down there in Missouri when we had a little place there and there wasn't much going on where you could make anything. I told my dad, I says, "If you can take care of things," I says, "I think I'll go and see if I can get a job." I went up to Hawarden, Iowa, there, and I got off the train. I think I had 15 or 25 cents in my

pocket. I wouldn't hitchhike. But I got off there at Hawarden and started from the depot over to town. I thought I'd go over and get me a sandwich, and then see if I could find something to do. Going over to the restaurant there, old German fellow come along, and he says, "Sonny, do you know where I could get somebody to help me in the harvest?"

I says, "Sure, I'm looking for work."

He says, "Where was you going?"

I said, "I was going over to the restaurant there and get me a sandwich."

"Well," he said, "Come on. I haven't had dinner either."

I thought by him saying that, now, am I going to have to pay for his or how am I going to do?

So we went over to the restaurant, and I forget what he ordered. I think it was...I forget what it was. Anyhow, we eat dinner, and he says, "Well," he says, "now you got everything you want to do?" He says, "We'll go out to the farm."

I says, "Sure." I said, "I got everything I need." I had a little sack with some (unintelligible) in it, you know.

On the way out there, he says, "Do you know what the going wage is, don't you?"

I says, "No." I says, "I don't."

Well, he says, "It's 50 cents a day."

Well, that was better than nothing. So I went out there with him and started the next day, started harvesting. He's running the combine, and I was doing the shocking. We shocked it then. I was keeping up with him all the time with my shocking. We went in that night, and he said, "You know what I'm going to do?"

I says, "No." I thought maybe he says, don't need you or something.

He said, "I'm going to give you a dollar a day, starting in the morning."

Well, god man, I thought that was awful good. Then I had a cousin living up here in Montana. I worked for him for a year, and just about a year. I told him that I was going to come out to Montana and homestead. I had a cousin out here, and he said he'd get me a homestead. I says, "I think (unintelligible)."

"I don't want you to go," and he had nicest family of about four or five girls. I could have had my pick of any of them. So I come on out here to homestead, homesteaded. I got...about every week, I'd get a letter from him. Him and his family wanting me to come back. But I stayed.

So I don't regret a thing that happened. Couldn't have been any better than the way it was.

EN: Your homestead, then, your cousin got that lined up for you?

RC: How's that?

EN: Your cousin got your homestead lined up for you?

RC: Yes, yes.

EN: Was his homestead up by yours?

RC: Yes, yes.

EN: That country's pretty rough up in there, isn't it?

RC: She's rough. It was rough, yes.

EN: What was the conditions of homestead?

RC: You mean—

EN: What did it take to get a homestead?

RC: I think it was...I forget what was filing fee. I had to just file on this piece of land, and I forget what it...didn't cost you hardly nothing.

EN: When you worked for Bateman, about what did he pay you a day or a month?

RC: About 85 dollars a month. He furnished traps and everything.

EN: Did you have a car in those days or just—

RC: Yes. Had an old Star car, and then I had a Durant. Do you remember them?

EN: Yes.

RC: (laughs) It's been a long time ago. Then I had a Model A and had to come out of that Hoskin's Basin country there, and it was a steep hill going up through there. I couldn't go up

front-ways, but I'd turn it where I could back up all right, see. It was so steep that the gas would all go to the back, see, so I'd back up that hill.

People wouldn't think of going through what we did in them days, you know it? Don't you think the younger generation's a lot different? You don't see the trappers like you used to.

EN: You mean in numbers or in philosophy or—

RC: Well, in numbers. We got a few. Now these, what I call, weekend trappers. They'll put out a bunch of traps, and they'll run them maybe once or twice and then the traps'll be there maybe for a month. That's what hurting trapping.

EN: The people don't care anymore, is what you're saying.

RC: That's right. That's right.

EN: Why do you think that is?

RC: I don't know. They're so different. It seems like their life is more for excitement than it is to have to work and get out and trudge through the snow and the cold and such as that.

EN: Do you think that there are some, though, that still believe in the old way?

RC: I think they is, yes. I've got two or three of them. They're good trappers. What I mean...You know what I mean by good trappers—a man that'll get out here and...just like that Roger Brower. There was one winter here year before last, I think Roger knocked out around 12, 13,000 dollars trapping. Now, that takes a pretty good trapper.

EN: It does today. Yes.

RC: You got to take care of it. But he'd take care of it, and he's awful good on calling up coyotes too. He puts that over pretty good.

EN: Did you ever try calling coyotes?

RC: Not too much. No.

EN: Being's we're talking about the difference between yesterday's trappers and today's trappers, do you think that a lot of today's trappers' biggest problem is nobody ever took the time to help them, to show them that there's a difference between right and wrong? They just wanted to be a trapper, so they went and bought some traps and started trapping?

RC: They want to make some easy money without putting out much exertion. That's what I think.

EN: And they found out it was different? Is that how you think'

RC: You bet you. That's the reason they'll put out a line of traps. They feel up into going in the fall, and they'll put out a line of traps and they'll run it once or twice and then they wait, maybe, couple three weeks. That's no good. That's the reason we got these here different societies fighting the trapping situation. It's the trappers themselves that causing a lot of it.

EN: The bad trapper.

RC: Yes, the bad ones. But it's getting to the point now where we haven't got too many of them, and I don't think it's...These high prices has helped.

I'll tell you another thing is it's hurt the coyote situation such (unintelligible) these snowmobiles.

EN: Chasing the coyotes down?

RC: You bet you. Now, this last winter they couldn't make it here at all.

EN: No snow?

RC: No snow. No.

EN: Are you going to try and trap this fall?

RC: I don't know.

EN: You don't know?

RC: I still got traps and everything.

EN: I see you got an old hound dog tied up here. You still got some dogs, then?

RC: Oh, you bet you. He's a watch do.

EN: He's a nice-looking dog. What kind of dog is he?

RC: He's a blue tick. You know where he come from?

EN: No.

RC: Oh, up there out of Toston, Radersburg. Radersburg. Miller had him, and he died. His wife went back to Virginia to take care of her aunt, and she brought that dog down to me and says, "I'll know he'll have a good home."

EN: What's his name?

RC: Sam.

EN: Sam? I remember you telling earlier when we talked about you didn't want to kill those pups you dug out of that den—

US: (unintelligible)

EN: Do you feel pretty close to the animals, do you?

RC: You bet, yes.

EN: When you were trapping, did you feel that you helped the animals by trapping them?

RC: I think you did. I think that whenever they pass laws or something that those animals can't be trapped, they're going to get diseases in there that they can't control. So I think it's the best thing in the world if we've got trappers like we have got to keep them thinned down. They ain't going to exterminate them. No.

EN: How do you feel about that old coyote today?

RC: What?

EN: How do you feel about that old coyote today? Do you think he's as smart as he always was?

RC: I don't think there's any difference. But if you let him keep going, he'd going to outsmart the people. (laughs)

EN: You think so. Did you ever try any snaring, Ray?

RC: I've got some snares, but I never use them. I don't know. I don't go too much for snares. I'll tell you, I think they'll cause more trouble among the stockmen and such as that than anything they can get. But your steel trap is different.

EN: You mean by causing trouble, you mean catching livestock in them?

RC: Yes, getting one of them there on their foot or leg or something, and the farmer isn't going to notice it maybe until it's too late. But if it's a trap, he's either going to break it or he ain't going to get in it.

EN: What kind of trap was your favorite trap to use on coyotes.

RC: Victors. Number 3s.

EN: By that you mean a 3N, or just a 3.

RC: Just number 3s. Straight number 3. I see that Victor come out now with that 175. What kind of a trap is that?

EN: It's a coil-spring trap with a round jaw—half-moon jaw—and it's their answer to what a lot of fox trappers want, between and one-and-a-half and a number 2. It's a little bit more powerful, and it's a little nicer trap. It's a new—

RC: Be easier to set.

EN: Yes, I think that's their idea.

You think that, over the years, that—a

RC: I was going to tell you now, like on making that prairie dog set like we did, you know, like I showed you there. You want to get back with all that loose dirt and stuff like that and throw it past it, right across your set and everything. It looks just like the wind has blown that dirt.

EN: So it looks natural.

RC: You bet you. That's the main thing. Then know where that coyote's going to step when he comes up there.

EN: How do you determine that? By watching him?

RC: Right through your head. That's the reason it's hard to tell anybody, you know it?

EN: How do you look towards your future? Are you going to try and trap this fall, you think?

RC: I might a little, yes.

EN: Keep your fingers in it?

RC: Yes, it's hard to get away now. I'm 88 years old. But I think it's the worst thing in the world, a lot of times, for a person to quit.

EN: Quit trapping?

RC: Yes. You lose interest in everything.

EN: Are you pretty content, then, with your life as a trapper?

RC: You bet you. Very much so.

EN: Well, we better let you finish your coffee, and we'll take another rest.

[End of Interview]