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Oral History Number: 120-006b
Interviewee: Edna Brooks Giesy
Interviewer: May Vallance
Date of Interview: February 17, 1978
Project: Bitterroot Historical Society Oral History Project

May Vallance: Good afternoon. I'd like to have you tell us a little bit about your family history and the school that you went to and anything that you can remember that will be of historical significance.

Edna Giesy: Well, I don't know, May, but I'll tell you my grandparents came across the plains from Missouri in 1876, and they drove what they called oxen, but it was cows so that they would have their animals with them and could have milk and all. They had three children. Grandmother carried the baby on her arm until Ted was almost sideways. Come across, they were four months, three days, I believe they said, coming. They landed south of Stevensville at a place called Mr. Kinniman. Grandpa came in and asked him if he could park there for the night, and he said, "Well, come on in, neighbor." He had 50 cents in his pocket. Well, he turned around and got work, splitting rails that winter for 50 cents a hundred. Then he moved to his place, oh, I'd imagine seven or eight miles south again, and there's where he landed with his family. The rest of their children were born there. They have nine altogether.

MV: What was his name?

EG: His name was John Wood and his wife's name was Elizabeth. He had married once before, and his wife died and they had a daughter named Elzura (?). Their oldest girl was Mary then Henry then Ben and Heddy and George and my mother, Lula, and let's see, Emma and Alfred and Rilla (?). They all farmed there until they were of age to go and grandpa got some place that the two boys down below Stevensville on the Burnt Fork, they called them. Henry and Ben. Then George, he stayed on the place right near Grandpa, and married, and they had three daughters. I don't know—(unintelligible) got married and Uncle Alfred, he stayed there on the ranch. Mom's sister, Mary, married and they lived right next to Grandpa in the big brick house which is now occupied by Grandpa's great grandson, John Wood. His father lived there before that, Alfred did. I think everybody knows him as Doc. My mother and got married in 1888. She married Louis Brooks from Oregon. They moved to a ranch just three miles from Grandpa's place. Later, I was born at the same ranch that Mama was born, at the old homestead place. Grandma used to make butter, and they'd make all their different produce and take it to Missoula with a wagon and team. One time going down there, it was so cold that the horse's nose was frozen; they had to put canvas over their noses to thaw noses out.

MV: How did your grandmother make the butter?

EG: She just churned it and then made it by hand and packed it in big jars, and that's the way they sold it at that time. Grandpa butchered all of his own meat and made all of his own hams and bacon, and was counted to be one of the best ranchers around.

MV: Well, did your grandparents start a school down there for the children?

EG: I don't know how the school was started, but they went to a little school about oh, it'd be a mile and a half, two miles from their ranch. The teacher used to stay with them. I don't know how many, it wasn't very many pupils: perhaps half a dozen or maybe a dozen.

MV: What'd they call the school?

EG: They called the school the Birch Creek School.

MV: Was it a log school?

EG: Was it what?

MV: A log school?

EG: No. It was a regular building, there. It's been moved up across, oh about a mile and a half or two miles to Ray Morris' place, but I don't know if it's still standing or not or if they use a shed or what they have done with it. I went to school down there for, oh, perhaps six months and then we came back to Corvallis and went to Corvallis' school.

MV: How long did your mother go to school there?

EG: As well as I remember, she went as far as the fifth grade.

MV: How did it happened she didn't go farther?

EG: Well I don't know unless it was just that she was needed at home to help take care of the children and to help do the housework and stuff. Grandmother had lots of work to do, making their own clothes and weaving and knitting their socks by lamplight, which we don't agree with now. Then my mother and father got married in October in 1888 and she lived a year in Oregon and then came back and we moved about three miles from Grandpa's place where my brother and three sisters were born. Then in 1914, we moved to Corvallis, and my dad was driving the stage, carrying the mail from Woodside to Corvallis, which was—at that time the railroad went through there. Then in 1916, we started the hotel unexpectedly. One of the traveling men had a room at a place in town here they called the Walker Hotel at that time. He came this Monday night and they had given his room away. So he said to Dad, "Lou, you got more room over at your place; why can't I stay there?" Well first thing you know, he wanted to bring somebody

else. We had to give him something to eat that night and something to eat next morning. That's the way we got started in the hotel business. [Brooks Hotel.]

MV: That's interesting.

EG: Lasted for 59 years.

MV: [laughs] That's wonderful. It's always been a very wonderful place and very well known. I'll always say it's known nationally because you've been written up in the Ford Times and several different—lots of people—

EG: We've had lots of advertising for that since there are pictures taken of the house and in the Spokesman Review and in the Great Falls Tribune.

MB: But you don't remember very much about the Birch Creek School?

EG: Not too much. I went down there just those few months and all. Frances Wollier (?) Lockwood was our teacher when I went down there. I was just in the second grade at that time. Mama had started us at school in Corvallis, but the whooping cough got started up here and my sister had bronchitis and the doctor said it would kill her if she got it, and we moved home. About a week later the minister came down with his family and the youngsters had whooping cough, Gladys got the whooping cough then but it did cure her bronchitis.

MV: [laughs] Well, that was something. They didn't use the school much as a social center, you don't remember? Did they have parties?

EG: We used to have programs and I don't know that they ever had dances; they had programs there quite often. I remember one time, them having a box social there. I don't know what the proceeds were to go for. Build desks and they were double desks, you sat double. Two at a desk. They had, I guess, up to the eighth grade.

MV: Well that's very interesting, and I certainly appreciate this because it's so interesting to know about the old-timers and what they had to suffer to live. You wonder how they ever got enough food and clothing together to raise a family of nine.

EG: Well, they were always warm, I guess, and always had plenty to eat because grandpa was a very good provider of having garden stuff and grandma making butter and meat and all. She always fed well and people were always welcome to her home.

MV: Well thank you ever so much.

EG: Well, it's not been very interesting.

MV: Yes, it is. It's very interesting, and very worthwhile.

EG: Thank you.

MV: This concludes Edna Brooks Giesy's report on the Birch Creek School District number 38.

[End of Interview]