

Oral History Number: 333-001
Interviewee: Gertrude Rognlie
Interviewer: Lynne Van Sickle
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Lynne Van Sickle: Most people are just people that come in and they want to know about...Like their grandparents lived in town and they want to find out about the town and what it was like when their grandparents lived there.

Gertrude Rognlie: Now is that turned on now?

LVS: I think so. Let me check.

GR: I might digress and just talk nonsense.

LVS: That's okay.

GR: John O'Brien (?) came from St. Paul out here and he bought—I don't know how big a tract of land and started—he bought this land from some people by the name of McGovern (?). He started a saw mill and a planer. There was a big mill in Stillwater, Minnesota, that had just closed down, and many men came from there here to work. Big new project opening, a big new mill opening in Somers, Montana, and it was right on the Great Northern Railroad so they could come on the railroad to Somers.

LVS: So did the mill just used to be on the north [unintelligible]?

GR: Well just where it always...Do you remember where the mill stood when you were little? Did you ever see it right there at...Yeah, that's where he built the mill. The mill did burn down but I don't remember the year, and they rebuilt it. Then of course, it burned down again about 19...I don't remember when it burned down the second time, but that was after everything had moved out of here. He built that big house up on the hill, three stories high.

LVS: The big yellow one?

GR: Yeah, the big yellow one. He built it up there. They tell me he had five children, and they had servants and every room in that house was used when he lived there. Then about 1905 or '06, he sold this property to the Great Northern, and they operated it after that. But they had mostly built the houses. One thing about this town, it never had a business district. That was because the Company [Somers Lumber Company] didn't want any competition. They had a store where you were expected to buy all you ate, and there was a garage and on the outskirts of town there was another store. They allowed a butcher's shop that was privately owned, and that was it. We didn't have any business district in town.

LVS: Wow! So when you were little did you have to buy all your food from the Company store?

GR: Well, you just about had to because otherwise you had to go to Kalispell, and we didn't have a car so we couldn't go to Kalispell to buy anything. So yeah. They were pretty nice. They'd deliver if after...We didn't have a telephone either. A man came around twice a week and took your order. To start with they delivered with a team, but eventually they had a truck that they delivered the groceries in twice a week. [unintelligible]. The schoolhouse too couldn't be on company property, so that was outside of the town but as close to the town as they could get. They had a rooming house, and my husband said when he first came to Somers in 1929, there were 90 single men staying at this boarding house.

LVS: That was quite an establishment.

GR: Yeah. Yes, it was. It was quite an establishment. Of course it was a man and a woman that run it, and Mr...Well, in 1929. I don't know how it was run before then. But Mr. Ratchford (?) did the cooking, and his wife took care of the beds and everything. There were three churches in town—a Catholic church and a Lutheran church and a Methodist church. The Catholic church is the only one that is still here. The Lutheran church moved out because there was no room to park where they had built their church. They had to move out of Somers to get parking.

LVS: Is it Eidsvold?

GR: Yeah, Eidsvold Lutheran Church. But the Methodist church has at this time died out. There was another New Life or something that they called themselves, but they were not part of the Methodist church. Then...Now, let's see, what else do I want to tell you about our town?
[laughs]

LVS: How many kids were in the school when you were there?

GR: Well, the first year I was here in Somers, most grades averaged about 25 to 30, which is kind of average. But the first year I was here, second and third were together and I'm not sure if there were 62 of us in those two grades—and I made 63—or if it was just 62 even, even with me. But the poor teacher, she had a nervous breakdown by Christmastime [unintelligible]. Then I had three more teachers, and I can't remember learning anything that year. I was just completely lost. I came from a little country school where everybody was so friendly and nice. There was more kids in the whole...in that one room than there was in the whole community, in the whole school where I had come from.

LVS: Where did you go to school before that?

GR: Well, the first year I went to school out at Swan River. That was an interesting year, and I was so glad to learn to read. But then next to the Company store west was a post office. That was kind of two little rooms that...Then on other side of that was the bank, and it was built the

same way. The building is still there, but there's no...The post office has moved to bigger quarters more down in the central part of the town. Then there was a doctor, and he had a house there. A bookkeeper had the first house, and then the doctor had the next house. Then there was two rooms that he used for an office. Oh, we had the drug store here in Somers. That's right. I forgot the drug store. [unintelligible] That was the sum total of the...You know, most towns have a business district, but our town didn't. It had a store and a post office and a bank. Had to have the bank [unintelligible]. [unintelligible] each month. The general manager, when we came to Somers, lived upstairs in the upper two stories of that house, and the office was on the first floor. The men came up on the...they used to have steps [unintelligible] then formed a long line. There was a lot of other men that had to pick up their check. The bank would stay open until six o'clock on the tenth and the 25th of the month only because that's the two days it was payday. [laughs] That was payday.

Then, let's see, what did we do for...Oh, we had a gym. We didn't have any electricity out at the school house so we never had a program or anything in the evening because we didn't have any lights. Didn't have any lights. So it was always in the afternoon. When we had a program, everybody was expected to stand up, and the little kids and school kids sat on the floor. Each grade, in turn, would go up and do whatever they were going to do. Like at Christmas time, sing or have a little play or something. But it had to be in the afternoon. Sometimes in the spring, we'd have a program on the front porch of the schoolhouse, and people had to stand up then, too, to see our wonderful program because we didn't have any chairs or any place for them to sit down. That schoolhouse was heated with wood. They had steam heat, but they used the wood to generate the steam. That was pretty hard. I think the janitor had to stay up most of the nights trying to sleep over at the school house to keep the furnace going [unintelligible].

LVS: Did they just have the older boys stoke it during the class, during the day?

GR: No, no.

LVS: Oh, the janitor did?

GR: The janitor had to do it all. The rule was that you could quit school when you were through the eighth grade or you were 16 years old. I remember when I was in the sixth grade, there were four boys that got to quit school, and now I know it was good that they got to because those four big boys, they didn't want to go to school. They'd get up and wander around the room and they'd throw spitballs, and they'd never sit down and try to study. They just didn't want...They could go down and get a job we called picking edgings. The boards came through the saw and the saws sawed off the bark on the edge of the board. Well, the board went on down to a sorting shed, but this edger had to pick those two pieces and throw them over the edge. Some more saws sawed it up, and they hauled it around to the people in Somers for wood. That's how we got our wood. We used what they called edgings. It wasn't very good wood because it came right out of the lake and it was wet and sometimes kind of green too. One reason they started this mill here was because the Stillwater River, of course, empties into

Flathead, and then the Flathead River was the main river that emptied into the lake. But the Swan emptied into the lake too, you know, over by Big Fork. In the spring, they'd have these big...Everybody that lived in had company houses. Everybody that lived in Somers had to work for the Company. If you didn't work for the Company, you couldn't rent one of their houses.

LVS: So you basically wouldn't have a place to live if you didn't—

GR: That's right. There were some other houses outside of Somers, and that's where we lived. We lived outside of Somers. But really, it was cheaper to live in Somers because some of the houses had only four rooms in them but most of them had five. They had a kitchen and a dining room and a living room and two bedrooms. There was a single light that the Company had furnished the light. There was a light that hung down from the middle of the ceiling, and it was what they call 50 cents for each drop. Well, then you had five drops in the house—five lights—that was two and a half. Then it was two dollars for water. Well that was four-fifty. . Then it was 50 cents rent, and that made a total of five dollars. You could use all the water you wanted. You could use all the electricity you wanted. In fact, I know people that heated their outdoor privy with—

LVS: With electric heat?

GR: Yes. So you can imagine. But those privies [unintelligible]. [laughs] Then these logs all came in by the [unintelligible], by the rivers, and in the spring when the rivers were high, the men...the tugboats. They had two tugboats and they had what they called a wanigan, and the wanigan was kind of like a flatboat. The men boarded on them because there were so many logs coming down the rivers, and if they didn't catch them when they were coming down and haul them over here to big holding ponds that they had at the north end of the lake, they'd go on down to Polson and the Company would lose them all. Or another thing that often happened, especially out here in the lower valley, the river would flood and take a lot of logs with them and then farmers would say [unintelligible] 30 days to come and get these logs. Well, there was hardly no way to go get them. It was an awful job to get out on those flats and haul those logs back to the river and dump them in. They had these tugboats out, and then they...Do you know what a boom is? They'd chain logs together and then they'd put the logs inside of this chain and fasten it, and they'd fasten that to the tug and haul it over here to a holding at the north end of the lake. Then they'd go back for another load. I think they took the outer logs because, see, they had a hole in each end and they run a chain through it.

Here comes Ellen, and I [unintelligible]. Excuse me.

[Break in audio]

GR: I don't remember where I was at.

LVS: You were telling me about how they were floating the logs down the river.

GR: Oh, yes. The tugboats had to be there to kind of catch these logs and then bring them to the holding pond over here by the mill. The whole north end of the lake, practically, was holding ponds for logs. Well, to make a boom, they bored a hole in each end of the log and then they run a chain through that and hooked it to the next log. Of course, when they got it as big as they thought they should have it—and that depended on the tugboat, how much it could haul—they left that open so they could push the logs in there and then with their [unintelligible] push the logs in. Then they would fasten the last log together and tow the boom over here.

Then all the men walked to work. And yes, the town had a fence [laughs] all the way around it eight foot high.

LVS: That's amazing.

GR: Like she said, they did have two gates where the men...and of course where there was a road like you had to go up to Somers, why, the main gate there. So I don't know why they bothered other places to shut the gates, but they did.

LVS: And you couldn't get out after dark?

GR: Well, you weren't supposed to, and you weren't supposed to go in there and play or anything. They had a watchman out there [unintelligible]. But besides these workers that came from Stillwater, Minnesota, there were workers that came, at least where we lived, they came...Well, like she said, they came from Italy, and young single men came. With 90 men staying at the boarding house, there wasn't enough women for them. You know what I mean. So I don't think they...Then anyway if they sent back to the old country, they'd get good Italian Catholic wives. Can't tell what they'd find here in America.

LVS: Might not be Catholic. [laughs]

GR: They might not be Catholic. Well, but it seems kind of funny to me. They just...maybe somebody knew somebody that they thought could come over to America, and they'd tell each other. I remember Mary Cash (?). She thought of a girl for her brother, and her brother couldn't even remember her. Her brother came over when he was 18 years old and their father-in-law...not his father-in-law. His brother-in-law sent him money for the ticket but not one cent for food. As long as he was on the ship, oh, he lived like a prince, he said, because so many people got seasick and then the stewards couldn't serve that food and they kind of befriended this young Italian man. Oh, he said it was wonderful. Then he got to New York, and he had to get on the train. He didn't have any money, and I suppose maybe they felt sorry for him and they'd maybe give him an apple or something until he finally got to Somers. Well, then a few years later, he thought it would be nice to have a wife, so they exchanged pictures, and she came on a train and he laid off that afternoon to go get her. He walked up...The train went clear to the

depot, but it stopped at the building that's still there. Stopped at some buildings that were kind of a crossroads across from...Then the postman came down. The train came down at nine o'clock in the morning and went back...well, I say to Kalispell, but I guess it went clear to Columbia Falls. Anyway, it stopped at Kalispell so you could do shopping if you wanted. It would go up in the morning and come down at four in the evening. Anyway, a new wife came down on that four o'clock train and her sister-in-law, Mrs. Cash, had supper for her. The next day, they went and got married. They'd never seen each other before.

LVS: They hadn't seen each other before they got married?

GR: No, until he met her on the train. That's the first time...Well, he saw her picture, and she saw his picture. But can you imagine packing your suitcase and going that far across the ocean and clear across the United States?

LVS: Did a lot of women do that?

GR: Yeah, quite a few. That was common. Then you always heard about poor Jimmy and his trouble. He sent money for two...oh, you had to send them money to come here. They didn't have any money.

LVS: Oh, you had to send them money for a ticket?

GR: Yeah, for a ticket. I don't know how other men did it, but Joe always sent the money for food because he remembered how that was. But they said...now, I don't know that Jimmy sent money for two wives, and then when they got there—two women—they wouldn't marry him because he was such a little old squirt. Then he went over to Italy, and I guess nobody much wanted to marry him. But anyway, he had 100 dollars, and he gave Mary's mother this 100 dollars and she made Mary go to America. But she couldn't go with Jimmy. In the first place, she couldn't afford a wedding, even with the 100 dollars she didn't feel she could afford a wedding. Then there was paperwork she didn't do, and so Jimmy came over here and Mary was still in Italy but she got to come all by herself clear to Somers. When she got here, he took her over to [unintelligible], and she said...well, then they didn't know what to do. He couldn't possibly sleep with her. That wouldn't be right. She said she was willing to sleep any place. No, you have to go and get married right tonight. So they went to the justice of the peace, and he was the one that just about like out of *Guns smoke*. I mean, he was kind of fat, and he wore a vest and the vest had lots of gravy spots on it. He had a full beard but he wore...We used to call them a Windsor tie, they were like a ribbon cut on the bias and you tie them in a bow tie. The only way you knew he had a tie was because some of these ends hung below the beard. You couldn't see it otherwise. Anyway, they got married. He'd gone to bed and he got up, and he put that vest on over his nightshirt. In otherwise...you know how it goes. [unintelligible].

LVS: She always said she married him in his nightshirt.

GR: But anyway, they were married. Then on Sunday, they were wed by the priest, and then everything was all right. I think it was all right. Anyway, they were our neighbors, and they were good neighbors. They'd do anything for you. But Mary wanted to learn American ways, and she used to come up to my mother's. I marvel at her now. She would watch my mother make a cake, and she could go home and make that cake—remember all the ingredients and just how Mama did it, and make a cake just like Mother's. Even bread. Her bread even looked like...She was almost as good a bread maker as my mother. She made bread just like my mother. I marvel that she could do that.

But they were very frugal people. I tell you, in the spring, they used to pick dandelions, and I mean, like a tub-full. And, you know, they ate it. They'd have this, well, it's just like a Caesar salad. They just took a big bowl of greens and boiled an egg about two minutes. If the chickens had been laying, then everybody got an egg. If they didn't, why, they kind of beat the eggs up and parceled just a little bit in each. Then you put oil and vinegar on that, and then they had bread [unintelligible]. But they never sliced the bread like we did. They just held it under their arm and had a big knife and...I always thought they'd cut their hair off when they'd slice a piece off and break it into chunks. Another thing they gathered was mushrooms, and then string them on a store string and hang them over the cook-stove and dry them. I don't know how they used them [unintelligible] but they [unintelligible] in the winter. This was in the days before...You can't imagine how awful it was [unintelligible]. Didn't have refrigeration, and if you did [unintelligible] chickens that you could butcher on Sunday and cook.

LVS: What did they do [unintelligible]?

GR: Well, they always bought some beef from farmers, and they'd make salami. And then they'd just hang that salami up in the ceiling of their bedroom. You could hardly see the ceiling for the salami hanging there. It would get hard almost, as hard as a board, but they would eat that until it was all eaten up and it wouldn't be eaten up until way out in the summer.

LVS: Wow!

GR: Yeah, wow is right. [long pause]

What else do you want? Oh, transportation. The boats could run in the summer. The boat met the train down at the depot, and then from there you could go on the boat to Polson. From there, there was another train to take you either to Spokane or, like if you wanted to go down to Butte or something. But then in the fall, the lake would get so low that they couldn't get up to the dock again.

LVS: Oh, and so they had to close the ferry down for the winter?

GR: Well, the boats, not the ferry. There was the *Klondike* and the *Montana*, and then there were some boats that mostly hauled stuff like flour and grain and even apples. They could go

on east lake shore and pick up apples and bring them here and ship them. It was quite a thing at one time. We used a lot of apples up here. Eventually, Washington did better on apples than we did [unintelligible].

LVS: Were there roads going around the lake shore?

GR: Well, they tell me—now I don't know—that Highway 93 out here was built on Indian trails. It didn't go like it does now, in front of the Montana Grill, it went back a bit further up in the hill. Now, the reason for that was, was because, well, in the spring when the lake was so high, it would be impassable there. That's why they put the road higher up in the hill. But now, you see, they had big machinery, and they filled that all in. You don't even think about how awful it was, because that house there, before you get to Montana Grill, I can remember sometimes in the spring, the lake was right up to the front porch on that house. Well, now you wouldn't even think of that, because it comes up to the road, and if the road wasn't there, you can see sure it would go up in that yard. But they filled in. They had an awful time filling it in. They'd fill it in and come down and look at it, then this winding road had disappeared.

So what else should I tell you about Somers? Can you think of anything you'd like to know?

LVS: Did the dam change the town at all, when they built the dam [unintelligible]? Did it change the lake at all?

GR: Well, not at Hungry Horse, but we used to have a perfectly gorgeous beach all the way from Somers clear over, oh, clear over [unintelligible]. But after they raised the lake—the beach is still there, they tell me—but they buried that so you can't use it! It's just gone, that's all. Just covered with water all summer long. It would be covered maybe a little while in the spring, when the water was high, but then it would go way down and there was that nice beach. The water wasn't very deep, it was real nice for children. I can remember you had to walk out about a fourth of a mile to get up to your knees. But little kids could play along the edge of that water, and because it was so shallow...and it was sandy. It wasn't, you know. Oh yeah, you could [unintelligible]. Not like rock where I got my lake shore. So that was the main...I suppose if we still had had boats then, but by then everything was run by cars and busses. The road took over, and then [unintelligible] quit coming to Somers because there wasn't enough traffic anymore. When that was the only way to go to Kalispell, I can remember this one little car they had [unintelligible] just about be full of people going up to Kalispell. Well, then people got cars. I can remember when the Planer (?) boss got a car. It was in the paper!

LVS: That he got a car?

GR: Yeah, he got a car! And we thought it was pretty nice. Everybody else still walked to work, everybody walked to school, even children that lived...you know where that [unintelligible] is? The people that lived there, they'd walk to school in Somers, every morning.

LVS: The one halfway to [unintelligible]?

GR: No. Well, the big old schoolhouse. You know where it is. They'd walk from here to that schoolhouse morning and night. That's a long ways. Those that lived up Somers, of course, didn't have to walk that far, and we didn't have to walk that far. We really didn't have very far to walk. But we sure walked all the days. The only time it was bad to walk was in the winter, because the wind was always from the north and you had that one stretch—from the railroad tracks to the schoolhouse had north wind that would hit you. I froze my cheeks a couple of times [unintelligible].

LVS: Now, could you walk across the bay to get to schoolhouse? Just because I remember Grandpa telling a story about him going across the highlands in the bay to get to school or something. Did you do that?

GR: Well, we had a sidewalk, and there were years when the water would come up so high that that was kind of floating around a little bit. But it wasn't anything [unintelligible]. And then there was like [unintelligible]. They always wanted to be the first ones that went swimming, so, I don't know what month, but they'd go down there when...you know how it would freeze along the edge of the lake, kind of a crackly ice. They'd go down and wade through that and get out into the nothing. Then they'd come back up, "Ah, we've been swimming already." Foolish.

LVS: Yes. [unintelligible]

GR: No, a lot of...quite a few [unintelligible] from the old country. Sometimes [unintelligible]. Mostly [unintelligible]. it was real bad. Our priest was Irish, and they'd always tell him in Norway, you know...or in Norway, no, in the old country, that, "Oh, they'll be somebody there that'll help you with your...explain everything to you." Well, poor father was there. He just couldn't. I mean he didn't—

LVS: Didn't speak Italian?

GR: No. And you'd think with all these...because he had learned Latin, is what they told [unintelligible] help him. Of course, I don't know. He may have been the kind that didn't want to either, I don't know. I didn't know him at all. He was Irish. Our Italian neighbors always felt like the poor guy didn't even say the mass right. I suppose the poor guy was Irish, and it didn't come over as melodiously as Italian. I don't know. But they were real good neighbors, you know, they just helped. They were different, because...I don't suppose they ever criticized us because we didn't eat dandelions. I know they sure didn't think we were very frugal. There was all those dandelions, and we didn't eat a one. [laughs]

LVS: How large an Italian community was there?

GR: I don't know exactly. We had four houses that had Italians, and then there was us. We were Norwegians. Then this other house, first there were some Irish people in there. Well, he was German, but she was Irish. And it was Prohibition days at the time.

LVS: Did they run bootlegging?

GR: Yep. They did. Whenever they cooked up a batch, why, they used to burn tires to disguise the smell, which didn't do any good because you knew what that smell was. You know how children are? They know—

LVS: They know anyway?

GR: Well, don't they? There's no use...The poet says that trailing clouds of glory will come from Heaven, which is our home. Well, I'm not sure it's clouds of glory, but I know that as a child I knew more about what—and I'm not sure how I knew—knew more about what went on than I would see now. I'm not sure if it's because we associated with their children and they talked about it. Or what. But I know we knew a lot more about the bootlegging operation because we were on the main road from Butte. They brought down all the [unintelligible] down over this road so [unintelligible] always chasing them.

LVS: Oh, down through Somers?

GR: They went Highway 93. They didn't ever go through Somers. There never was any main roads through Somers, not ever. They'd tell about...These guys that would bring down a load...There were a lot of little logging roads up in [unintelligible], little old logging roads. Sometimes we'd follow them. There'd be so many little offshoots here there and everywhere that they'd escape anyway. But if they did catch them, why, they would break every last bottle and pour all the good liquor on the ground and Irishmen [unintelligible]. She always said—this isn't true I know—but she said it was St. Patrick that invented whiskey, because he had rheumatism. He had to rub some of that on his knees, and he would drink a little and he would feel better. Went to scotch. [unintelligible]

LVS: Were there a lot of bootleggers around?

GR: Well...See, the Italians told us that they asked the priest about Prohibition, and he told them that if they just made wine for themselves and didn't sell it, why, it was all right. But the people that really wanted some, then they'd come around and...I think on the whole though our other neighbors didn't sell any. You came to their house and sat down, and they'd pour you a glass or so. Or they might give you some at Christmastime. But some of them made stuff [unintelligible] talking their head off. That's no lie.

LVS: It was strong.

GR: Oh! You could pour it out in a spoon, and it would all burn up with a nice clean flame.

LVS: Wow. That's quite strong stuff.

GR: Yeah. But they didn't all make that. They started out with wine, and then they'd run it through the still until it looked just like water. [unintelligible sentence]. Then we had other neighbors that would stop in. I remember there was a couple that came and lived in a little shack. Your grandfather won't remember this because he was too small. They came from the East. They were always singing about, well he was, he was always singing about the poor little lambs that have gone astray. I thought they were some kind of [unintelligible] or something like that.

LVS: Oh, like a different religious cult or something?

GR: Yeah, kind of a cult. But that wasn't it. I guess he had gone to Yale, but she thought maybe she could collect some Paul Bunyan stories. That was quite a thing in those days to collect Paul Bunyan stories. Of course, he got a job at the mill so that was all right. She went down and tried to sit among all of these men, but they didn't tell Paul Bunyan stories. They was Norwegians, and they talked Norwegian. They had to get their water at our house, or I don't suppose we'd have ever met them. She was very disappointed. She didn't want to just sit around and [unintelligible]. [unintelligible sentence]. Then Joe Brown (?), he was in the Joel Brown—he was [unintelligible]—lost an arm here, and he had some shacks that he used to rent. These shacks that he rented belonged to him. He said my mother could clean it up. I never will forget that neighbor. This lady left her [unintelligible], and it had so many nice cherries on it. We had those cherries, artificial cherries, for a long time. [unintelligible] But there wasn't much of anything else. They had bought that real cheap tin stuff to eat off of. It's about the worst stuff you can ever think of to eat on. If you put hot coffee in one of those tin cups, it just about burns you. So they left all that tin stuff. But that's Somers.

Is that tape recorder still on? I'll tell you something else.

LVS: Yep, it's still on.

GR: Oh, no, I don't want to tell it [unintelligible].

LVS: Well, I can turn it off when you need [unintelligible].

GR: Okay. You turn it off and then I'll tell you.

LVS: Okay.

[Break in audio]

GR: So they dug separate graves for each [unintelligible], and they quit having two year of high school. One year they had four years. I think it was 1936 they had a graduating class. But it was...We didn't have enough room, and they didn't [unintelligible]. I don't know why...Big Fork built a high school, so we could have too. I know that.

LVS: Did a lot of people leave town after they got finished with eighth grade or after they graduated from high school?

GR: Oh, not very many kids went to high school. Out of the class that I had when I was in the eighth grade, three of us finished high school. Two boys and me. Because, well, I can see how it was. If you take those boys that were 16 years old and could get work. That was all there was around here, so you go work at the mill, and of course, they did.

You can turn that light on, and we can see a little better. There's a...on the other side. Keep turning. I think once more maybe. It turned it off. Well, don't turn it once more.

LVS: [laughs] Okay. So how many people lived in Somers then?

GR: Well, I don't really know. There were 100 houses, 114 houses. [unintelligible] sold and [unintelligible] they would average about...I suppose, right around 800 people. You know, you figure, like, each house was probably average about five people, well, that would be close to 600, and then there were...I don't know where they decided [unintelligible] the town proper. I think that would be the Company town, as...It was a company town. You ever hear Tennessee Ernie Ford sing, "I sold my soul to the company store?"

LVS: Yes, I've heard that.

GR: Well, that's kind of the way it was in Somers.

LVS: When did the mill close down?

GR: Well, I think it was June 1, 1949, was the last day that Forest worked. The planer run a little longer. There was still some stuff to plane after the mill had shut down. But I think the mill had shut down the fall before in '48. At one time, they made ties for the railroad, but they quit making ties in '49 and they let small operators [unintelligible]. But they treated them and polluted everything up here at the north end of the lake. You've probably read about that. They're still trying to...One man I talked to said, well, what they used was kind of strange. He said, "You can dig down and then you can take that stuff and just literally pick it up and it kind of hangs together."

LVS: The stuff from the railroad ties?

GR: Well, they used creosote to treat the ties so they'd last longer. Then when they'd used it long enough it wasn't good anymore and they'd dump it. They used to dump it in the lake. So this whole end up here is polluted. Now, Mr. Van Rinston (?) thinks that what they used wouldn't hurt, because it doesn't seep. It just sticks together and hangs in long chunks. You get down deep enough here there's clay. But I don't know. I know nothing about things like that.

LVS: So after they sold the mill, did they sell all the houses and everything too?

GR: Yeah. They sold everything in '49, in about a year, to an Alaska junk company.

LVS: Oh!

GR: They advertised in all the papers. I know the *Wall Street Journal* had an ad and the *Minneapolis Tribune*. I saw those two papers. And the *Seattle P.I.* [*Seattle Post-Intelligencer*]. I'm sure there were other papers too, and of course, the local paper. We heard that it sold for 100,000 [dollars], but I don't know if that's true. I have no idea what...The man that you dealt with always was Alex Schulman (?). He came to see what you wanted to buy, because the contract with the Company was that the people that lived in the house would have the first chance to buy it. But if they didn't want to buy it, why, then Schulman could sell to anyone else that wanted to buy it. Then the first thing he had to do was survey everything because nothing had ever...well, it had been surveyed, but the Company owned it all and so nobody paid any attention to it. So the people would tell him, "Well, this is what we own" and maybe the next door neighbor would say, "No, you don't."

LVS: [laughs] Oh. Did a lot of people stay here even after the mill closed?

GR: Well, no, because there wasn't any work, but we stayed and a few other people. Then some of the older people, they bought their house and stayed on and lived here. A few other people bought houses too, or...But, for the most part...Then of course, the mill burned up so that was too bad.

LVS: Where did most [unintelligible] people go?

GR: Well, a lot of people went up to Libby, and they went to Newport, Washington—different places where there were mills that could use an experienced person. That was something else too when you think about [clock chimes] [unintelligible]. Some of them could read, but some of them couldn't read. Some of them couldn't even sign their names, and yet they got a job and learned their job and worked here. Now, I don't think you could get a job anyplace if you couldn't read and write, can you?

LVS: I don't—.

GR: I don't think so. But, I remember Jimmy Cash (?), he just wrote X, he couldn't...He couldn't even write his name. Although I think that his wife worked with him so he got to the point where he could write his name. But Mrs. Salmi (?) had boarders and she lived not far from us, we used to go there. Those boarders would come out and we'd have our schoolbooks with us, and they'd want us to read to them and they'd want to sit there and look in the book while—

[End Tape 1, Side A]

[Tape 1, Side B]

LVS: I was kind of wondering about what happened when the dam came down. Did the lake keep rising [unintelligible] as much?

GR: Well, after they put the dam in...It's up to Bonneville Power. They raise it to a certain level by June 1, and then they let it down again in the fall in October. But in the old days, it went up when the snow melted out of the mountains and the water came down the rivers. Usually by June, it had reached its peak, and from then on it would go down again. I tell you, it really went down. You know that old dock out there? The water wouldn't even come up to that. That was all blank between my island and those other islands out there. Well, just like it is in the spring, if you're ever up here in the spring, you know there's no water in there. Well, that's the way it was. In the good old days before the dam came in. But now Bonneville Power regulates it. Opens the gates down at Polson and shuts them and everything like that. Well I don't know...I think the last time I can remember those gates all open was when we had the flood.

LVS: You had a flood?

GR: Yeah. It was in June, but I don't remember the year anymore. I have it in my book. We had 11 inches of rain up in the mountains on top of the snowpack, and it all came right down and we had a flood. [unintelligible] Evergreen was up in Kalispell, and the road out by Woodland Park was underwater. About two feet of water over that road there was just flowing like that across the road.

LVS: Was this back in the '70s?

GR: I don't remember now when it was, but we did have a flood. '64, I think. One of those floods that happens once in 100 years. They always said we'd never have a flood after we got Hungry Horse. Well, that wasn't so. We had a humdinger of a flood after we got Hungry Horse.

LVS: [laughs] Sounds like it.

GR: [laughs] Yeah. Course, Kalispell was all right, but Evergreen and everything below, kind of below the hill there [unintelligible] and lower—Woodland Park.

LVS: Do you know what year they stopped doing the high school?

GR: Here in Somers? '36.

LVS; '36?

GR: Yeah. Because, see, they wanted to make it...That was the one year they'd had four years of high school, and they wanted to keep it that way. But they had an awful time getting

accreditation for that year, because they didn't have enough room. They had to build, and that part of it was voted down. But when the schoolhouse burned I think there was only two votes against building a new schoolhouse.

LVS: Well, that's [unintelligible].

GR: I think that's terrible there were even two votes. How could they think we didn't need a...of course, I can see how they felt. DeForest (?) was on the school board at the time. Because the mill had gone out, and he just thought it would be like all these other lumber towns you hear about, nothing. Nobody lives in them, just boarded up houses. Move houses out, and...There's a few houses moved out of Somers but not very many.

LVS: Did most of the Italians stay here, or did they go back to the old country?

GR: Well...No. I don't know...I knew one Bohemian family that went back to the old country, but I never knew any of the Italians. They all said they were so poor, they just couldn't see any hope back there. These Bohemian people...Well, they called themselves Bohemians, they lived in Czechoslovakia. They'd been here a while, and they owned land in the old country. They were somebody in the old country. Here they were just another working stiff, and I think especially Mr. Harncharle (?) was the name, felt bad about that. You know, he didn't have any honor here. So they went back. His wife didn't want to go very bad, she had a little boy and she was afraid he'd die. We heard he did die. Because she said the way it was, you kind of lived in town, but your land was outside of the town. Then everybody had to go out and work on this land, and the only one to take care of the children was an old grandfather. She just felt like he was getting too old. I don't know if that's the cause, but we did hear in a roundabout way that—

LVS: Oh, that's too bad.

GR: Yeah, it was too bad. But I think about them. They did pretty well. They built a little house there—we bought it so I know—and it had cute furniture in it. They saved up enough money to go back to...None of the Italians went back. But the older generation of Italians died, and there's...I think about, I can only think of one family, not even one family, one Italian lady left here in Somers.

LVS: Really?

GR: It's kind of that way with the Norwegians too. Because, well, the town is still, every Company house is full of people, but when I go to the firemen's supper in the fall, I don't know anybody. It's filled up with strangers. I can't get over these strangers. They have taught at the University of Southern California, and I think, "How did you get up here?" It just happens. But then, children get scattered. Well, just like...I think Arnold has been fortunate. His children were all kind of around, but now Patty, look at, she's in Tillamook, that's too far to get together for Thanksgiving.

LVS: Yeah, it was too bad.

GR: And you didn't even feel you could go home for Thanksgiving.

[End of Interview]