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Interview no. 864

Julia Nail Moss

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UNIVERSITY OF TEXAS AT EL PASO
ORAL HISTORY INSTITUTE

BIG BEND NATIONAL PARK ORAL HISTORY PROJECT, 1994

INTERVIEWEE/ADDRESS: Julia Nail Moss, 810 East Avenue A, Alpine, Tx., 79830. Phone: 915-837-3264.

INTERVIEW BY: John R. Moore

DATE: Feb. 27, 1994

LENGTH OF INTERVIEW/LANGUAGE: 1 hour/English

SUMMARY: Moss, born 1921 at Marathon, Tx., grew up on the Nail family ranch in what is now Big Bend National Park. She discusses social life among residents of the area before and during the acquisition of property for inclusion in the park. She recalls meeting Roger Toll of the National Park Service, who stayed at her family's home while inspecting the Chisos' south rim and other areas to determine the feasibility of Big Bend being included in the park system. Toll apparently stayed with her family immediately before his death in New Mexico in an automobile accident.

Moss discusses the effects of drought and livestock grazing on the area at the time her family sold its property to the government. She laments the destruction of her family home by the park service immediately after the family vacated the park. She also offers her opinions on park service preservation policy, predator control and the effect of the Great Depression of the 1930s on ranchers' decisions to sell their property.

She also provides detail on her education, by a private governess, at the family home during the Depression. She has some recollections of contact with members of the Civilian Conservation Corps in the 1930s and early 1940s. The interview contains several background comments by her husband, John Moss, who also is a long time resident of the area. Nail family documents pertaining to the sale of property for park use are maintained at Sul Ross State University Library in Alpine.

Big Bend National Park Oral History Project

Julia Nail Moss
By John Moore

February 27, 1994

[This is a] Big Bend Oral History Project interview with Julia Moss at her home at 810 East Avenue A, Alpine, Texas. [This] interview [is] by John Moore. [University of Texas at El Paso]

M: Mrs. Moss, if you would tell us about when and where you were born and your family's background in Big Bend.

N: Alright. I was born in Marathon at the home of my grandmother on May 30, 1921. My grandparents came to the Big Bend from Menard or close to the [area]. They ranched near Menard. And they came in 1908. And I'm not sure when Grandfather bought the ranch, probably a year or so before that, but that's when the whole family moved out - in June of 1908. And they settled at Government Springs, which is right at the mouth of Green Gulch. And their home was still standing until the [National] Park [Service] tore it down. So there's really nothing there, I don't believe, to mark that spot.

M: Could you better describe where Government Springs is, at least in relation today to the park headquarters at Panther Junction?

N: Well, it's more or less right at the head of the road to up Green Gulch up to the [Chisos] Basin. Of course, it's west of Panther Junction. I'm not sure how far.

M: It's where you turn off to go up...

N: Right, right.

M: ...to the Basin on a paved road?

N: And it's down.... And there is a spring still there, but I don't see [any markers there]. And, of course, I really haven't been down there. I don't think, that there [are markers there]. There may be markers there. I'm not sure.

M: When your grandparents moved to the Big Bend area in 1908, what prompted them to pick that location?

N: Well, I'm sure it was always financial. You know, there's always economic reasons for all these moves. And, I don't know why, I've often wondered why they left. Seems like they didn't better themselves as far as country was concerned, you know. It always seemed to get worse every time they moved west, but, I guess, land was cheaper and they could get more of it.

M: So they bought an established ranch...

N: Yes.

M: ...rather than homesteading?

N: They did. Well, I'm not sure just how much, but I imagine all the land was owned around the mountains at that time. In fact, there were two houses. There was one across a kind of a ravine - and I don't know who owned that either - but there

was another family close by.

And then, my father came the next year in 1909. He and his brother, Sam and Jim Nail, moved to the park from Baylor County. And, I think, I'm not sure why they moved except, I think, Daddy was tired of farming.

M: And your father's name was Jim Nail?

N: No. My father's name was Sam.

M: Sam Nail?

N: Yeah. And Jim was his brother. They came together. Jim was older. And they settled, first, close to Dugout [Wells] and then they moved up into - well, they called it - Nail Canyon at that time. Let's see, they call it Pine Canyon now. And they built a log cabin up there, which stood until - oh, I don't know. It's been a good many years since it fell down, but...

M: At the time of their arrival, was there still a community at Dugout?

N: Well, I guess. Well, I'm not sure. I don't know whether the Greens had [already arrived]. I don't know when they came.

M: And the Greens lived at Dugout at one point?

N: Yes, they did, but I'm not sure they were there at that time. But I just know he always said that they settled close to Dugout. They camped there, really, until they built this cabin up in the mountain. And they stayed there a few years and then, later, they moved over on the west side where I grew up and I - at the Nail Ranch, which is just about two miles

west of the mountain, west of Oak Canyon.

M: And the Nail Ranch was separate from your grandparent's ranch?

N: Oh, yes, yes. Uh-huh.

M: So your father bought property...

N: Yes.

M: ...in addition to what your grandparent's...

N: Yes, uh-huh. Actually, my grandparents moved out here with all of their children. There were seven children in the family. They didn't all come at the same time. But it finally wound up in the hands of the youngest boy, who was Watty, Jr. And then my grandmother moved to Marathon [and] built a house in Marathon in about 1916, I think, it was.

M: And you were born in 1925?

N: [19]21.

M: [19]21, I'm sorry. Was your mother from this area or was your father married at the time he moved to Big Bend?

N: No, they married late in life, which is sort of - well, I shouldn't say - customary, but with our branch of the family it is (chuckles). No, they were neither one married. But, let's see, when the Burnams came out here - that was my mother's name - well, there were three boys and four girls in that family. The oldest girl was married. And she came about 1910, I think, or maybe - well, I'm not certain - [in] about [19]10 or [19]12, but the rest of them all came together and married after they got out here. Except two of the girls never did marry.

M: Had your mother's family also settled in the Big Bend area or were they in Alpine or Marathon?

N: No. See, my mother was a Burnam and so she.... They settled in the Big Bend.

M: So they were neighbors to your father and grandparents?

N: Yes, uh-huh. And, of course, there were a lot of people down there at that time and a lot of young folks, as you might expect. I don't guess it was a country for (chuckles) older people, but there were a lot of people in the Basin. Now, they may have come at different times, but I've just heard them talk about all the different families, you know, that they knew. And they also knew the people at the mines [in] Study Butte [and] Terlingua.

M: Was the Leary family in the neighborhood at that time?

N: Well, the Buttrills were here, but the...

M: The Buttrills?

N: ...Learys' were not. Yeah. And the Buttrills were one of the families that they visited. They lived up in Rosillos [Mountains] at that time. And, of course, it was a good ways and they always had to go horseback. Of course, they came by wagon so when they visited they usually spent the night. And, of course, the Hannells then were down at close to where the grave is. Do you know where they lived?

M: I'm not sure where the grave is.

N: Well, you can see it from the road on the way toward the Chisos. And they lived close to there. I can't describe it

exactly.

M: And whose grave is this?

N: It's Mrs. Hannel's. [She] died and was buried there.

M: What is your earliest recollection of living at the Nail Ranch? And what do you recall about your family home and the surroundings and neighbors at that time?

N: Well, it was a fun place to grow up, I think. Of course, I had a little brother that was two years younger than I. He died at the age of nine, but when I was tiny, you know, it was.... We still had to - well, I guess, my parents must have had a model T Ford by the time I was born. I'm not sure when they bought it, but, anyway, it took all day to get to town. I remember that. It was a long ways. We didn't go very often. And the way we came to town was up through Slick Rock and up toward the Alpine road and then up back through down (Oro Gap)??? to Marathon. And...

M: That's a roundabout way compared to today's...

N: Compared to now, although at that time, it was the most direct route to our place because we were on the west side of the mountain, you see. And the mines were hauling quicksilver. They went to Marathon at that time. They hauled it in wagons and...

M: And these are the mines at Terlingua and Study Butte?

N: At Terlingua and Study Butte, uh-huh. And - I don't know what I was starting to tell you.

M: What was your home like at the Nail Ranch?

N: Well, it was pretty native. I mean, it was an adobe, just Mexican style, because Daddy had had a Mexican build it. Actually, it was two rooms to begin with - two adobe rooms - and then, later, they added a lumber sleeping porch and kitchen on the west side of that. And that's.... I never did, really, understand why the park tore it down, but when they first went in they tried to obliterate every sign of human habitation. And so, I guess, that was one of the reasons.

M: Tell me about how long you lived there. Were you still living at the ranch at the time the park service...

N: Yes.

M: ...took over...

N: Uh-huh.

M: ...in 1944?

N: Uh-huh. Well, actually, I think they had to leave in - well, maybe you're right. Maybe it was [19]44. I think they left in, maybe, January of [19]43 or somewhere along the end of [19]43.

M: Tell me about what you recall transpiring, first, with the State of Texas and then, later, with the National Park Service as far as your family property becoming...

N: Well, of course, I really didn't pay that much attention. Of course, I knew that there was talk about all of this. And nobody, really, wanted to leave, [especially] the people that had been there for any length of time. We thought, you know,

it was fine to have a state park in the [Chisos] Basin when the three C [Civilian Conservation Corps] boys came and.... Because my father had once owned that section and it was just too hard to, you know, to get your livestock in and out of the Basin.

M: Your father...

N: He owned it at one time.

M: ...Sam...

N: Yes.

M: ...Nail had owned...

N: So...

M: ...the Basin area? It was before there...

N: Yes.

M: ... was anything there?

N: Uh-huh. And then, of course, I guess, Homer Wilson owned it when the park came in.

M: The state started about, I believe, [in] 1933 in acquiring property?

N: Yes.

M: ...in the area?

N: Yeah, they got the Basin. And then they were working on the other.... What I remember, mainly, was that they kept bringing all these VIPs down to see the park, you know, and they usually came to our house to spend the night and rent horses from Daddy. And then he would take them up to [Blue Creek]. They usually went up to Blue Creek. I suppose -

well, I'm sure the reason they did that was because they wanted to show them the South Rim and Boot Canyon.

M: And the Blue Creek, is that what's...

N: And it was easier to get to it.

M: ...today called the Blue Creek Ranch?

N: Yes. It was easier to go up Blue Creek. You see, they had to ride horseback from Blue Creek on up to - about where the Blue Creek headquarters is now - on up to the mountain. So it was a pretty rough ride on some of those fellows. (laughs)

M: Do you remember any particular VIPs by name?

N: Gee, there was such a - well, I guess, the one I remember most was Roger Toll. He was such a nice man and very polite and courteous. A lot of them just never even said thank you for all the, you know, the favors that we did for them and just...

M: And Mr. Toll was with the...

N: He was...

M: National Park Service?

N: Actually, he was the superintendent of Yellowstone at that point and died not too long after that.

M: I believe he died near Deming, New Mexico...

N: Did he?

M: ...on his way from Big Bend to Arizona in a car accident.

N: He was one of the nicest people. And, of course, there were a lot of locals who went down with him each time.

M: Do you recall what Mr. Toll [looked like], how he appeared? Could you describe him?

N: Well, of course, I was not very old at the time, but I [remember] he was just very kind and courteous and expressed his appreciation, you know. And I remember my mother appreciated that.

M: Did they stay at your...

N: Yes.

M: ...ranch house?

N: They all stayed at our house overnight. They had to, you know. And then, Daddy would drive the horses on up to Blue Creek. And then, they could drive up to Blue Creek to about where the headquarters is and then ride from there.

M: What was your father's opinion about relinquishing his property to the park?

N: Well, you know, nobody really wanted to, but what people forget (chuckles) is that we were in the midst of a drought as well as the depression at that point. And it was a terrible drought, the worst we've ever had. And, I think, if it hadn't been for that, I don't think they would have even considered selling, but...

M: This would have been what year that...

N: Well, I can't be specific. It was.... Because these people kept.... Seems to me like they.... Well, I know, in [19]34 and [19]35 there were a lot of people that came down. Maybe [19]33. I'm not certain.

N: And then, I guess, after...

M: We should, also, not forget that that was the middle of the

depression as well...

N: Well, that's what I said. Yeah.

M: ...as well as the drought.

N: People talk about the depression, but then they forget what a bad, bad drought [we had]. And when the park people keep talking about the vegetation, you know, how the ranchers had ruined the land.... There wasn't much to ruin. There just wasn't any grass. (chuckles)

M: Yes, I believe the park service contends that ranchers had over-grazed.

N: Yes, they did. And another thing that I had read in some of their publications is that ranchers, after they had sold their land, you know, they allowed them to stay, gather their stock, and gave them a year to find a place to go. They contend that they bought more stock and brought it down with the thought of.... Because they were angry, which wasn't the case. I mean, you know, they didn't [have to sell].... Well, they practically did have to sell because, you know, one lone hangout can't battle the whole government. But that was certainly not the case. In the first place, none of them had the money to buy more stock to bring in.

M: The condition of the drought and the depression.... Was your family pretty cash poor at that time?

N: Yes, everybody was, uh-huh, but we were all in the same boat. (chuckles)

M: The livestock, were they suffering because of lack of forage?

N: Many of them died.

M: And I don't know if you remember. There was a government program at that time. They would have all probably starved to death, or most of them, if the government hadn't come in and paid. I think it was, I don't know, just a few dollars a head. And then they shot the animals and buried them because they were dying anyway. And then I've heard others say, "Well, why didn't they take that meat and feed it to people who needed it?" But it was not possible. The roads were so bad and refrigeration wasn't there. It was just no way they could have done it.

M: There was no way to preserve...

N: No.

M: ...the meat?

N: And, besides, you know, it was so poor and.... (chuckles)

M: What year did your family sign over its property? You said once they sold it, they had a year to relocate.

N: Yes. Well, yes, I realized that there were different ties, but I don't remember. Like you were saying, I know they had moved. By [19]44 they had moved out. But it was sometime during [the early 1940s] because I graduated from Sul Ross [State University, Alpine, Texas] in [19]42 and then in January of [19]43 I went to Washington, D.C. to work. And sometime during that year of [19]43, it must have been when they moved out...

M: Moved from...

N: ...because I was not at home when they actually moved.

M: Where did your parents relocate?

N: They first bought a place up in what's now the game preserve [Black Gap wildlife management area]. It was the old...

M: Black Gap game preserve?

N: Well, yeah, not Black Gap actually. It was the Walker place. I was trying to think which Walker - I can't [remember] (chuckles) - was living there. Anyway, there was a little rock house there. But they didn't stay there very long because, well, Daddy just didn't like it as well as he thought he would, I guess. And, then, they bought the place over in Chalk Draw, which had belonged to the Schullers. Nolan Schuller was living there at the time.

M: During the process of the government taking control of ranchers' property, did your father and mother and other ranchers every collectively get together and discuss what was about to happen?

N: Well, not collectively. At least I don't remember that they did. I know I remember hearing them talk. When somebody would come, you know, they would discuss it.

M: They didn't create an...

N: No.

M: ...association or...

N: No. I guess they weren't as familiar with the way the government operates as they are now. (chuckles) And, I remember, Homer Wilson was our closest neighbor. You know,

they lived in Oak Canyon. And, I guess, he had more money than anybody else, but it was all tied up in land and stock so he didn't have any money either, actually. But he said, you know, that there was just no way that we could fight. I mean, if the government made up their mind to take it, there was no point in trying to hold on because they would win anyway and, then, you'd just lose everything in lawsuits.

M: Did your family and others, to your knowledge, agree that where they lived and the scenery and the environment was of national park quality?

N: Yes, I think they appreciated the beauty of it all along. They always did.

M: And they saw that it was...

N: Oh, yes.

M: ...somewhat unique?

N: I think that's one reason they went there, uh-huh.

M: Do you recall particulars of your family's settlement with the government, [such as] what they were paid [or] any [other] particulars?

N: Well, all those papers are up in the archives at Sul Ross. And I don't have copies of them. I didn't keep them, which I probably should have done. [I] didn't keep Daddy's papers. But, I think, it was about two dollars an acre it must have been. That's about what it was.

M: And how many...

N: And they did pay for improvements. I think they paid extra

for improvements.

M: Improvements such as the home...

N: I think...

M: ...home and water wells?

N: ...and tanks, you know, windmills, and so on.

M: And your parents' ranch was approximately how many acres in size?

N: I believe.... I want to say twenty-eight sections, but I'm not certain that that's exactly right. He owned - some of them he was buying, you know, at the time and...

M: Approximately twenty-five to thirty sections...

N: Yeah.

M: ...would be...

N: Uh-huh.

M: ...a good estimate? Okay. And the park service in 1944 or [19]45 tore down your home?

N: That seemed to be their policy. When they first came in, they tore down all the fences, they tore down all the water troughs, and did away with all the houses, tore those down, bulldozed some of the springs. A lot of the wildlife died as a result of it, but, you know, I guess they didn't...

M: They bulldozed the springs? These were natural springs?

N: Yes. Of course, the ranchers had gone in. Wherever they found a natural spring, they would clean it out and, maybe, make a little trough or hollow it out so that the stock could drink there.

M: So it could collect water?

N: Right. So it would collect. And so, I guess, they didn't want anything to look like man had ever lived there. I think they wanted it back - I don't even know if they wanted it to look like Indians were there. Of course, I don't really know, but I know that's what they did.

M: Does anything remain at your ranch site today?

N: Well, yes. They left a.... Well, I haven't been down there in quite awhile. There was still part of the old adobe wall standing the last time I was there. And they kept up the windmill, I guess, for deer and...

M: It's strange that they call that the Old Ranch.

N: Well, for a long time they did. I think it now says, Nail Ranch...

M: Nail Ranch.

N: ...on the sign, but for a long time it just said, The Old Ranch or An Old Ranch.

M: It seems ironic that today they have an exhibit for tourists at the ranch site.

N: Do they?

M: And they have a pamphlet, I believe...

N: Well, I haven't been down there.

M: ...discussing the ranch and they even have...

N: Well, you see, they've changed their policy. Each new superintendent seems to have [a different policy] - or maybe its in Washington - but they change their policy instead of

having an ongoing plan. (chuckles) Now, they've tried to restore some of the old places that they tore down. And one of the sad things - I don't know if anybody's given you Patricia Wilson's address, or Patricia Clothier she is now...

M: No ma'am.

N: Their home.... Now, they didn't build it, but the home that they lived in Oak Canyon was an old [structure ordered from the] Sears Roebuck catalog, you know. It was ordered from Sears Roebuck catalog. And, I guess, the Roonies' were the ones who actually brought that [Sears Roebuck home]. They had set it up somewhere else and then moved it down there when they brought that...

M: The Sears home had been erected elsewhere but...

N: Yes.

M: ...relocated?

N: And then moved, uh-huh.

M: And Oak Springs is below the Window?

N: Yes, uh-huh. And so that's gone, you know. They just tore that down. And just a lot of things that would be of interest were [torn down]. And I thought our house, you know, was a typical Mexican-style adobe. It would have been interesting to people now, I think.

M: Do you have any idea why they left the Blue Creek Ranch standing?

N: Well, in the first place, there was no way for anyone to get there at that point because that road [Ross], that Maxwell

[Scenic] Drive, had not been built. And, I think, they maybe thought they needed to keep somebody there or when they took horseback tours up there they needed a place to stay and...

M: So that was, again...

N: That was my...

M: ...their access to the south rim?

N: That's what I figure they did. I don't know.

M: Do you recall other structures that they tore down anywhere in the vicinity?

N: Well, of course, the Wilson place and our place. Crotin, there was a ranch at Crotin, which two of my uncles owned at various times. Have you been over there to Crotin Springs?

M: I'm not certain I know where that is, Mrs. Moss.

N: Well, it's between our house and Government Springs. So it's.... That was torn down. And that was a blatant case where they bulldozed the spring and...

M: Was the former Buttrill place torn down?

N: I don't know. I don't know about that.

M: That was located north of Government Springs?

N: Yeah, uh-huh. And the Burnam place.... Well, their old house, the original house, had burned and they had replaced it pretty much [as it was before]. It didn't look like exactly like it did [previously], but it was certainly in the same spot. And it was a new house and they tore that down. And I'm sure a lot of others [were torn down] that I don't know about.

M: Yet they left buildings standing at Castolon?

N: Well, you see, they didn't buy Castolon at that point. You see, the Cartledges were, really, the.... They went around selling the land and so, really, they came out ahead. And they didn't sell their land until much later and got a better price for it. So....

M: The Cartledges owned all of Castolon...

N: Yes.

M: ...or much of it?

N: Uh-huh.

M: Do you remember when they turned their property over to the park service?

N: (turns to spouse, John Moss, and asks if he remembers when the Cartledge family sold their property to the National Park Service. Mr. Nail subsequently recollects his attempt to purchase scrap lumber from the National Park Service during the federal government's demolition of the Cartledge home)

N: (laughs)

M: And these were poles...

N: When they built the house, he had a Mexican drag them. They cut them up in the Basin. And they were about a foot in diameter and about twenty feet long at least, you know - the *vigas* - and hauled them down with a burro. I'm sure he dragged them - he couldn't have carried them, anyway...

M: Right.

N: ...and, I guess, through the Window. I'm sure he did because

it would have been too far to go around through Green Gulch.

M: But the Park Service would not agree to sell scrap?

N: Well, now I thought the man who had tore down the houses got lumber, didn't he? (turns to spouse and discusses question of who may have gotten the scrap lumber)

M: So it seems wasteful to you in that case?

N: Well, I think considering the history of it, yes. (chuckles)
I think those poles were historic.

M: If we might back up a little bit to the point that you still lived there at home. Could you recall what your social life was like with neighbors [or] residents of Castolon or Study Butte or.... Anything you recall?

N: Well, actually, when I was young we were in the depression so we didn't do a lot of traveling around but, of course, we did occasionally see the people in Study Butte and Terlingua and Castolon. And, I think, I mentioned earlier about when Mother and Daddy first went down that there was a lot of activity, but it was probably not as often as you might think. They did get together and they'd have dances and people would spend the night at someone's house and they would have a party. But when I was growing up, of course, our main....

Well, when I was fairly small an uncle lived at Oak Canyon, Charlie Burnam. And one of his daughters still lives close to Study Butte. I don't know if you've met Evelyn Fulcher.

M: No, I haven't.

N: Well, of course, she didn't actually live in the park all that long, but she knows a lot about that country. She's lived there all her life. And, so, they lived there when I was very small. And then Harry Smith bought it and, of course, we'd see them occasionally. But after the Wilsons came - and Wilson bought the Blue Creek Ranch. He came by very often, you know. And she was alone up at Oak Canyon most of the time because the headquarters was up at Blue Creek. So she would come over quite often and, of course, we would go up and visit with her. So...

M: Would she...

N: ...we saw more of them than anyone else.

M: Would she come by horseback or...

N: Horseback, yes.

M: And you would...

N: Uh-huh.

M: ...go up by horseback or...

N: Yeah, uh-huh.

M: Did your family have any contact with the residents of Castolon - the Cartledges or...

N: Well, yes, but like I said, not very frequently. You know, if Daddy had business down there, if he needed something, he would go down and if, you know, school was out I would go with him. Well, of course, my school[ing took place at home]. Part of the time I went to school on the ranch. [For] three years I went to school on the ranch. Part of the time I went

in Marathon. Then I went to San Antonio and stayed with aunts for a year. And, then, I came back to Marathon and stayed with another aunt. And so it (chuckles) was not easy.

M: How did you go to school on the ranch? Was...

N: I had a governess. And this was during the depression. My family figured it was cheaper to hire a governess than it was to maintain two households, one in Marathon and one down there.

M: The tradition was before, I guess, and maybe after, that families would come to town...

N: Yes.

M: ...during the school year?

N: That's what they usually did. And that's what I had done, you see, my brother and I first. And then after he died, just my mother and I would stay in town. And that was just, well, [for] the first four years. And, then, I went fifth, sixth, and seventh grade on the ranch.

M: Your governess, who was she and where did your family...

N: Well, I had different ones. My first one was a young girl out of Ballinger and she was just out of high school. Her name was Esther Fulcher. And...

M: Would you spell that, Mrs. Moss? Fulcher, F-U-L...

N: F-U-L-C-H-E-R, uh-huh. And, of course, she was a real sweet girl and a good teacher because, you know, at least she could teach me. But she just stayed a year. And then a cousin of mine from Marathon who had had a business course came down and

taught me. And then the next year, I had a teacher who had just received her Master's degree from Sul Ross - a Master's in English - and was not able to find a job. So we were really lucky. And she was a good teacher. And after she taught me, she taught the Wilson children and then she went to Terlingua and taught a few years. And then she went to Monahans and taught many years over there. And they even named a school after her and a street. (chuckles)

M: And what was her name?

N: Her name was Florence Pope.

M: Do you recall what your parents paid the governess?

N: I imagine about a dollar a day. I don't know, (chuckles) but it couldn't have been much. I don't know exactly, but I suspect that's about what it was. And then, of course, she got her room and board.

M: Mrs. Moss, I'm going to turn over the tape.

End of Side A

Beginning of Side B

M: Mrs. Moss, was [having] the governess sort of a unique situation for you or did other families...

N: I'm the only one I know of who just had one student (chuckles) per governess. Now, there were other little schools around

the country, like at San Vicente and at Green's [Ranch]. Usually, at Dugout where the Green family lived, one of the girl's, one of the [Green] sisters, would teach the other children because, I think, there were twelve of those children.

M: You mentioned Mrs. Pope with a Master's degree in English.

N: Uh-huh.

M: What all did she teach you that you recall?

N: Well, I just [recall], of course, we basically followed the [same program followed by other children]. You know, we got our books from Marathon. And I would go to Marathon at the end of school and take a test and make sure that I was up with the other children. And, basically, [I followed] the same program that they followed. I just remember that she was just a really good teacher and she was...

M: She taught you reading, writing...

N: Yes.

M: ...arithmetic?

N: And she would introduce, I don't know, in different ways - One thing that I remember she had me do was [write for the ranch's newspaper]. We did a little newspaper and, of course, she wrote part of it. And I would write things that happened on the ranch and, you know, draw the pictures with a compass and all. So, it was interesting.

M: Was that for private consumption or did you circulate it...

N: Oh, no.

M: ...to the...

N: It was just for us. (chuckles)

M: Right. But the newspaper was used as a...

N: Yes.

M: ...as a tool...

N: Yes, uh-huh.

M: ...to teach?

N: Uh-huh. [It was used to] teach me, you know, to write poetry, I guess, and prose, and whatever (chuckles) was required, [such as] spelling, I guess - everything, you know.

M: Your grandparents, you said, first came in 1908, so they were there at a time during the Mexican Revolution...

N: Yes, they were.

M: ... when it began in 1910. Can you tell me what you recall them telling you about their experiences and observations during that period?

N: Well, yes. I've told this before (chuckles), but my mother - let's see, that was 1916, wasn't it? My grandmother had.... See, my grandfather had died and she stayed on the ranch several years. And then she built this house in town. So the women...

M: And her name, Mrs. Moss was, her name...

N: Her name? My grandmother...

M: Yes.

N: ...was Sarah Louise Burnam. She was Mrs. Watty Burnam the first because there were three Watty Burnams. So it was kind

of confusing. So the girls went to town when all this occurred. My father, though, was living over on, where we later lived, on the west side. And he went by the Burnams' ranch and, of course, some of the boys, I guess, were there and a cousin of Mother's, Gid Hubbard, was there. And Daddy was on his way to Glenn Springs and he asked Gid to go with him. And Gid said, "Well, I can't. I have to do something today, but I'll go tomorrow."

So the next day they went down and got there just at the tail end of the [raid]. Buildings were still smoldering...

M: It was the tail end...

N: ...and the Mexicans were still pillaging.

M: ...of the May 8 or May 9 raid?

N: Yes, uh-huh. And Daddy used to laugh and say that, well, he killed a dog and shot a hole through a woman's hat but, of course, you know, he was a great one to joke, so we never knew how much of that (chuckles) [to] take literally.

M: There were several people killed at Glenn Springs.

N: Oh, yes, uh-huh, several.

M: I've read differing accounts. There was a child among...

N: Yes.

M: ...those killed.

N: Uh-huh.

M: I don't recall the family's...

N: Their name was Compton.

M: Compton.

N: Was that what you were trying to think of?

M: Yes ma'am. I've read different accounts that the child was a deaf-mute.

N: Well, that was the one that was not killed the way I understood it. That killed the...

M: That's been a contradiction?

N: Uh-huh.

M: So the deaf-mute child was not killed? It was his brother?

N: Right, uh-huh. But the Mexicans had some sort of superstition about killing a [deaf-mute].

M: Was your father still at Glenn Springs when U.S. troops showed up a day or two later?

N: Well, of course, you know, there were troops there at the time of the raid. And I don't know. I don't remember whether he stayed. Of course, he had a lot of friends. Captain Wood was a special friend of Daddy's. And the Woods were living there. And who else? I can't think of the other names. But, of course, he knew them all. But I do, of course, remember Judge Wood because he lived up here for years later. I don't know whether he stayed until the troops came.

M: Was your father acquainted with Jesse Deemer or...

N: Oh, yes.

M: ...Monroe Payne?

N: Uh-huh, yes.

M: They were at what is now Rio Grande Village...

N: Uh-huh.

M: ...or Boquillas...

N: Uh-huh.

M: ...Texas. Did he ever recall talking with them after they...

N: Well, you know, I'm sure he did, but I really didn't pay as much attention as I could have. It's just too bad, you see, that those folks are not the ones that you could tape. (chuckles) They're all gone and a lot of my generation are gone, too. Like my cousin Bill Burnam died last year [1993] and, you know, a lot of the people who knew.

M: Was your family fearful for a number of years about...

N: I suppose they were, but, of course, my parents really never let me know it. So even during the depression, you know, I remember if you listened to some of the men, you'd think that we were all going to starve to death, but they never did talk that way around me. Now, I did hear some of it from other people. And I 'm sure that they were watchful, although I don't - and they lost a horse and saddle. I think [that] was about the only thing they ever lost at that time at the Revolution.

M: And that was stolen from your ranch home?

N: And, of course, we always went off and left the house open if anyone came by so they could go in and cook or whatever. And, of course...

M: So there wasn't a great effort to secure property or homes?

N: I don't think it would have done any good. (chuckles)

M: Was there any law enforcement in the area other than a county

sheriff that you recall?

N: I'm sure there was. I'm sure there were [Texas] Rangers around, but I don't remember hearing talk about it.

M: They were not so prominent that...

N: Yes.

M: ...they...

N: They just sort of blended in with the.... Uh-huh. I'm sure, you know, my parents knew.

M: Particularly following the Glenn Springs raid and the revolutionary era, even up into your time, do you recall what the relations with Mexicans across the river was? Was there animosity or...

N: No.

M: ...cooperation?

N: No, I don't think so because they came back and forth and worked. Well, of course, we could hire anybody on this side. We did. And there were a lot of them, of course - well, not a lot either. You'd be surprised. But Daddy usually hired one of the families who lived close down to... And then, later, sometimes you'd have to go across the river and find somebody if you were desperate, but...

M: To hire...

N: Yes, to hire help, uh-huh. But there was no animosity that I've ever heard of. Now, I don't know how the Mexicans felt.
(chuckles)

M: But from...

N: But from our point of view I never heard that.

M: You mentioned that you only had a few items stolen from your home during this period or later. Was cattle rustling ever a problem on either side of the border that you recall?

N: Well, I'm sure we'd lose a steer now and then from somebody that wanted to eat it. Yeah. Yeah, that happened.

M: But it was not large-scale...

N: No, not like it is these days when it is so easy to drive up and (chuckles) load them in a truck.

M: Is rustling more dominant today, you think?

N: I think so. Oh, yes. I don't mean down here particularly, but I mean all over because it's...

M: In general?

N: Yeah.

M: Right. Because then they had to...

N: Right.

M: ...drive them.

N: Yes, uh-huh. And, of course, you knew your neighbors. You knew everybody in the country and you were suspicious if anything out of the ordinary went on. You usually knew who got the steer, the one that disappeared.

M: You mentioned earlier that although your home would be approximately forty miles from Castolon that you had few occasions to go there.

N: Uh-huh.

M: Someone else told me it was just the roads and travel time

were so difficult that you did not move around much.

N: That's right. You didn't go unless you had to. Now, Daddy used to ride. Well, before Homer Wilson came in and built a net where our fence is for his sheep, we had barbed wire fences. But cattle, you know, can knock those down. And he used to ride all the way to the river, twenty miles to the river and back, you know, after stray cattle and horses. And he would, of course, always spend the night. [He'd] throw his saddle down on the ground and cover up with his saddle blanket.

M: You mentioned that Homer Wilson had sheep.

N: Yes.

M: Was he among the first to bring sheep in to that area?

N: Yes, I think he was. He was the first that I know of.

M: Was there any...

N: There were too many predators, you see, [such as] mountain lions and coyotes. And he, of course, killed out the coyotes and the lions.

M: So Homer Wilson did a lot to control predators...

N: Yes. Yes he did.

M: ...to protect...

N: Uh-huh.

M: ...his livestock. Was there any of the Hollywood traditional animosity between cattlemen and sheep men that you remember?

N: Oh, I suppose there were comments, but I don't think anybody really.... (chuckles) We kept them fenced in so they weren't

hurting anybody else. No, I don't think. I didn't hear about any of that. In fact, they were very good neighbors. We always were glad to have them.

M: When you came to town, did you come to Marathon or to Alpine or both?

N: Well, we always came to Marathon. Like I told you before, you know, the main road came up to Marathon.

M: At that time there was no direct route from that area to Alpine as there is today?

N: Yes, you could go to Alpine. You see, the road forks - well, I don't know. The road to Del Norte Gap, I guess, was the plainest road because that was where the ore was coming to. But there was a fork which went to Alpine from that same road. Then on the other side of the mountain, it went off down the other direction. But none of the roads were real good, you know. They were all dirt roads. And before the state park was made, you know, they were just pretty bad. And then, of course, cars got better and you didn't have to push [up] every hill like we did when I was tiny. (chuckles)

M: You came to town occasionally to get supplies, I assume.

N: Just as often as you had to, no oftener.

M: Did you, also, have a garden at your ranch home?

N: Oh, yes. I always had a garden, uh-huh. In fact, the only things we bought were, you know, canned goods, and flour and sugar and salt, and things like that.

M: How did you preserve your perishables [such as] meat and so

forth?

N: Well, now, we didn't have a lot of fresh meat in the summer. We had it in the wintertime when you could hang it outside. Of course, we had coolers, old milk coolers, and they would keep milk. And some things would keep in there, but not a lot of meat, you know, not of beef. Now, Homer Wilson would kill a goat, you know, sometimes and bring us part of it. And that was about the only meat we had in the summer [with the exception of], of course, canned meats. And, of course, in the winter we would share beef with them, but you just didn't eat a lot of fresh meat. (chuckles)

M: You mentioned that, occasionally, neighbors would gather at someone's home for parties and dances and...

N: Uh-huh.

M: Can you describe for me what the parties were like? Did you have barbecues and...

N: Well, I remember - the ones that I have gone to - everybody would just go and gather and they would usually dance all night. And they would put the children down on a pallet somewhere. And, then, the next day they'd go home. (chuckles)

M: Who provided the music?

N: Well, I guess, there must have been somebody around with a fiddle or... (chuckles)

M: Guitar.

N: I'm sure there was, but I can't remember who it was. Or maybe

[there was] a piano. My mother always had a piano. She played the piano. And so the Burnams had a piano at their house and she would play the piano. And I've heard of a time - of course, this was when they were all younger - when there wasn't any music and so my Uncle Watty whistled. I don't know how long it lasted, (chuckles) but that was how they danced. And I don't know where this was either, but I just heard tales [and] heard them talk about that.

M: You also mentioned earlier that the roads were bad until the CCC, the Civilian Conversation Corps...

N: Well, whenever the state built the - you know, the state graded the road and, I guess, it must have been about that time.

M: About in the mid 1930s.

N: Yes, uh-huh.

M: Do you recall any contact with the CCC after they arrived?

N: Well, actually, we didn't have any reason to have any contact with them, but you'd see them pass by. They would just burn up the road, you know, going back and forth to Marathon and Alpine because they had to go in everyday for supplies. And we met a man just a few days [ago], last Sunday, who came by who had been down to the pioneer reunion of one of the three C boys. And he was telling about meeting my father one time and..

M: Do you recall his name, the gentleman that you met?

N: Yes, it was W.R. Bowers. I had heard they were trying to get

some history on those. Have you heard anything about this?

M: I'm going to pause...

N: I'm sorry.

M: ...for just a moment. (taping stopped and started again)
Mrs. Moss, did you ever go to the Basin while the CCC camp was there?

N: Yes, we would go up there and see what they'd done, see the roads. We were just really impressed that - well, of course, before you had to go by horseback if you wanted to get into the Basin.

M: And after the three C arrived they built the road?

N: They built the road, uh-huh. And, of course, they built a camp down there. And, of course, we knew some of the people who worked with some of the supervisors, [such as] maintenance people. Lloyd Wade was there and his family and Mr. Lester and, I don't know.... Well, I didn't know Ralph at that time, but, you know, there were people that we knew who...

M: Was there a doctor at the camp at that time that you recall?

N: Not that I know of.

M: One member of the three C told me there was a doctor there in 1942 that he recalled.

N: Uh-huh. I didn't know that.

M: He also recalled saying he never had an explanation of why the recreation hall at the Basin was painted black and yellow. Do you recall ever seeing that?

N: I have no idea, but I imagine that was the kind of paint

(chuckles) they had. I doubt that it was deliberate, but I could be wrong. I don't really know.

M: Okay. What else can you tell me about your life in the vicinity and, particularly, after the park started acquiring property? Did your neighbors become fewer or did you all...

N: Well, actually, we all moved out about the same time so....

M: What is your observation today compared to 1943 or 1944 when you last lived there or your family did? [Can you comment on] how much it's changed, other than the destruction of property? Do you see any noticeable difference in the scenery, the plant life, the wildlife?

N: Well... (turns to spouse) What were you going to say? (chuckles) (spouse comments on diminishing number of sheep due to predators) Because of the predators...

M: This is after you moved from the park?

N: Well, I mean, there's nothing here now. There's no sheep and goats in the country. Whereas, it used to be lots of them.

M: Explain how that happened you think.

N: Well, I know how it happened. The coyotes and the panthers ate them - killed them - and the eagles because, you see, we didn't eliminate them by any means, but people did control them because they will eat baby calves. And, of course, the panthers just love little colts, so we had a hard time raising [colts]. Daddy always loved horses and he had a hard time raising colts.

M: Because of the mountain lions?

N: Yes, because of the mountain lions. Uh-huh.

M: So what you're saying is that after the park was established, those people living on neighboring ranches...

N: Yes.

M: ...suffered from the...

N: Yes.

M: ...increase in predator wildlife?

N: Uh-huh.

M: Were there ever discussions with the park service about that?

N: Oh, I'm sure there were. (turns to spouse) Did you ever discuss it with them? (chuckles) (spouse comments that his discussion with the Park Service never did any good) He was raising sheep just north of there for a time, but...

M: But the Park Service chose not to help control?

N: Oh, they never have. (chuckles)

M: Did that create a lot of bad feeling?

N: Yes, I'm afraid so. Uh-huh.

M: Does that persist to today?

N: I'm sure it does, uh-huh.

M: What did ranchers feel that the park service should do regarding predators? Was there a particular opinion?

N: Well, I guess, they realized when the park got it that what would happen, you know. I really did think that. But.... (spouse comments that ranchers's only recourse was to complain)

M: Complain and no response was your feeling. You mentioned

earlier, too, Mrs. Moss, that you left the area in about 1943 for...

N: Yes, uh-huh.

M: ...Washington. Could you tell me a little bit about what prompted you to leave Texas?

N: Well, actually, World War II was on and, I think, you know, there was a lot of unrest. And I trained to be a librarian and there was nothing open here. And I just got a civil service job in Washington. I took it. And then I stayed three years there. And then I came back and worked at Fort Bliss for awhile, Del Rio, and various places.

M: As a librarian...

N: Yes. Uh-huh.

M: ...for the government. And how long have you lived in Alpine?

N: Well, we've lived here twenty-one years in October. We lived in Marathon. Well, after we married, we married and lived in Uvalde, and then we moved back to Marathon and lived there - about twenty-years, (turns to spouse) wasn't it - until our children were out of high school and then we moved up here.

M: So you married in San Antonio?

N: Uvalde.

M: Uvalde. Right. Did you retire or had you retired when you moved back to Alpine?

N: No. I worked up here until seven years ago [when] I retired.

M: At Sul Ross?

N: At Sul Ross.

M: As librarian?

N: Yes.

M: Right.

N: (spouse remarks that they were wed in Marathon) Well, yes, but, I mean, we were living in Uvalde. That's what I meant. (chuckles) It wasn't clear.

M: Do you still have other family living in the area?

N: Not many. I have - I mentioned Evelyn down at Study Butte - I have a cousin living here, D.W. Kahns, and a cousin's wife lives in Marathon. And that's just about all that's left. A cousin's wife lived in Fort Stockton, but they're nearly all gone.

M: Had your grandparents both died by the time.... Backing up, again, what had happened to your grandparents?

N: My grandfather died. I started to say a while ago, but I can't [remember exactly]. I guess it was about 1912 or earlier. He didn't live too long after they came out here. And then my grandmother died about 1922, I think so, soon after I was born.

M: And was a member of the family operating her property at the time?

N: Her youngest son took over that ranch, uh-huh, and kept it until the park....

M: And his name was?

N: His name was Watty Burnam. You see, her husband was Watty Burnam and her son was Watty Burnam.

M: So he, like your parents, sold his land...

N: Yes, uh-huh.

M: ...to the government? Do you recall approximately how much land he owned at the time?

N: No, I don't.

M: Something comparable to your family's...

N: I don't know. I don't know how much land Grandfather had and I don't know how much land there was when....

M: So your family was...

N: They were small ranchers, you know, they were nothing on a big scale.

M: But much of your extended family was affected by the park?

N: Yes.

M: Your uncle...

N: Uh-huh.

M: ...and his family?

N: Uh-huh.

M: Okay. Is there anything else, Mrs. Moss, that I haven't touched on...

N: Well...

M: ...that you'd like to tell me about? Any interesting funny stories? Anything that comes to mind? (phone rings, taping stopped and started again)

N: [That was] D.W. that called and he's home. I was wondering if you might want to talk to him. Now, he didn't live down there, but his mother, actually, is my first cousin although

he and I are near the same age. He used to visit down there at the Burnam's a lot when he was growing up. I know you've got some other names. I just wondered if I could help you in anyway by telling you about some of the other people that...

M: Sure, if you would care to mention some other names.

N: Okay. What about the Greens? See, Aaron just died. Do you have Jack Green's name on your list?

M: No, I don't.

N: Well, he is one of the Greens, the youngest of the family, and the only one left. Well, I don't know if he's the only one left, but I believe he is. (Mr. Moss comments that Jack Green is the last surviving member of the Green family)

M: And they lived at Dugout?

N: Unless there may be a girl living somewhere and I don't know. I think Ruby died and, I believed, Jack's the last one. And there are some, of course, the Dodsons'. You've heard of the Dodsons'?

M: Yes, I've interviewed one Dodson.

N: Have you interviewed the one in Marfa?

M: I'll pause again, Mrs. Moss.

N: Oh, I'm sorry. (taping stopped and started again after talking off-tape about Bill Dodson of Marathon)

M: Mrs. Moss, did you know Ross Maxwell?

N: Yes, I did. I knew him, well, I guess, around 1935, whenever about the time he first came out here, I imagine, or soon after. I met he and his wife.

M: He came here to do...

N: He did...

M: ...some geology.

N: Geology, uh-huh.

M: And this is before the park...

N: And, I think, I met him at Wilsons'. He and Homer Wilson were both geologists and good friends. And, I think, that's how we met.

M: Did he live in the neighborhood at that time?

N: When I first met him, I don't just, don't think they were living out here. But later on then, of course, they did live up in the Basin during the time when the three C boys were there.

M: Do you ever recall - you were in Washington, of course, but your family [wasn't] - any recollections they might have had about some of the early tourists after the area became, first, the Texas Canyon State Park and, then, Big Bend National Park? Any recollections?

N: No, I don't recall. They, maybe, never met any (laughter)...

M: Right.

N: ...because they were out of the park, you see, before they...

M: Right.

N: So.... And, I think, this just gradually increased, you know. In the beginning there probably weren't that many.

M: Okay.

N: Of course, we had a lot of botanists and biologists and people

like that, you know, came even before it was a national park.

M: Did they stay at your place occasionally?

N: Sometimes they did. Some of them did, uh-huh.

M: Any interesting artifacts that you or your family ever came across?

N: Well, of course, we were always interested in arrowheads and mono[lith]s and things, you know, that we found and, plus, pretty rocks. We liked rocks and liked to walk and prowl around.

M: Any interesting discoveries that you recall?

N: Well, I remember, I never did [climb], no. I was always afraid to climb in those caves where there might have been Indian burials. Sometimes we would find a little bit of woven [inaudible] fiber or something like that but, perhaps, it's just as well that we didn't dig too deep. (chuckles)

M: Where were the caves located that you remember?

N: On the ranch, you know, up on the.... Well, of course, our ranch was mainly on Burro Mesa. And they were around there.

M: You mentioned one grave site or cemetery site. Were there other community or neighborhood grave sites in the area that you remember?

N: That's the only one that I know of and I'm sure - well, no. There's another one down where the Rices' are buried and I've never been to it, but I'm sure the park knows where they are. I think there's several graves there. And, then, I belong to a genealogical society here. And we were trying to do a book

on the graves of Brewster County and I wrote to the park. And they sent me a map showing several graves that I had never known about. And I don't know. We don't know who they were. And I don't know if they were Mexicans, Indians, or what.

M: Before we conclude, Mrs. Moss, is there anything else you'd like to tell me?

N: Well, I thought of one story. And the reason, I guess, [I thought of it is] because it's about a prominent person. One time when little Homer Wilson was about two years old or less, he swallowed a peach seed. And his mother was putting up preserves, you know, and peeling peaches and so she was very alarmed and sent down to the house for Mother. And it just happened Francis Sayer, you know, Woodrow Wilson's grandson, was spending the summer. He and a friend of his were working down here at the Oak Ranch. And they [were] just kind of out looking over the country. Otherwise, we would have had to ride horseback. But he had just arrived and he had his car. And he took us up there to Oak Canyon. And, of course, I don't remember, but Buzzy was in no pain and Mother, I think, told her to give him some bread. And he got to be alright. But, I mean, that was just one (chuckles) exciting adventure.

M: You didn't have any medical help very close?

N: No, no.

M: Did you have to come to Marathon...

M: Yes,

M: ...to the nearest doctor?

N: Uh-huh.

M: Do you recall that you or your family frequently had to go to the doctor?

N: No, not my immediate family. Uncle Wattie broke his leg and I remember they had to painfully haul (chuckles) him to town and then sent for the doctor from Alpine because at that time [we had no doctor]. I don't know where Dr. Wittington was because we had a doctor in - or maybe he just didn't want to treat the broken leg.

Later - well, it was still when I was still in high school - I remember Daddy had the flu one time at the ranch. And he'd obviously caught it down there and he nearly died. And [he] was just very, very sick, but he didn't have a doctor. And he finally pulled through. But, other than that, you just came to town if you could make it. But if you couldn't, you just (chuckles) toughed it out.

(spouse comments on trips made by Dr. Lockhart to ranch)
Well, that was later. Of course, he happened to be down there hunting when Homer Wilson had his first heart attack and, I guess, pulled him through that first time and...

M: This was Dr. Lockhart?

N: Dr. Lockhart from Alpine, uh-huh.

M: I assume that your mother and your grandmother before her had lots of home remedies?

N: Well, I don't remember anything but the castor oil. (laughter) I guess they did, but I don't remember any

particular home remedies they had.

M: Mrs. Moss, we're about out of tape...

N: Alright.

M: ...and I'm going to conclude this interview.

End of Interview