

Edna J. (Clapp) Garrett
Oral History conducted
on April 9, 2011
Interviewed by Dawn Moon
At the home of Edna Garrett
Casper, Wyoming
For Casper College Western History Center

Edna Clapp Garrett was interviewed by communication student, Dawn Moon in her home. Topics covered in the interview include her life as a child in the "Boomtown of Salt Creek, Wyoming;" this town was located eight miles south west of Midwest, Wyoming and the moving of her childhood home from Salt Creek to Mills, WY. Edna Garrett added to this interview with donation of typed questions and answers not covered in the interview. It is available from the Garrett Collection located in the Western History Center as are other vignettes Edna has deposited relating her life and history in Casper, Wyoming.

Dawn Moon: Good Morning. Today we are here with Edna Joan (Clapp) Garrett, at her residential home at 1824 West 16th Street in Casper, Wyoming. My name is Dawn Moon, I am a Sophomore at Casper College, and we are talking with Edna this morning to have her tell us about her life as she grew up in Wyoming and how things have changed over the years. This record will be put in the archives in the Wyoming [Western] History Center, as record of her experiences here in our State of Wyoming. Now, do you have any questions before we begin?

Edna Clapp Garrett: I have done this before.

Moon: Okay, well, let's start with: You were born in the Salt Creek area, correct?

Garrett: Yes, there was a little town of Salt Creek, it is a ghost town now. There is only just a Paymaster Vault that was used by the railroad.

Moon: Hmm. I think the last time we talked you said you were born in a tar paper shack? [Laughs]

Garrett: Yes, I was. I was born in 1926 in a tar paper shack and I suppose it was just kind of a one room place and it was temporary.

Moon: Uh hmm, and, were you the youngest or the oldest?

Garrett: I had four [4] members older than me and four younger.

Moon: Ahhh Wow: Your mom was busy.

Garrett: Yes she was.

Moon: And how was life, growing up in the Salt Creek Area?

Garrett: Well, it was, had been a "boom town", so as a consequence it had faded away and there were empty buildings. There had been stores, like Penney's, all the big stores, theater, [there was a pop factory, beauty shop, car garages with new cars] and dance halls and railroad people and all that you know. But, that was all gone. Some of the homes were there, but, mostly there were just foundations, and every body was in the same boat, you didn't have a lot of money, and just made do with what you had.

Moon: Sounds like you had a big family and how was getting along with your parents ... how was your family life?

Garrett: It was a lot of fun, we didn't have to go to town to see a show, or anybody's house to any foot ball games or anything like that. We had a team of our own.

Moon: Yeah.

Garrett: So we sorta entertained ourselves, and we played all those games of tag, and basket ball, and we had a horse that we could take a little ride on every once in awhile. Of course, we all fell off, but we tried.

Moon: That's exciting. And, so what was it like growing up? Probably completely different than how I have grown up.

Garrett: Oh Yes, it is a lot different than the kids nowadays. We didn't have running water in the house, and we didn't have an inside bathroom. No electric lights, but my Mom had kerosene lamps and we had those in about every room. She was very cautious though, because if somebody would knock one over, you could have a fire, of course. But, it was always fun for me to have my mother do her hair. She had real long hair. But, they cut it off and she marcelled [process to put a deep soft wave in hair] it. The way that she did that was to stick her curling iron down in the kerosene lamp [chimney] and heat the iron and clamp it on her hair. It was not a roller type. It had like [three] fingers that would make a wave. She never wore lipstick, she didn't have time to do all that stuff, you know. When she would put [lipstick] on, I thought she was the most gorgeous person in the world.

Moon: Well, yeah, when there is like nine or eight kids.

Garrett: Yeah

Moon: There was no time.

Garrett: Right, right, I had three brothers that were older and a sister that was older. Oh of course we would get into arguments, but, we got along very, very well. We had to be in Sunday School every morning. We had a Non - Denominational Church, so we learned every religion there was. We had different pastors. Maybe we would have one for twice a week and they would leave. We would get someone else and was a different denomination altogether. We had "Holy Rollers", we had Baptist Ministers and there was a Catholic Church there too, but my Dad was a Baptist and had studied to be a Baptist Minister in Texas.

He wanted to be an accountant, so he changed his subjects and his Father disagreed with him a little bit about that so, but he went on his own and did well. He had a second hand store in Salt Creek, and he sold nuts, bolts, axles, and wheels and he even had a barber's chair. We had furniture, he got furniture from different people that wanted to leave town, so he bought it. We had depression glass, you know, cups and saucers and things like that. Sometimes he would get a bedstead, they were always the metal ones, and my Mom would work and clean them all up. She would decide she wanted to take one of those herself, so we would get bed bugs. That wasn't too much fun.

Moon: No.

Garrett: She had to fight to keep them under control. Every summer, or every spring we wallpapered [inside] the house. We lived in, . . . by then, we had moved into the house in the back of the Second Hand store.

Moon: Oh Okay.

Garrett: And so it was, any little shipment that might come in, she might get something in the furniture, but she didn't really take too much furniture.

Moon: No.

Garrett: Then, they developed D.D.T. and at that time that was the only thing that would get rid of bedbugs. She could fumigate, as we had every kind of diseases you could get .there was always somebody in school that would bring home Chicken Pox, Measles, or Scarlet Fever. [It did no good to fumigate.] It was pretty much a life, like everybody there, lived [In later years D.D.T. was banned]. The Doctor had to come from Midwest.

My Mother frequently had tonsillitis, rather than to take her tonsils out, he used to come to the house and he would lance her tonsils. They would swell up so big, he would lance them and she would be OK for a while and she did really well.

She always had a hard way to take care of nine kids and we didn't have running water, like I said. We had to catch rainwater, and then get water from a Service Station that had an artesian well. She would have to heat it on the stove. The stove had a reservoir and you could fill it with water and it would heat, oh, maybe two gallons of water, that was enough probably to wash dishes and maybe she had a dishpan full of water on the stove [that she heated] to rinse them in.

She made all of our clothes and we always had our own fashion, you know.

Moon: Oh, Yeah.

Garrett: I had an Aunt in Missouri that owned a store and at Christmas time she always sent enough material to make each one of us a dress out of a different pattern. We got to pick which cloth we liked.

Moon: Yes.

Garrett: Oh let's see what else. For our underclothes, that was different too. Well, we had, Mom would buy sugar in a sack and it would have the Holly Sugar emblem on the sack, and she would ... had to use those scrub boards to wash the clothes. She would soak those, I don't know if she had some kind of bleach that she used. I do know she used quite a bit of bluing for the white sheets and things like that. But, she would try to get all of that Holly emblem off of the sack, and then she made "bloomers" which are underpants for us girls and we wore those to school. Every body did in those days, that was the only way you could afford to dress. And, then, we had to wear long stockings,

cotton stockings and she would make like a garter to hold them up. Just take a piece of elastic and sew it, and it would hold them up. In the wintertime, we had to wear long handled underwear with the back drop in the back, and we had to button it and unbutton it. That wasn't too much fun.

Moon: Okay. So, was there any siblings that you were closer to, or were you all just really close? I mean, there was like nine of you.

Garrett: Well, yes this is true, there were nine of us. My oldest brother was really kind of a guardian for all of us. We really looked up to him. Then, they had their boy friends, they would go to their houses you know and visit and read books, go to school together and all of that. The girls we were only two years apart. My oldest sister was very pretty she had dark black hair and green eyes, myself and my sister next to me, [younger] we had white hair, and then my sister that was younger had dark hair and brown eyes. Both the older sister and the younger sister both were very pretty. My sister that was next to me with the white hair had a lot of freckles. She was cute, she was cute, but, she didn't like those freckles, she wanted to try and get rid of the freckles, and it was just really cute. But, we never argued too much. We had to help each other as much as we could and we had learned from some place. Probably a Work Basket Magazine that my mother got every so often, because she crocheted.

We had learned that you could take a strip of cloth and wrap hair around it to curl the hair, to make the Shirley Temple curls. So that was my job to fix my oldest sister's hair. She got fingernail polish one year for Christmas, it was a brand called Lillian Hutton. I don't know if they still have that brand or not.

Moon: I am not sure.

Garrett: But anyway, it didn't have any color to it. It was just clear. Other make up that was in it didn't have any color to it either. It was pretty nice for us young ladies to have that. So one time I asked her if I could use her fingernail polish, she said No, she didn't have enough and anyway I bit my fingernails and she said you have to quit biting your fingernails before you can use any polish on them. So I tried and I got them to grow pretty good. It came time for me to fix her hair and I got it about half way wound up, and I said, can I use your fingernail polish and she said no, that she didn't have very much left, and I said OK, I am going to bed, and she started to cry. And she went, (my mom and dad was in bed) it was about 8:00 I suppose. And she went in and told Mom "Edna hasn't and won't finish fixing my hair." Mom said, "Yes she will." So I did, I fixed her hair. She let me use her fingernail polish though, too. So, that was kind of a little spat that we got into.

Moon: Yeah

Garrett: After, then she would fix my hair. She always wanted to be a beauty operator. Which she wasn't, but when she was little she thought that was really the way to go. But, other than that...

We had a friend who lived across town, my older sister and I. We liked to go over there, after Sunday school we would get to go over to her house for an hour and then the next Sunday she would get to come to our house for an hour. 'Cause it was quite a distance, and my little sister wanted to go and we thought she was too little to be interfering with our conversations, so we told Mom we didn't think she should let her go, and Mom said, just get ready and go ahead and go on over, you know. And, when we would get there, here was my little sister! She had already beat us there. Mom had

dressed her up and sent her ahead and one of my brothers had took her over and then come back. That always kinda upset us, but you know she was only two years younger than me and they had a daughter too, that was about her age and she could play with that little girl. These people were, where we went to their house, were German. He made violins, and he made all of their furniture and lamps out of cedar. Very talented, very beautiful wood in their home.

Moon: When did you guys move to Casper, as obviously Salt Creek isn't there any more.

Garrett: We moved, well, most everybody was gone, there were a few people that still lingered, but as soon as anybody could find a place they thought they could live, they were moving too. So my Dad had talked to a house mover and he said that he could move our house, but the second-hand store had a false front on it. He said that would have to come off, because it would be way too wide to load on his equipment. And so, my Uncle was a carpenter and he lived in Buffalo and he rode the bus down from Buffalo and stayed with us. Remodeled the house, and made it into ... Well, it had the upstairs already in there, but he made that into two bedrooms -- one large one and one smaller one. Then he put dormer windows in each end of the house and then the rest of it was pretty much remodeled inside. Didn't have any cabinets, or sink or anything like that. They did that later. In 1938, my Dad said well, I have made arrangements now we have the house pretty much ready to move. So he bought some land out north of Casper on the Salt Creek highway, towards Bar Nunn, and they, one morning, just came and knocked on the door and said we are moving your house today. Well, that was exciting, it was sad. I had known, grown to like and had a lot of friends in school and it was out. I knew what I was going to be in for when I come to Casper. Have to get acquainted all over and so,

they loaded it up and had to drive with it 40 miles from Salt Creek to the Salt Creek Highway. My Dad had a foundation built and they just put it on the foundation. Then, of course, we had to have a well drilled to get water; they didn't at that time have water from the City of Casper out there. So they drilled a well, and of course we had a lot of fun playing while they drilled the well. They brought in culverts to put down in the well you know, to keep the sides from caving in. That was fun for us to all get up on that culvert and take it up on the hill and then walk as fast as you could to the bottom. My Dad had made a cellar outside, it was heaped up, so we could roll down the hill that was south of the house and come down and roll up on the cellar and then roll back down. Sometimes people got hurt but we got by OK.

Moon: And, was that the last time you guys moved?

Garrett: No. That was . . . well I got married in 1948 and my Dad passed away in 1949. He knew he was not going to live. I was at that time working for Tom Weadick. He had a trucking company, and also my husband owned a truck. My Dad said to me, in probably about the last conversation that he and I had, was, will you see if Tom Weadick can move your Mother's house in to Mills. So that she can have running water in the house. I promised him that I would ask, and try and get the job done. Well, it all worked out fine, Tom said he would be glad to do it, and that Carl would have to help. Carl was more than glad to do that too, because we had to run out to Mom's and take them water and things like that in 5 gallon milk cans. They had a spigot at the Amoco Refinery, it was the Standard Oil Co., at that time and they let us get water there.

So, we moved the house then, and Carl was going forward with the house and Weadick's two trucks were pulling forward, and they had to come down "S" Hill and

make a sharp curve to go into Mills. My brothers had obtained a lot on Fourth Street and when they started across the bridge . . . they had manipulated over this big high bridge that the train ran under, from Thermopolis I guess. Then they made the turn and started towards Mills and when they started to go across the bridge [over Casper Creek] the house was about 6 or 8 inches lower than the bridge which had side railings, so the house had to be picked up. So the one that was helping Carl had to go around and come and get on the other end of the house and they lifted it up and took it across the bridge. Then we turned at the first street into Mills, and our house, we went across the railroad tracks and there's a base ball park there or a kind of park for the kids, now. That was where the [Mills] Jail sat. We had a house that was to the left and that was where Carl and I lived. Then we took Mom's house on down to the Center of Mills and up to 4th Street. My brothers, built the foundation, got all the pipes in for the heating fuel, the electric lines and all of that, got the water in, and put the [kitchen sink, and bathroom in.]

That house is still at 4th and Riverview. I think they may use a different street number.

Moon: Do people still live there?

Garrett: Yes, they do.

Moon: Well that is cool.

Garrett: Well, my Mother's health failed in 1966, so she got to have a pretty nice home until then. Well, her first years were really tough. She did have it pretty nice then, at the end. She got done, putting the lawn in and she was real happy.

Moon: Yeah, that is always exciting.

Garrett: Yeah.

Moon: Well, back to, what are you and your siblings up to now?

Garrett: Well, my three oldest brothers are gone and my oldest sister and my youngest sister passed away.

Moon: Five of them?

Garrett: I have a brother that lives in Denver. My youngest brother lives just a block from me. My sister lives in the Pine Tree Condos with her husband, and I see my sister very regular. We go to lunch quite a bit.

Moon: Oh good, that's good. Well besides all the exciting travels from moving your house, I am sure that you have been to other places in the world. Or in the States at least. Yet, you have still come here, like this is where you decided to make home. Is there a reason for that?

Garrett: I think this is where our friends are. I had a son and he lived in Jackson Hole, and he passed away in 1992 and he was married, but he didn't have any children. His plan was that when we retired he wanted us to move to Jackson Hole, or at least Dubois and then we'd be closer, you know. That didn't work out. Then in 2002 my husband died. My family was here, so I just stayed here.

We did get to do some traveling. Carl had Heart By-Pass surgery twice, and so when we retired in '87 we did get to do some traveling. But, actually, I don't care to go away from home and stay too much. He didn't either. When we would leave, if we left for two weeks that was plenty.

Moon: That was enough.

Garrett: Yeah that was good and we would come home or go to California to see my sister and we would go on several trips with them, you know to different places in California. I never did take a cruise or anything like that. I didn't want to.

Moon: Did you not like the water.

Garrett: No do you?

Moon: No I don't.

Garrett: I never learned to swim, and I would go out on Jackson Lake in the boat, but I had a life jacket on and I figured it knew how to swim so, I would go with it..

Moon: That is awesome. Are there any words that you live by, or how would you like to be remembered by in life?

Garrett: Oh, I try to be as honest I can and try to help anybody that is in dire situations. You know, we had it pretty tough growing up and I have worked and I live very comfortably, and if I see that someone maybe needs a little bit of money I try to help them out. Not a lot. But, if they want to go someplace and have a little vacation I kinda like to give them a few dollars to spend, that they haven't had to work hard to get.

Moon: Right.

Garrett: I guess just to say, that I was a poor little rich girl. When we were growing up, we thought it was tough, but it was instilled in us that money isn't every thing. Family was very important.

Moon: True. I think if you have family, you are richer than a lot of people with money. So true.

Garrett: Right.

Moon: Is there anything else that you would like to add Edna? That I didn't quite cover?

Garrett: Probably there is, but I don't know. I just can't think of it. I miss my brothers and sisters that are gone. But I feel that we will be together again.

Moon: Oh, I believe you will. Definitely.

Well then, thank you very much for your time and I think that will conclude our interview for today.

Garrett: Well thank you, it was a pleasure.

Moon: Thank you.