

The conversations with John T. Labbe on January 27th and 31st concern themselves with the history of logging here in Washington County. Mr. Labbe, who was 66 years old at the time of the interview, was born in the city of Portland in 1911. He has been involved with the logging industry all of his working life. Moreover, during the summer breaks from school, young John was out in the forests cutting and hauling wood.

~~Afterwards~~ Mr. Labbe became a "gyppo", or an independent logger. In other words, he would hire his services out to various mills and contractors here in the northwestern part of Oregon. After retiring from active logging around 1969, Mr. Labbe turned reflective on his experiences in the forests and turned to writing about logging. He has contributed to a number of books on the subject and has authored one on his own entitled, Railroading in the Woods.

Mr. Labbe's major interest lies with the railroads. As a result of his research, Mr. Labbe has knowledge of the various logging railroads in Washington County, i.e. the main lines and the spur lines leading into the mills, camps, and logging sites. As a natural extension of this initial intellectual inquiry, he learned about the individual mills themselves. Also, because Mr. Labbe hired his logging services out, he came in contact with many of the mill owners here in Washington County on a personal and professional basis. As a result of these factors, John Labbe makes an excellent oral history candidate.

In this interview, Mr. Labbe delves into the construction of the Southern Pacific railroad into the forest of western Washington County. By opening up this area, the railroad proved to be the lifeblood of the industry. In the second half of the interview, Mr. Labbe discusses many of the individual mills, camps, and logging sites in the county.

This interview can serve as a valuable preface to the entire series of interviews on logging in the oral history collection. It provides a good overall background into the entire industry.

Mr. John T. Labbe  
January 27, 1978  
Accession No. LOH 78-94.4

Mr. Meyer (LM): Good morning Mr. Labbe.

Mr. Labbe (JL): Good morning.

LM: To start out with, I would like a little information on yourself;  
as to where you were born and where you grew up.

JL: Well, I was born in Portland. My father before me was born in  
Portland. . . He was a doctor; an obstetrician. He was not only  
my father but he was my doctor. Both my sister and I were born in a  
little maternity hospital which you might say was his hospital. It  
was there on Overton Street in Portland, between 22nd and 23rd.

LM: So, how old are you now then?

JL: Well, I'm 66. I was born in 1911. At that time we lived at  
Westover Terrace, near the head of Lovejoy Street, just off Cornell  
Rd. I lived there for something like 60 years.

LM: So you've been involved in logging yourself?

JL: Oh yes, I've been logging all my active working life. Even earlier  
than that. When I was in school I used to spend the summers  
working in the woods, locally around here; primarily in cutting  
wood. . . hauling wood. It's a good summer job for kids. (laughs)

LM: Since you have retired Mr. Labbe you've done quite a bit of research  
of your own on logging and written several books.

JL: Yes, I have.

LM: Your emphasis, I know you know a little bit about the logging mills  
and companies in individual counties, particularly Washington County.

JL: Yes I've followed them because I've been interested. I can remember them as a kid around the county. I never actually did any logging myself in this particular area. Mine was around the state and on the coast.

LM: Could you give me an idea how many logging companies, past and present, operated in this county? And when they had their start?

JL: Well, they started logging here quite early as a matter of fact. The valley itself was never a logging area. The logging was done on the hills around it. As far as I can determine, a lot of this country was open meadow land. It wasn't heavily timbered. The earliest that I have any record of was there at Cedar Mill, which is about...oh...1860. Mr. Jones, I think his name was Jones...yes... Mr. Jones and his son had a little cedar mill there at Cedar Mills. The Cornell Road goes over the top of what was the dam for their log pond. The story that I got on it was that the two of them worked this together. They would close the gate on the dam and back up the water and then they would fill the pond with cedar logs which were cut in that gully up there through...I forgot...there's a park up in there. But any rate, it's along side Cornell Road. When the pond was full, they would open the gate and that provided water for the water wheel. And they would saw up the lumber. Then they would load that on a wagon and the ol' man would haul it into Portland and his son would fill the pond with water and with logs again. That's of course the origin of the name, Cedar Mills. Then later they moved to Portland and started a steam saw mill which became the Jones Lbr. Co. That was in the area where John's Landing now is.

LM: How about some of the lumber mills in the western part of the county?  
They were quite numerous?

JL: Well, they were numerous but they came later on. That part of the valley was slower in developing, you know. This area was filled with small mills that merely served local trade, little farm mills, or... They weren't large. There was no way to get the lumber out. They had to haul it away with wagons. Of course there were no roads to speak of. What there were were only passable in summertime. In the winter they were just axle-deep in mud. So they served local trade. The larger companies didn't come in until they built the rail line to Tillamook. And that was about 1911, I think, roughly speaking. That's about the same age I am you see. That gave access to all that timber in the Coast Range; which was the primary timberland source for Washington County.

LM: Once the rail line was built, where did the first mills start to crop up then? Now that they had the advantage of transportation.

JL: Well, you see, that line was slow in building. But the first section was built from Hillsboro to Buxton. And of course the first mills were in that area. They were around Banks. And then as the line extended the loggers moved on with it. Really, the largest operations were centered around Timber and Cochran. Of course, that reaches your county line, you see. The major operations were in that area.

LM: Now the Timber and Cochran mills were they run by a man (by the name of) Wheeler?

JL: Yes, C.H. Wheeler. He was an interesting individual from all that I can determine. He was a cruiser...and a...he was born and raised in  
(30) Clatskanie.

JL: (cont.) ...and a...when the eastern operators became interested in western timber, he had the job of going around and locating this timber for the eastern owners. He bought up tremendous tracks of timber all through the Nehalem Valley for eastern people.

LM: Who were some of these eastern people?

JL: Well, John DuBois was one of them. He built the big mill at Wheeler. Wheeler of course was named for C.H. Wheeler. He was in partnerships there. And then later on he bought his own timber in the Cochran area and then he set up his operation under his own name. The Wheeler Lbr. Co. was really owned by John DuBois out of Pennsylvania.

LM: Was he a businessman?

JL: Oh, he was a large timber operator. He had interests all over, the Penn. area and out here as well. But Wheeler didn't start on his own until he purchased this timber around the Cochran area. And then he built a mill at Cochran. And then later on he bought another mill at Timber. He was the major operator, really, in that area, although there were others.

LM: Um, now I know you're acquainted with Tony Lausmann. He was the man that bought the Miller (Cox) Lbr. Co. Could you tell me a little bit about the initial company before he moved in and when he came to purchase it?

JL: Yes, I've talked to Tony about that. He's not entirely clear on that himself, unfortunately. He's approaching 90 years of age. His memory is not what it was. But, from all I can tell, there was a small operation there, Miller-Cox, I believe was the name. (35) (He died in Feb. 1978)

JL: (cont.) ...and there was a fellow by the name of D.H. McCall who was operating in there. And their operations were just east of Timber. There was a switch (railroad) there just east of the Timber yard limits on the Southern Pacific. The switch was called Reliance. That was where the line switched off to the Sunset operations. As nearly as can tell that's where these operations were started. He came along and bought the timber in behind and he took over these operations and acquired some of the equipment.

LM: Could you tell me a little bit of background on Mr. Lausmann? And how he got his start and why he became interested in buying land up in this area?

JL: He was kind of an interesting individual. He was a German. There was a large timber company by the name of Stanley-Smith. They got their start up in the LaGrande area. And they came down to the west side of the Cascades...oh...just after the turn of the century. They bought their railroad at Gobel which later became Park and Wilson Lbr. Co. They had that for a short period. Then they sold it and they moved up to the Hood River area. They had extensive operations up around Hood River. That's the time they sent for Tony Lausmann, who was living in Germany at the time. He showed me the letter he received inviting him to come over here and go to work. He started working for them up at Hood River. They had an interesting operation. They floated logs out. They built a series of dams and would float the logs from up the head of this small lake down the dam and then they would open the dam and float them down into the next one.

JL: (cont.) and they got down to the saw mill and they sawed them up and then the lumber was flumed on down to the railroad. He worked up there for them, for quite awhile before he started on his own.

LM: Speaking of flumes, were they any flumes that were used in this area that were used in the mills?

JL: No, I don't know of any in Washington County. There were flumes down along the Columbia River. But I don't know of any here in this county.

LM: Well, back then to Mr. Lausmann. Could you tell me about what time he came to this area? In Sunset, and why?

JL: Well, I couldn't tell you exactly why except that he was working his way up in the industry. He worked into the operation of the East-Side Mill and Lbr. Co. and there was a Miller involved in that. Whether this was the same mill in of Cox-Miller I don't know... it might well have been. But Mr. Miller had this saw mill which would be under the east end of the Sellwood Bridge. Or at least, (the) ferry landing there. The pilings (I think are still visible between the old ferry landing and the Oaks Park. The buildings under the end of the bridge were part of the planing mill. Tony got involved with them and then he took over the logging operation out in the Timber area and he provided the logs for that mill. He expanded his logging...and he bought some timber of his own and sold that on the open market through Rock Creek Logging Co. there at Keasey which was just adjacent to the East-Side Logging Co. Which was part of the East-Side Mill and Lumber Co. operation. Tony ran them both. They were entirely separate. Even the rolling stock, the locomotives, and so on were not mixed up. They were kept separate. Interesting thing is, that the Rock Cr. locomotive was lettered for the East-Side Log. Co. (laughs) although it belonged to Tony. So these things get very involved. (41)

LM: Didn't he (Lausmann) own another lumber company right off what is now the Sunset Highway?

JL: Well, Sunset Logging Co. yes. He was involved in that, originally. That was set up right at what is now Wolf Creek Junction on the Sunset Hwy. where the Timber-Vernonia road crosses the Sunset Hwy.

LM: There was quite a logging camp there?

JL: Oh, yes there was a big camp there. Of course originally the Sunset Hwy wasn't there. That was the main hwy between Timber and Vernonia. The camp was on either side of the road and the large meadow which is just south of the junction there you had the engine house. That would be on the southeast corner of the intersection. On the southwest corner they had the warehouse and some yards where they stored machinery, and that sort of thing.

LM: The people that worked in these mills; there was an actual camp there?

JL: There wasn't an actual mill there. That was just a logging operation. And the logs were brought over to Reliance Junction, and hauled in on the Southern Pacific and the logs were dumped at Oswego...at the dump there, and then they were sold on the open market. I suppose the East Side Mill and Lbr. Co. probably had a prior claim on them. But Tony, that was his major operation in Washington County. He operated all over the western part of Oregon.

LM: O.K. I would like to change emphasis a little bit here. You've written a book called Railroading in the Woods. Now could you explain the role or the importance of the railroads, particularly the Southern Pacific railroad and the spur lines to these lumber mills?

JL: Well, of course, you see, the timber in those days was largely old-growth timber. We're not familiar with it today. But the logs were four, five feet through. They were very large and difficult to handle. There was no way of getting them to a market until there was a rail line. We didn't have any paved roads. We didn't have any trucks or things that could handle it on the road anyway. It was horse-drawn equipment. So you were limited, unless you get logs into water and float them to a market. There was no way to get them out. As soon as the railroads pushed into an area that gave the loggers access. Then in order to get from that railroad to their operation they had to build rail lines of their own. Theirs were rather crude. (laughter) Anything to get out to the main line railroad. The whole thing was, the railroads--standard railroad procedures had become pretty traditional. It was well-regulated by federal authorities and so on. But the loggers were not bound by any of this tradition or any of this regulation so they used their own imaginations in the matter of equipment and rail lines.

LM: What were some of the things that they did?

JL: Well, they did a lot of things. For instance, they developed the disconnected logging truck. Instead of having a car to put the logs on, they just had a truck that they put under each end of the logs.

JL: (cont.) And the weight to the log held these together and made a car out of them, you see. But they could be any length. If they wanted to bring out logs 80 feet long, they just space these trucks to support the logs and they could bring them out and of course on main line railroads couldn't have handled anything like that, because of the curves and so forth. In addition, of course, they couldn't use air brakes on them, because there was no way of connecting the trains. So they were all handled with hand brakes. The brakeman had to walk along the logs from one end of the car to the other and set the brake wheel on the truck by hand.

LM: Could this be dangerous then? Were there any accidents?

JL: Oh yes! It was dangerous. It's always dangerous in the woods if you're not cautious. If you're careful why you're safe.

LM: Do you know of any spectacular accidents that happened up in the county here?

JL: Well, there was a spectacular accident, probably the most spectacular occurred up near Cochran...on the Feasle. Feasle had an operation up there. Going out to work one day, one morning, it was frosty and snow on the ground. As the train was crossing a trestle, it was a curved trestle, the tracks suddenly contracted from the cold and it pulled the tracks off the trestle. They had not been nailed down, oddly enough. I don't know why that might be but the tracks pulled off and the train landed in the canyon and quite a number of people were killed. (51)

JL: But the rails were subject to expansion and contraction. In the earlier days particularly. More often they were bothered with what they called sun kinks. You get a very hot summer day and the expansion would cause the rails to buckle.

LM: Did this accident occur on the trestle?

JL: Right on the trestle.

LM: Speaking of trestles, I know that there were a few in this area, and a lot of them are gone now. Were they utilized quite a bit up in this area?

JL: Yes, extensively. Because you see in the earlier days they didn't have earth-moving equipment. Excavation had to be done with pick and shovel or with horse-drawn equipment. They had those scrapers you know. So they avoided excavating as much as possible. It's easy to take poles out of the woods and drive pilings. They used trestles extensively.

LM: I am amazed by the sturdiness of the trestles and how much weight they could support.

JL: Well yes, loggers had a tendency to build things overly strong. They weren't always aesthetics pleasing, but the logger used to say that they were held for stout anyway. (laughs) They were not engineers. They resisted the trained engineers. The loggers had the feeling that a man had to learn the business from the ground up. The college trained engineer was looked on as an interloper, you know. They were not accepted readily. The loggers, of course, not being bound by engineering practice they came up with some innovations that probably an engineer never would have thought of. But on the other hand, they made some serious goofs. (60)

JL: (cont.) There have been instances in which trestles were put up and were not properly braced and collapsed for that reason. There was one in particular down in the Coos Bay area. Oh, it was quite a spectacular trestle. They braced it...the side bracing was on it, but they hadn't braced it longitudinally. Apparently they didn't realize that that was necessary. The first train over pushed it right down and it just collapsed like a pile of jack straws.

LM: Speaking of locomotives and rail lines...there was a man by the name of Mr. Eccles. Was he involved in the building of rail lines?

JL: Well, yes. David Eccles was involved...he was quite an extensive operator up in the Eastern Oregon area. He was a Mormon operating out of Utah. The Mormons had to move into the timber to supply lumber for their development in the Utah area. They moved into eastern Oregon near LaGrande, Baker, down through there. As soon as the railroad got into that area. They set up mills all through there and that was Mormon country and Eccles was involved in that and he built the Sumpter Valley Railroad, which is an air gauge operation that went from Baker as far as Prairie City. And of course, that was a lumber operation. They hauled logs and lumber out of that. But he also had interest down the river. He built the big mill out above Dee, out above Hood River.

JL: (cont.) And he built that Mount Hood railroad. He had an operation across the river (Columbia) on the Washington side also. Then he moved into this area. He had a sawmill down in Columbia County out in Clatskanie. He built a sawmill near Banks that operated for a short period until a forest fire destroyed that timber. I'm not sure just where the mill was located, but as nearly as I can tell, his railroad that served the mill was on the hills just to the west of the highway. Highway 47 there, right where the Sunset Hwy. and the Banks Hwy. join, you know. A forest fire passed through there and that stopped that operation. But later on, they bought all this timber that later became Oregon-American. He operated as Oregon Lbr. Co. at most of his operations. They set up the mill site at Vernonia. They were going to have their operation out of there as Oregon Lbr. Co. They built...or at least they started...I guess they actually built the railroad from Banks to Vernonia which was built as the Portland-Astoria and Pacific. But they ran out of funds before they completed it and had to sell out and that became Oregon-American. They retained the Oregon part of the title. His original plan had been to build a mill on the Willamette Slough, down below Cornelius Pass. And he had hoped to buy the United Railways which was the line that ran from Banks to North Plains, to Linton.

JL: (cont.) But it turned out that Jim Hill didn't want to sell that line because he planned it as an access to the Tillamook area. So, ultimately, he bought the line to Vernonia.

IM: So there was a lot of business competition between the people that were trying to start the mills then?

JL: Oh yes, there's competition there but they were also involved in the competition between Harrimon and Hill, both of whom were headed for Tillamook, you see. Hill had the right-of-way down the Wilson River, which was the best route into Tillamook. But Harrimon, in order to beat him out, he rushed construction down through Timber and Cochran and down the Salmonberry and got to Tillamook first. But it was the less attractive route and of course Tillamook has been stuck with it ever since. But, Hill, when he got just outside of Banks, it was called Wilkesboro then. It is still a community where the line crossed the Southern Pacific; just outside of Banks. Then he built an extension up as far as Glenwood under the title of the Gales Creek and Wilson River railroad. And that was a continuation of his plans to get to Tillamook. From Glenwood he planned a tunnel through the divide and then go down the Wilson River to get into Tillamook. But that was as far as he got...Glenwood. (70)

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LM: Mr. Labbe, you were a gyppo logger yourself. And you know a little bit about...you know a lot about gyppo logging yourself I would imagine, I was just curious, were there many in this area, or what was their role or importance?

JL: Well, yes there were alot of gyppo operators around here. Because the gyppo is a small operator who goes around who is under contract or buys small tracts of timber. And of course that was what was mainly available through here. There were gyppo operators who logged all over the Chehalis Mountain.

LM: Before we go any farther, could you describe what the gyppo logger is?

JL: Well, a gyppo logger is a...well, he's a small operator. He's operating with limited capital. Normally what we used to do we would find a small tract of timber, make arrangements with the owner to pay him on a...rather than buy it outright, most of us couldn't afford to do that, we'd pay it by the thousand as it was taken out, you see. And then most of them would go out and get all their equipment on credit and usually after you got through well probably about even again. (laugh) What you were doing you were making yourself a job.

LM: So it must have been fairly hard for independents to survive?

JL: It was. There weren't too many of them. I think probably the most successful in the county was probably Lyda. Lyda was the operator... well, he lived out between Forest Grove and Dilley when I talked to him. But he worked around the Glenwood area. And as a matter of fact he's the one whose operation the Tillamook fire was supposed to have started; according to Ellis Lucia. (2½ Min.)

JL: I wasn't aware of that but he owned that area around Glenwood, which is now that Trolley Museum. Those fellows made their arrangements with Lyda to acquire that property and I'm sure that Lyda took it over after the Consolidated Timber Co. you see. So, he came in to clean up and probably get what little salvage was left there after the Burn...before the Burn...No...let me see, if he was there, he must have been there before Consolidated Timber. He would have had to have been. Because they came in after the fire. But any rate, he was working on that area. There were a certain number of others Hoodenpile (sp), no, let me see, no, they would have been in Yamhill County, they were a little further down. They worked for me too at one time. But Lyda was the main one. There was another fellow who lived at Glenwood by the name of Thayer. I hired him as a cat-skinner. And later on he became quite a large gyppo operator on his own.

LM: What is a cat-skinner?

JL: Well, he operated the caterpillar-tractor you see. Doing the yarding. He was a whiz too, that guy. We had one tractor and one logging arch and we averaged 75,000 feet a day. And we did as much as 150,000 feet in one day. He was a high-ball operator. As I say, later on he operated on his own they tell me and was quite successful. He's passed away now, but his last operation he had a gravel pit in the county somewhere, I forgot the title it was under. It's in the Aloha area somewhere.

LM: You told me earlier about some man by the name of Meyer?

JL: Oh, Max Meyer.

LM: He had quite a bit of troubles?

JL: Oh yes. He was the bottom of the totem pole! (laughter) As a gyppo logger on the scale of one to ten he was probably a one or a two! He was a character. (5min.)

JL: (cont.) He was a former baseball player and he...when I knew him of course, he was quite elderly. He must have had quite a reputation as a baseball player. He got his name in the sport section every now and then. And he always showed up for the oldtimer's ballgame. Big raw-boned sort of a character. He lived at Burlington just where the Cornelius Pass Road meets the Columbia River Highway. He lived right close to the school; across the road from the store. He would log small tracts of timber, farm lots and that sort of thing. He had a bunch of old junk, an old steam donkey. Anybody he could get into working for him, you know, would bring him some equipment, He logged along the skyline. And he logged down through the Tualatin Valley along around West Union and places like that. He had a number of different farm lots that had 10 to 15 acres of timber. He would go in and get it out. I don't think, I can't see that he even made a living, but he lasted a long time. (laughs)  
He must have come out some way.

LM: But he operated with old and used equipment?

JL: Oh yes, lots, junky equipment, stuff. Moving that around from one place to another was quite a project. Those old steam donkeys, and then of course this was in the day and age when most of the fellows were using small gasoline donkeys. If you set up a steam donkey then you had to arrange for the fuel and to get water lines to it and all that stuff. There was a lot of work to go to log five or ten acres when usually it was not a very high grade of timber. If it was old-growth it was old wood logs, you know. If it was second-growth, at that time second-growth was not in demand. This would have been, oh, in the Thirties.

JL: He always managed. He was always working someplace. As I was telling you the other day, he had one place out here near West Union. He was logging in a swale that was kind of marshy. Lot of alder and ash and stuff like that in there. He took those trees and cut them down and he'd wrap them with cable to make mats and he laid these mats of poles in the swamps and hauled over those with his truck! (laughs) It was like hauling out a deep pile rug. Water squeeshed out of there and mud "squeeshed" out. But he got in and out. I don't know, he must have spent twice as much time getting set up as he did logging. I don't know how he ever came out on it.

LM: So, do you think he is a good example of the adversitys most of the loggers faced?

JL: Oh yes. The thing about it was that you were independent, you see. You logged for yourself and you could thumb your nose at anybody. (laughs) You may not get rich but at least you were your own boss.

LM: Well, Mr. Labbe we talked about the small, gyppo, independent logger. We've talked a little bit about some of the mills. And this sort of brings in the idea of who controlled and ran the industry. Was it mostly, in this area particularly, was it mostly large organizations who owned the mills or were they mostly independent and individually owned and set up?

JL: Yes. In this area...

LM: Where did the money come from and where did it go?

JL: Well, it's kind of interesting. At that time loggers primarily were independent companies and they sold their logs on the open market. We put logs in the river. And these rafts were made up towed down the river and tied up at various places along the river and then they

JL: were sold to the highest bidder. Most of the sawmills were along the river for the simple reason that the woods operations had a limited life. (9 minutes)

And if the sawmill was along the river they were tributaries to any operation around the state because by use of the railroads and the river, why, you could get the logs to the mill. There weren't too many mills built in the woods. One of the few exceptions of course was the Timber area. They had sawmills up there and they were there for some length of time. But generally speaking, there weren't. A lot of the logs went to, for instance, the pulp mill at Newberg. They bought logs at that Newberg mill. The logs came from up on the McKenzie River; up around Hall City on the Rickreal Creek and the Luckiamute River. Spaulding logged all through that area and he bought logs from everywhere. Most of the logs out of this area went into the Columbia River and most of them were dumped at the Oswego dump. Southern Pacific operated that. That was below the Falls. Now, I logged into the Yamhill River at Lafayette. Those logs had to go down through locks of the Yamhill and then down the Willamette through Oregon City and then down into the Columbia. But they got down there. I could remain competitive. Now, of course, there was a big sawmill on the lake at Carlton. A lot of the logs were dumped in there too. Generally speaking, the market was the river. That determined the prices.

LM: Speaking of rivers, was the Tualatin River ever utilized for logging?

JL: In the early days it was, yes. It is hard to believe now but in the early days not only was it used for logs but they also had boat service on it. Stern wheelers. (laughs) On the Tualatin River! There was one problem there at the lower end, of course. There is shallow rapids and

JL: ripples down there. The major part of what was shipped down there was for the paper mill at Oregon City.

Of course, tributary to the river was a cottonwood, white fir, that sort of thing, which was good pulp timber. A lot of it was sent down as cordwood. For a time there was a railroad that operated, the electric road, that operated out of West Linn. That was extended almost to Oregon City. And up above these shallow areas on the Tualatin they used to haul logs from below the locks up above where the paper mills are. They would also haul from the Tualatin River down to the paper mills and they could also haul clear down and dump near Oswego. So that gave you a pretty good two-way street for handling material. Generally speaking, the Tualatin was not a popular driving stream.

IM: The introduction of the railroads was really a boon?

JL: That's right. The Tualatin, like most of the rivers around here was the primary artery of travel until they got roads and railroads and that sort of thing. But it was not well-adaptable to that sort of traffic.

IM: Did the people that worked for the Wheelers and the Lausmanns and the owners, did they see much of the money?

JL: No. Generally speaking, most of the operators, large and small, didn't make a lot of money. The few who made the money, in retrospect, were the ones who owned the timber and the land. Those who moved in just to cut it and move out really didn't make a lot of money.

IM: This brings up the idea of wage and working conditions. From what I understand, the unions and organizations such as the International Woodworkers of the World and woodworkers' union didn't really have

LM: much effect as far as prosyletizing the workers.

JL: No, they didn't. The loggers were a strange bunch. They were something like the cowboys I guess. They were very nomadic. They treasured their freedom. They didn't want anybody dictating to them where they could work and when they could work. They used to wander from camp to camp. If you wanted a good crew, and keep a good crew you had to have a good cook and a good cookhouse. That was the first order of business. And then of course working conditions beyond that were of some effect. Some of the operators were known as highball operators. They worked their men too hard. They weren't too careful about working conditions. Flora was notorious that way. I think more than he deserved to be perhaps. Most of them...

LM: Who, was this man now?

JL: Flora? Well, actually, Flora doesn't work right in Washington County. He worked down in Columbia County and Yamhill County. He had a reputation...well, the story is that somebody got killed on his operation and he just threw him in back of a stump until quitting time and kept right on going. Some of the operators, if there was an accident they shut everything down, for the day, you know. But, Flora, he didn't. He didn't shut down until quitting time. (laughs)

LM: We talked a little bit about the dangers of logging. If a logger was injured, was there any retribution? Did he have any chance to get back to work or was he pretty much out of luck?

JL: Well, he was pretty much out of luck, really, to begin with. Later on the courts began to allow them damages in lawsuits. But, gosh it was kind of rough to began with, compared to what we know today. Fellows didn't really think too much about it, really, in those days. It was

JL: one of those things. You took your chances wherever you worked. If the operator was grossly negligent, why they had recourse in the courts. But a five thousand dollar judgement doesn't sound like much. Of course it was quite a bit in those days. 2 minutes (mini-tape) But I can think of many cases where the fellows really got a raw deal, when you stop and think about it.

LM: We alluded to earlier the Tillamook fire. That had a giant effect on the logging, particularly in this area.

JL: Yes it did. The timber on the west slope of the coast range down through there was probably some of the nicest in the world. It would have lasted for another generation or so...as green timber. Probably today it would have been a sustained yield operation. That just disappeared overnight you might say with that Tillamook fire. Something like 300,000 acres burned. Unless you have an opportunity to see that first hand you simply couldn't visualize what it meant.

LM: Did it put alot of the loggers in the woods out of work?

JL: Well, no because they hadn't gotten into that timber yet. They were just working around the edges. Of course, it affected the future of the business, but it didn't have an immediate effect. Actually, the immediate effect was they went in there to salvage it. It put alot of people to work. But, when that was gone there wasn't any more. So, it was something like ten years delay. Then you began to feel the effects of it. But, at that time people didn't really realize.

LM: So, did the fire destroy any of the operating mills, rail lines, and trestles?

JL: No, very few, that's the first fire. The second fire did because they were in there...

LM: That was 1945?

JL: No, the first fire was '33 and the second...

LM: '39?

JL: Yes. They were 6 years apart. The '39 fire was the one that did the big damage. I went in and bought timber down on the south fork of the Trask River. In order to get in I built a truckroad up to reach the railroad bridge up to Florence and then I followed that railroad grade at Florence. There were the remains of camps burned. I remember there 22 steam donkeys standing out there that burned. Miles of railroad tracks. I think there were something like 16 trestles that burned. That did do a lot of damage in that area.

LM: We're talking a little bit about the equipment. As the years went on, the equipment advanced in technology and became more efficient. I'm curious, did the small organizations; were they able to afford the better equipment as time went on? Just how expensive was that equipment for them?

JL: Well, I'll tell you. The loggers were a peculiar breed of men. They were fascinated by equipment. They would over-extend themselves to buy equipment. They bought equipment they didn't need and of course the manufacturers kept coming up with more attractive equipment for the loggers to buy. In most instances they over-extended themselves on equipment. They bought sophisticated equipment that would be beyond their needs. Generally speaking, the larger operators, of course, the ones that could afford the railroads and the trains and that sort of thing, they bought these big donkeys. They bought these skidders, power-skidders and all of that stuff. The things weighed 300 tons, you know. And they took those things over their rickety railroads.

JL: But the smaller operators, he was kind of limited until the era of the caterpillar. When the tractors and the trucks came along the small operator was able to compete pretty well, because he didn't need as much equipment and he could afford the same quality of equipment, on a smaller basis. (7 minutes)

But in the earlier days if he went in as a gyppo, say salvaging or cleaning up behind a big operation or something like that, they usually provided the equipment on a lease basis. He was able to have equipment he could operate with.

LM: I think we have covered quite a bit of ground here. You think you have any other information that would contribute or would be valuable to talk about?

JL: Well, of course, I could talk for hours or all day probably. But I'm not sure just what you want and that sort of thing. But I would say this: If you want to any time come back and enlarge on this at a later date why that's fine.

LM: Yes, I think that might be best.

End of tape 1 track 2