

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 an ~~annual~~ 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.

Tape 2 Track 3

LM: Good morning Mr. Labbe.

JL: Good morning.

LM: I would like to ask you a few more questions concerning the topics we discussed last week.

JL: Alright. Anything you want to know. I'll see if I can fill you in.

LM: O.K. Good deal. I would first like to start out since your most and your greatest expertise involves the building and the construction of the railroads into the woods. And so I would like to ask you a few questions about that.

JL: Certainly.

LM: Maybe just to start out you could tell me just a bit about the book that you wrote on railroading in the woods.

JL: Well, I wrote a book designed to show primarily through photographs how the loggers utilized the railroads. They were able to get into previously inaccessible timber by using the railroads. They used it in a variety of ways that the railroader would have never considered. They went up the side of a mountain by using a cable for instance, you know, up and down. Their trackage was very temporary. Often other than the mainlines there was no ballast. Over that track they'd move these monstrous logging machines which the main railroad would have considered too heavy for their mainlines. They took them into the woods and very often they'd tip over and roll down the canyon, you know, but it didn't bother the loggers. They picked them right up and went on. It was just a slight inconvenience. (laughter)

LM: O.K. Again, my particular emphasis is on the railroads here in Washington County. Do you know how extensive the use of railroads were in this area then?

JL: Well, railroads were utilized primarily in the western part of the county, when you get into the Coast Range. There wasn't a great deal of activity in the valley. What there was was on a rather minor scale. There wasn't any use for railroads. Although one or two of them used the hills along the east edge of the valley, around Portland and the Multnomah County line, Skyline Blvd. area. But most of the major railroads were out in the Coast Range.

LM: Um. So what were the major railroads?

JL: Well, there were quite a few. I guess the greatest activity was probably on the Southern Pacific, Tillamook line. Timber became quite a hub for logging and lumbering. There were several mills in Timber and Westtimber, and Cochran. They utilized railroads to a large extent there, radiating in all directions. From Cochran for instance, there was a railroad that ran from northwest; that was C.H. Wheeler. He ran out toward, well, the general direction of Elsie. Southwest, toward Blue Lake, there were several operators. In fact, C.H. Wheeler was involved in one or two of the operations. But the final one was Standard Logging Co. which reached way down almost to Blue Lake. And then, of course, the Tillamook Burn put a stop to that, generally.

LM: Where is Blue Lake?

JL: Blue Lake is located in the Coast Range Mountains about...oh I say half-way between Cochran and Tillamook. It's, I think, about the source of the North fork of the Wilson River. It's right up in the divide. After the fire, before there was any underbrush or anything, you had a tremendous view from there.

JL: You could see the ocean, you could see the Wilson River drainage area. You look the other direction you could see the Salmonberry drainage area. And they ran along the top of that divide. It was very spectacular.

IM: Do they run...The lines still exist then?

JL: No, the grade is still there. It's been converted to a fire trail, truck road. I used to enjoy going out there on weekends you know. But nowadays they've been taken over by the motorcyclists.

IM: So, the timber that was cut in the area was loaded on the railroad, am I right?

JL: Oh yes. All that timber was brought in by rail. It came in to either the local mills or was brought all the way in and dumped in the Willamette River at the Oswego dump, primarily.

IM: Did any of the logs go the other direction? Toward the Coast?

JL: No. Not that I'm aware of. No, the activity around Tillamook was rather minor really. It didn't of course, well, it started quite early, the sawmill there in Hobsonville, but that's in Tillamook County. Do you want to get into that?

IM: Well, I think we might let that go for the moment. So what year was the rail line completed?

JL: Oh, I say roughly around 1911, that they completed the line. Then that gave the loggers access to the timber and in order to get from the mainline into their holdings they had to build railroads of their own. They began building about that period. It lasted up until, well, after the fire. The Tillamook Fire. There was activity, let me see, Standard still operating in late Thirties, because I was out there. I rode on that line about '39 I would say. That was probably the last one to operate out there.

JL: That was the Long-Bell subsidiary. The logs from that operation went to their mill in Longview.

LM: So the individual mills would build spur lines to the Southern Pacific mainline. Would the Mills pay for these spur lines?

JL: Well, yes. They were all private operations. Not all of them had mills, however. There were a lot of them that just logged timber. Then they may have had mills elsewhere. But, they would transport the logs down to the river and then perhaps by way of the river down there to their sawmill. West Oregon for instance had a railroad out beyond Cochran in the later years. Their logs went to their mill at Linton. That was a Kingsley mill. Then the Bricks operation they had a operation at Enright. Now they didn't have a sawmill. They put their logs in the river and sold them on the market.

LM: Where's Enright?

JL: Enright is on beyond Cochran. It's on down in the canyon, the Salmonberry. But that would be over in Tillamook County. The county line is about at Cochran, as I recall. So, it's hard to say whether... they were logging in Tillamook County. Their camps and their rail connections were in Washington County.

LM: So the mills and camps would own just the right-of-way? Would they purchase the right-of-way outright from the government?

JL: Well, no. Generally speaking, you see, if they acquired the timber, they were on their own property. Or else, if they just bought the stumpage that included the right-of-way permission. I think probably the last rail operation in Washington County would have been the, well, it was the Vernonia mill...which went through a number of

JL: (cont.) ownerships. We always refer to it as Oregon-American.

But they sold to Long-Bell. Long-Bell sold to International Paper Co. Technically, it was International Paper Co. Longbell division that cleaned it up around 1958. But they got into Columbia, Tillamook, and Washington County. They operated in the area where the county lines meet.

LM: So, was it an expensive proposition for these companies, mills, and camps to build these particular railroads?

JL: Well, not really. The railroad was no more expensive to build than a good truck road, for instance. The primary difference was that they were permanent. If once you build a railroad, that was the route you had to follow. You couldn't vary it. With a truck road you could pick it up and move it where ever you want to because you could operate on dirt roads in the summertimes, spur lines most anywhere. But the railroad, you have to have enough timber to make it worthwhile to build a railroad into it. After the large timber stands became depleted it was no longer feasible to build a railroad. Actually, I don't think the railroad was anymore costly than trucking. When your trucking, your trucks cost almost as much as the locomotive did. Each truck only carried one load whereas the locomotive could handle one or two dozen loads of logs. And of course each truck requires a man to drive it whereas the railroad would handle a whole train with about 3 or 4 men.

LM: You mentioned at the outset that the loggers when building the railroads weren't bound by tradition. So, were there any unique methods used? particurely in this area?

JL: Oh, yes. They used anything. Each individual had his own ideas. Each man would use any means he could find to get to the timber. They built on very sharp curves, very steep grades for rails. And of course their equipment their geared locomotives were designed for power, not speed. The top speed I guess for a Shay locomotive would be around 12 or 15 miles an hour. It could work on a grade of 14 or 16%. That wasn't exactly a practical grade but they have been known to handle it. And, of course, then they had to develop their own cars and equipment. The standard railroad cars were not as practical in the woods. For instance, for one thing, they were too heavy. If you came down 12% grade you could handle a pretty good load downhill. To get the cars back up the hill it had to be as light as possible. Also, they didn't like to be restricted on the length of logs they could handle, and so they made use of the disconnecting logging truck which was just a single truck with a bunk on it and two trucks would make up a car. The logs, of course, the weight of the logs held the car together. And it could be any length for the situation required. Benson, down at Clatskanie, hauled loads over 200 feet long. Those logs would sag in the middle until the belly would drag on the ties. When they would go around the corner, why, the load would just bend. Many of the corners, if there was a bank on the side, the bank would be polished from the logs going around the curve. (laughs)

LM: They would really have to allow for clearance for a load that size.

JL: Yes, Well, if you put the trucks near the end then of course it was the center; as long as the center of the load would get around

JL: (cont.)...the corner. Yes, they would have to make allowance. In many of those operations the last load of logs they didn't put much restriction on it. The loaders could pick up anything that was left over and put on the last load because nothing coupled to it. Sometimes the back end of that load would be dragging on the track behind the train.

LM: Did they ever lose any of the logs?

JL: Oh yes, they'd lose them. They had steam cranes and periodically they would go along the track and pick up the logs that had fallen off and take them on in. They didn't tie the logs to the car. They just used gravity to hold it together. Sometimes a log would get to wobbling and fall off and as long as it didn't hit the ground, you ~~know~~, and derail the train they didn't worry about it. They just came back and got it later on.

LM: So it wasn't actually lost then?

JL: Oh no, it wasn't lost.

LM: We were talking about equipment. So would each individual company have to purchase their own locomotive and train cars?

JL: Oh yes. But that equipment, of course these operations, many of them were only for a short period, 2 or 3 years perhaps. And that equipment would land in the machinery yards, the dealers, and they would pass it along from one to another. There was all kinds of used equipment and used machinery available. The more used it was, why the lower the grade of the operator that operated it! (laugh) That stuff that was in operation didn't look as good as the equipment that was being scrapped in the scrap yards. (more laughter) As long as they could hold steam and operate it they

JL: (cont.) ...would have it.

LM: So would...people that worked for the company they would operate the trains full time then?

JL: Oh yes. Generally speaking, the locomotive engineer and fireman were responsible for maintainance of their locomotive. And that was usually done on their own time. Periodically, you know, they had put out the fire and washed out the boiler. Then they'd refill it and they would have to bring it up to steam again. That was done often on a weekend on their own time. But in the camps there wasn't much to do on the weekends anyway, unless you came to town. Nobody ever considered it much of a chore and I think the, generally, the crew took pride in their equipment. I've known lots of instances, when they had to wait for periods on a siding for another train or wait until the crew was finished loading cars or something. They'd spend their time working on the locomotive; polishing it up or repairing it, whatever it might need.

LM: Did the trains need much repair work as far as new equipment and new parts?

JL: Well, it depended to large extent on the operating crews. Some crews were rough on equipment and others were very careful. No, they stood up remarkably well. They used to say that a Shay locomotive could streww parts all along the track but it would never stop them. It kept right on going. (laugh) For the most part, unless the track was particularly bad, there wasn't much problem there. You had to take time and keep it greased and things adjusted and keep the nuts and bolts tight. It stood up pretty well ... that was kind of tricky because if you put on

JL: (cont.)...the brakes and slid the wheels it wore them flat. When the wheels were flat they were almost impossible to operate, you know. The problem was that the company said " Alright, you've wrecked your locomotive. We will have it fixed but you're going to be out of a job until it comes back." So, they'd take it in and patch it up the best they could and get it back to work again, you know, and then they'd keep working on it until they got it back in shape.

LM: That would close down the whole mill for the time it took to repair it?

JL: Yes, that happened occasionally. But they had brake shoes that were abrasive, like carborundum. Those would wear the wheels back into the proper shape in time. I know in one instance a friend of mine, they got caught that way and they... in order to operate at all, all the wheels came down flat at the same time on a Shay, you know, there all geared together. So they removed the gears and they turned each set of wheels a few degrees from the other and put it back so they could get back into camp. But it was like riding a washboard road. It must have been rough riding. But they put on these Carborundum brake shoes and finally wore them back into true. (laughs) Didn't miss any time.

LM: So, any mill or camp of any substantial size would have their own spur line hooking to the mainline?

JL: Yes. In the early days sometimes the major railroads, in order to get the business would build the spur and would switch it for them. But normally that wasn't over possibly a mile in length. But I don't know of instances up there in Washington County where that was done.

LM: So when was the heyday of the railroad?

JL: Oh, the heyday really ran from 1900 to 1925.

LM: Then it went down hill from there?

JL: It was downhill. Actually, it was downhill from about 1920 although there was so much equipment around that it wasn't really felt, except perhaps by the locomotive builders.

LM: Now what caused the railroad decline?

JL: Well, just the lack of timber. They had reached as far as they could reach. It's hard to visualize the amount of timber they were capable of taking out with a train. Out here at Standard they had bay tower skidders. They'd bundle those logs in bundles and just bring them out on the fly, you know, just as fast as the train could haul them out. They'd take them out. Some of the operators would get out as much as a million feet a day. It doesn't take you very long to go through a large tract of timber at that rate. So, it ultimately reached the point where it no longer was economically feasible to use the railroad.

LM: So then they would switch to trucks to get the remaining stands?

JL: Yes. Trucks and tractors and that sort of thing. Really, the decline coincided largely with the Great Depression. The two together was just the death of the old steam operation.

LM: That's something I would like to get into as far as...boom and bust cycles in the mills and depressions and high times. Did the industry really fluctuate?

JL: Oh, yes it fluctuated far more than the general economy. In some way it's comparable to farming. You get a good year, prices are high, everybody goes out and logs. They'd fill all the sloughs and rivers, and bays, and everything with logs. Well, then the next

JL: (cont.)... Spring the mills had all they needed and they would bring the price down because of the law of supply and demand. That would put the loggers out of work. Well then, they'd always all... either go broke or be out of work for the following year. The mills would have all these nice cheap logs to work on. Now they'd go up. And then as soon as they were out of logs and needed them badly the loggers would get a top price for theirs. It was just the law of supply and demand. At that time, of course, you didn't have the government stepping in to balance up this fluctuation.

LM: Was the logging industry also affected by... more a nationwide depression such as the Great Depression? It must have been hard times.

JL: Oh yes. It was hard times. In a way, it helped because the big operators were going down and it encouraged the little operators. The individual could get out there and do a little logging on his own. The gyppos came into their own about that time. They could buy a truck fairly cheaply. Equipment was not high and so they managed to make jobs for themselves. What had once gone into profits for the big operators, why, it helped to pay their wages in the Depression. They made out pretty well.

LM: Getting back to the railroads. Do you foresee any return of the railroad in the woods?

JL: No, The only way they utilize the railroads today is to eliminate long truck hauls. Several of them have hauls from say the National Forest timber lands like for instance, on Mt. Hood into Portland. With the energy shortage there's an economic advantage to the railroads in some instances, particularly if they own right of way

JL: (cont.)...to begin with. Weyerhaeuser has built, I understand, nine miles of track in the last year or so; new rail lines in order to get into an area. What they'll do, they'll haul the logs from a loading point to the dump point which maybe at the mill or a rafting point, or whatever. But they just run back and forth over this same track like any other railroad would. They don't go out into the woods. Trucks come into this central location point.

LM: So they'll never be... just because of the fact they'll be no timber stands left?

JL: That's right. There's no timber stands left that warrant a railroad or would support it a rail operation, per say. Like the old days.

LM: Well, I think that's all the questions at the moment I have. Any additional comments to make on the railroad and in general?

JL: Nope, I think not. You're the one that has the questions. It's all clear to me, you know. (laughs) It's hard for me to understand what you might have in mind.

LM: O.K.

LM: Yes, last time we were talking alot about the individual mills in Washington County. I'm amazed about the number of the camps that were in this area. They seem to be concentrated in certain particular areas. Maybe you could tell me why that was so.

JL: Well, that's true enough. They concentrated around Timber and Cochran largely for the same reason that that was where the heavy timber stands were located. But there were other stands. On the Chehelem Mountains and the... there was timber along Skyline Blvd, and so on. All the way around, surrounding the valley there were stands of timber. They were not accessible until the rail lines went through, for the most part. Of course, then they clustered around the rail access. The first rail line that really opened up the area was the one to Tillamook built by the Southern Pacific. They had built to Banks quite early. Even before they got to Banks their route to the coast was not determined on. There was several surveys. There was down in the Nehalem River circling around through Vernonia and Mist and Jewell. And that was promoted by Portland bankers and capitalists. They were hoping to open the area by the means of the railroad because there was a tremendous amount of timber in that area.

LM: How was the Portland bankers tied into it? When they opened a rail line did they own the mills then?

JL: No. They weren't so much interested in that. They were trying to promote the general economy of the area, and make sure it was tributary to Portland rather than to Astoria for instance. What

JL: (cont.)... they had in mind, you see, Jim Hill had a right-of-way down the Wilson River to Tillamook and Harrimon, who owned the Southern Pacific, was anxious to get to Tillamook. The fighting between the two, and the pushing and shoving, was delaying the whole thing. So this group of Portland capitalists formed the Portland-Nehalem and Tillamook railroad I think it was called. And that was the one that was designed to go down the river and follow the river. And then in order to satisfy these two factions they planned to split it at Banks with one rail line to Hillsboro which would give direct access to Harrimon's line and the other down to Linn~~ton~~ area which would give direct access to Jim Hill's line. Well, they never accepted this plan. But, they did build on these two legs as far as Banks. And from there on they couldn't agree to share the right-of-way on to Tillamook. While on this hemming and hawing was going on Harrimon got disgusted and said, "Heck with y~~ou~~, I'm going to build my railroad." And he built right on down the Salmonberry River which was the only one still available to him. It happened to be the worst grade of the whole works. But he built over it and Tillamook has been stuck with that ever since.

LM: So the lumber industry here in Washington County did provide a lot of jobs and pumped a lot of money into the whole area then?

JL: Oh yes it did. Yes. From the Banks area when they reached that point you see they began to branch out. There was the Gales Creek Wilson River which headed on the Wilson River route that Hill had in mind. And then there was the Portland-Astoria Pacific which built from Banks to Vernonia because they wanted into that Nehalem Valley to get their timber out. That came under the

JL: (cont.)...control of the Hill faction through the United Railways.

So, they built both directions from Banks but it was off the Southern Pacific line that most of the logging was done, really.

LM: Well, we've talked at length about the importance the rail lines and spur lines to reach the mills and now I would like to know a little bit about the individual mills. I know you have compiled a list, quite a complete list of the mills that had rails going to their camps.

JL: Well, if we go down the list itself alphabetically I could comment on some of these operators since we have an alphabetical list at hand.

LM: That would be fine.

JL: The first one of course is the Aagard Lbr. Co.

LM: Maybe you could tell...pardon me for interrupting, but maybe you could mention where it was and when it operated.

JL: Yes. Aagard Lbr. Co. was the first one to get into operation on the Gales Creek and Wilson River Rd. They...I believe they operated in two areas. I think they first started near Gales Creek and later moved into the Glenwood area. This was rather a small operation and they had their own mill. They logged into the mill and they primarily shipped lumber over the line. Then there were some of them that just shipped logs. They had no mill operations. This Berst and Cox in Reliance for instance is that. I think Allen-Murphy at Banks...they may have had a little mill...I'm just not sure. I think they're more, without looking it up, I think they ship logs. I don't recall a mill under that title. Blodgett Co. shows up in a number of areas. Blodgett Co. was a Michigan

JL: (cont)... concern. They bought and dealt in timberlands. They bought a tremendous amount of timber in the Nehalem Valley. They are shown as operators here at Glenwood and what happened of course, when the Tillamook Burn came... after the first burn; they had to get busy and get their timber out before it was lost to the bugs and rot and that sort of thing. So, they moved in there and got that out. But, primarily, they didn't log themselves. What they did... they would get the gyppos in there and where they had to, they'd finance it. They directed the operations and they got it out in that manner. And then we have here Bloyd and Sigler. (looks at list) They were a couple of Hillsboro men that had a small sawmill. But they had homemade railroads in conjunction with the mill near Rockton, right up on the Cornelius Pass. Right about where Multnomah County and Washington County join. I think they operated across the county line there.

LM: What years were these?

JL: As I recall, it would roughly be around 1910 or thereabouts. They had wooden rails and they had a homemade locomotive, I think rebuilt from an old traction engine. That was typical of the small mills that operated around through the valley. Mostly for local trade.

L Bonlokke and Nelson was a late operator. They came into the timber area from Yamhill County. I think that was just a truck operation up there.

LM: They set up in Timber?

JL: Yes. They set up very late. I'd say perhaps around the late '30's. Carlson and Cole here at Scholls, that was kind of an interesting operation. Actually, they were back at Midway.

JL: (cont.) Midway is halfway between Laurel and Scholls. They were back in there. They logged off the Chehalem Mt. there. They had their mill at the foot of the mountain and had there big mill pond on a creek there. Then they had a railroad up the hill and they had a Shay locomotive which they used for awhile. The mill was fairly large. It was kind of a overgrown homemade affair. It wasn't really an efficient sawmill. The locomotive eventually got away and was wrecked. It was junk to begin with. But they operated back in there and behind them; to break up this sequence a little bit; just up the canyon a little further was Laurel Lbr. Co. They operated with a railroad of sorts. It was a wooden rail and they used a Fordson Locomotive, to get their stuff into their pond. The mills were back-to-back but they went on different country roads. To get from one to the other you had to drive almost around to Laurel and back again.

LM: The mills are so close... was there much competition between the two mills then?

JL: Oh, I don't think there was competition. I think of the two operations I think perhaps the Laurel mill, The Laurel Lbr. Co., was more efficient. They operated out of Hillsboro. I don't know Cole, but Carlson lived in Scholls and everything was trucked out through Scholls, whereas with the Laurel mill everything went out of Hillsboro. They had other operations with other mills in the Hillsboro area. And they were a little more efficient operators I would say. Some of these others I don't recall.

Christenson, C.M. Christenson Logging Co. He was out of Hillsboro. He was a pretty good logger. He was not large but he logged down out of Birkenfeld out of the old Kerry line with railroad. He

JL: He was just sort of a high-grade gyppo logger.

IM: There were several mills in the Hillsboro area. I'm curious, did their lumber come from up toward the Coast Range?

JL: Yes. The G.H.P. lumber Company was the biggest one in Hillsboro.

J.C. Hare of Buxton was the one that logged for them. Most of their timber came from that area; around Buxton, Manning, and in through there. They operated for a long period of time. They were a pretty well established concern. A lot of these others weren't.

This Connacher was a good logger. Connacher had been in charge of the Weyerhaeuser operations out at Yacolt. Weyerhaeuser bought this timber out here. His plan had been to sit on it until it went up in value. But, they had the big Yacolt burn up in early in the century. 1902-1904, somewhere along in there. So, he had to come down there and salvage that timber and he set up Twin Falls Logging Company. Connacher was the man who ran it for him. Then later, Conanacher came over here. I guess he was in Columbia County over near Vernonia. He had a big operation. Then he moved up to Glenwood to clean-up after the Tillamook Burn. They put in the big Consolidated Timber Company. That was in the middle of the Depression. At that time there was a limit on the amount of production under the NRA, National Recovery Administration, determined who operated where and what you were going to put out and so on. After the fire, in order to salvage this timber they removed all restrictions and left all these fellows to get in there and clean it up as rapidly as possible. That's where you get the Consolidated Timber Company title. A lot of them were interested. Lloyd Crosby was the manager of that and he was an engineer, logging engineer for Weyerhaeuser.

John T. Labbe
Accession Number: LOH78-94.4

LM: I understand his nephew was Bing Crosby.

JL: Yes, he was the uncle of Bing Crosby. He was quite a character. He built all of Weyerhaeuser's railroads out of Klamath Falls. He built, well, I think he built their railroads out of Longview. Then he went into business for himself. Up around Reel, up around the Willapa Harbor area. He just got started when they called on him to set up this Consolidated Timber Company. I guess he dropped out of that up there and came down here. He directed that.

LM: Just an aside; we have quite an extensive list here. I'm wondering, how many or how long would each individual company operate for?

JL: Well, most of them were for a limited period. I'd say five to ten years, generally speaking. Well, some of the smaller ones might have been only a year or two. For instance, Dwyer Logging Company. That couldn't have been more than a year or so. Bonlokke and Nelson. W.H. Eccles Lumber Company at Banks. They operated under another title also; Northern Pacific or something like that. Let me see, North Pacific Fir Lumber Company that was W.H. Eccles. They built a mill at Banks. It was supposed to be a mile north of Banks which I would guess would put it about where the Sunset Highway passes over the railroad, Highway 47. They were along in there somewhere. They no sooner got well set-up and got going when the fire went through that. That kind of put an end to them.

Page 46
John T. Labbe
Acc. No. LOH78-94.4

LM: Banks seems to be a place where a lot of mills have been located.
Several are still there, am I right?

JL: Oh, I don't know of one operating ther now. There were alot of mills between Banks and Buxton there. There were a numberoof small mills. But there were no large ones. There was a limited amount of timber actually. The largest amount of timber was destroyed in the fire. It burned from back of Banks over to Cedar Creek which was jsut this side of the divide between Gales Creek and, I guess it's Dairy Creek that runs through there. Of course, they got into that because it was the most accessible at the time.

This Crossett Western for instance, was a big operation. That Company was an Arkansas company. Crossett Lumber Company had large holding in Arkansas and I think they still do.

LM: They set up in Glenwood then?

LL: They set up in Glenwood because they owned timber just to the north of the Consolidated Timber Company camp there. As soon as that Consolidated Timber Company got clearance to move all that out they moved in. But they id their own logging. They logged there as Crossett Western Company whi~~ch~~ was the parent company. On their major operations in Columbia County and Clatsop County they were operating Big Creek Logging Company.

LM: Were there alot of out-of-state comanies that would come in and purchasee land and stumpage//

JL: Oh yes. At the turn of the century, you see, the timber was running out in the East. Michigan had been cut out, Wisconsin. They were in Minnesota and that was running short. And Minnesota timber was poor quality compared to Michigan and Wisconsin timber. It was either find a new place or go out of business so they came out here. The reason they hadn't come earlier, of course, was the access to the timber was too difficult. Yes, they started buying up timber out here at the turn of the century. They'd hire timber cruisers to go around and locate these claims and then they'd buy them just on the strength of the cruisers' recommendations. A lot of those people purchased timber and never did see it. They purchased it as an investment. A lot of them, they would buy it very inexpensively and then resell it. They would buy up timber claims for anywhere between a dollar and a half an acre up to five dollars an acre. They'd hold it for awhile and then they'd start selling it. A lot of this timber changed hands a good many times before anybody got around to logging it. And each buyer would double his money. Timberland went up in value very rapidly.

LM: Initially, was the land purchased from private owners or was it straight from the government?

JL: Well, both. Mostly it was from small people who would go in and take out a claim like a homestead. You get a timber claim. They were limited in their acreage. These concerns would go in there and buy up all these claims in order to consolidate a tract of timber. It took capital to work with. You needed the capital to go in there.

IM: Did the local people and local companies want to start up and were not able to just because of the eastern companies?

JL: No, I don't think that cut them out. The eastern companies were buying on a long term investment. They got into areas that were, at the time they bought it, were inaccessible. It didn 't begin to hurt until all t of the smaller accessible tracts were used up. Then, of course, it came down to the fact that the timber was held by either large timer companies or the government. But, for a long, long time there wass plenty of timber to go around.

IM: You can continue with your list.

JL: All right. Douty Logging Company is interesting, at least to me. Fred Douty was quite a character.

IM: That was in the Timber area?

JL: Yes. That was in the Timber area. He operated all over this area. When I knew him he was a timber broker. He had the Old Multnomah Lumber and Box Company. He had several sawmills at Rainier and all around the country. Down around the Yaquina Bay area. He had some timber in the Timber area and logged that. And that's the only instance that I can think of where he logged under his own name, Douty.

Eagle Lumber Company, they were the ones that had the big mill at Westimber which would have been just beyond Timber. It was not a community. I think it was just the next switch on the railroad. Eagle Lumber Company originally was started by some contractors who had tugs and barges. They had quite a market in Alaska. They were cutting this lumber and hauling it up to Alaska in order to keep their tugs and barges busy. Then, later on C.H. Wheeler took it over and operated it, but I think he continued to operate under that name.

IM: With so many mills in that one small locale there must have been quite a thriving place there. Several hundreds of people and possibly a thousand or two?

JL: They were all little shacks and buildings. My recollection of it was that the whole area was filled with sawmills. You had trouble finding the county road! You had to wander past all these lumber piles and under mill conveyers and everything else. You go right through the center of the operation to get to Cochran. The county road was just...

IM: Have you been up there recently? In the last few years?

JL: Well, yes I have. There's no evidence of any of that anymore. The old Timber-Vernonia road wound down through town. There never was much of a business area there. Just a store and a little garage and an old barn, that sort of thing. Then you crossed the creek and up on the other side, on the north side on the hill, there were kind of nice homes that were occupied by some of the lumber company officials. When you continued on toward the Wolf Creek Junction that had been pretty well all logged off when I first knew it. You went across this broad flat. Then you dropped down into the area where the Sunset Logging Company was at Wolf Creek Junction. The minute you got down on the bottom there they had a logging railroad that paralleled the county road there and then went across it up into the hill. And all along there was the millhouses that, not mill but the camp. It was like driving through the middle of the logging camp.

JL: (cont.) They were on either side of the county road down through there. Then of course, all the way into Vernonia you passed through one camp after another. They were all along this county road.

The Haskell-Carpenter at Cherry Grove was another interesting one. They followed, let me see, well, it was Lovegren's came in there. They had Preston Mill I think out of, well, just east of Seattle, King County there. They came down and they bought some timber that belonged to a man by the name of Patton. It's still Patton Valley or something like that.

LM: Patton Valley Road.

JL: Yes. They had built a mill and a dam beyond Cherry Grove and they built a railroad from Patton sideing down there which is just out of Gaston up this valley to the mill site or the town of Cherry Grove. They laid out the town. One of the Lovegrens platted the town and laid it all out. They never did operate it for some reason to speak of. Then this Haskell-Carpenter came in. They were big operators. They took over the railroad line, they took over the sawmill, the whole thing. When I was up there some of the Lovegrens were still living there. That was about 10 years ago. Kind of interesting. After they split up one of the boys was running a TxV. repair shop somewhere and one of them had a typewriter repairshop down in the valley and one of them was a missionary in China.

LM: Quite a diverse occupation from logging.

Page 51
John T. Labbe
Acc. No. LOH78-94.4

JL: Yes it sure was! Their daughter lived on the hill above Cherry Grove and when I talked with her, she was living there alone. She was planning to move into Portland and her brother who had been the missionary in China was in Louisiana just finishing up his stint with the church. He was going to retire and come up and live there. I don't know whether he did or not.

End of Tape 2