

*Minnesota
Logging*

Forest History Foundation, Inc.
St. Paul, Minnesota

ORAL HISTORY INTERVIEW

with

Leonard Costley
International Falls, Minnesota
August 3, 1957

by Bruce C. Harding

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(Mr. Costley, what is your full name?)

My full name is Leonard Costley.

(And you were born in what year?)

I was born in 1887 at Watertown, South Dakota, the year of the big blizzard.

(So you were born in what we call the Northwest, South Dakota being a part of the Northwest?)

That's right.

(Did you live on a farm there at Watertown?)

Yes, I was born and raised on a farm until I was 13 years old.

(When you were 13 you went into the woods?)

I went into the woods at Nevis, Minnesota. That's in Hubbard County in the northern part of the state.

(I see. And there was active logging there at the time?)

Right in the heart of the logging industry.

(I assume then that you didn't go to school past age 13, is that right?)

Yes, I went to school during the summer months up to what we called in those days the seventh grade.

(And then you worked in the woods during the winter season?)

My first time in the woods was in 1903. I went to work in the woods as a road monkey.

(Could you define what a road monkey is?)

A road monkey is a fellow that goes out to keep the roads clean, and takes out all the bark, and watches the ruts to see that there's no slipping or tendency to slew off sideways. In those days when horses were used entirely for pulling, you had to keep the roads clear of the leavings of the horses.

(Were there many kids your age working in the woods at that time?)

I was the only boy in the woods and they called me "The South Dakota Scissor Bill" because I came from South Dakota.

(What company were you working for?)

It was the Red River Lumber Company. Their headquarters was at Akeley, Minnesota.

(Do you recall who the owner of that company was?)

That was the T. B. Walker interest of Minneapolis.

(Do you know how long they logged in that area?)

As far as I can remember they did their last logging around 1910 and then moved to California.

(Did you follow the company after they logged out of your area?)

No. As soon as the company pulled out there I went on over to Hay Creek, north and west of Park Rapids, to a company of contractors known as Congers and Wilson.

(Did you do the same kind of work for them?)

When you started in as a lumberjack, like the young fellow that I was, you usually started in road monkeying or swamping. At first you went into the woods as a road monkey, and the next winter you got a job as "conman" or conductor on a water tank, which you might say was one step higher in the category of lumberjacking.

(About what was the wage that you were drawing that first year? Do you recall?)

The first year it was \$26.00 a month if you worked less than a month. If you stayed until camp broke up in the spring you got \$30.00 a month.

(Were you paid by the month, every month, or at the end of the season?)

At the end of the season or whenever you quit or got fired.

(Did many get fired?)

If you didn't hit the ball you certainly got fired, but there was always somebody ready to take your job if you didn't come up to snuff.

(In the first woods experience you had did you run into any attempts to organize the men into unions or anything?)

That was never heard of.

(You started as a road monkey and then went in tending the water tank?)

"Conductoring" on the water tank, and then I went from there up to tending skidway or cant-hook work. And then as you are able to use a cant-hook you get into loading and you're up in the upper bracket then, or one of the aristocrats of the lumberjack fraternity.

(How many years did you put in in the woods?)

The total number of actual years would be very close to 40 years.

(Starting in 1903?)

Yes.

(And you stopped working in the woods then about 1943, during World War II?)

That's right. In fact, the last five or six years of those 40 I was working for the M & O Paper Company plant right in International Falls.

(You mentioned that you worked in the woods as a youngster during the season and went to school in the summer. Does that mean that all through your logging experience you worked the season and then did something else in the summer?)

Yes. In the summer logging was kind of slow in most places. When the camp broke in the spring -- they finished logging when the snow left -- the lumberjack would go down to Minneapolis, or the Twin Cities as it was known, and go on a tear there and have a little fun and by that time what we called the

"mustard drive" would be starting in North Dakota. Sometimes if we didn't take in the mustard drive, which was pulling mustard out of the wheat field, we'd take in the log drives as soon as they got headwater enough to start floating logs down the river.

(So for the most part you depended on logging for your year around income?)

That's right. That was the mainstay.

(Could you describe a bit what life in the woods was like? Take a typical day, let's say, of a youngster in the woods and then go on to a typical day of the "aristocrat" of the woods, as you say.)

Your day started in the woods around about five o'clock. You were rolled out -- the bullcook would roll you out and you'd get ready for breakfast.

(Did he use a whistle to get you out of bed or did he just yell?)

He had a long-drawn yell that used to be the pride of some lumberjacks. I'll give you an imitation of it. The first thing you'd hear about five o'clock would be "Roll out, " and if he didn't use that, the words would be "Daylight in the swamp. "

(That would wake anybody, I think.)

Well, they claim the way they got that heavy voice that way was hollering in a rain barrel, practicing the same as some of the great singers used to do before they got out on the stage.

(Well, then if you were up at five o'clock, what was a typical breakfast?)

There was a very good breakfast, particularly in our camp for the Red River Company. You either had fried salt pork or bacon or ham and cold-storage eggs. Those eggs I wouldn't say were much to holler about, but it really was the pure cream for a lumberjack for he didn't get much in most of the camps.

(Did you get many flapjacks or anything of that nature?)

Oh, the flapjacks were the mainstay. You ordinarily got them about three or four times a week. They'd always change off a little. The menu wouldn't be the same every day. But those flapjacks were wonders!

(And the coffee?)

The coffee -- I imagine the ordinary man would turn up his nose at it today. The coffee that we had in those days -- I think you got it for about 8¢ a pound and I'd say it was 60 or 70 per cent chicory, and possibly the balance of it would be barley.

(I've heard a lot of stories about the cookshack being the domain of the cook, no talking or anything like that. Is that typical?)

Yes, that was an ironclad rule wherever I've been in different states for the reason that with 120 men setting down at a table and eating off tin plates and having tin cups, there's a kind of a noise there that I don't know how to describe. I think you'd have to call it a symphony in tin. When you hear that rumbling, it's a sound similar to a beehive, but there'd still be the clank of the tin plates. And they wanted you to get out in the woods as soon as possible. If the men started talking, breakfast would go on for an hour, but the ordinary breakfast time was, I would say, from 15 to 20 minutes and everybody was out.

(To get a little of the serving technique: the men would come in with the food already on the table, or would it be brought to the table after the men got into the shack?)

It would be on the table in dishups, what we called "two quart dishups," tin basins. The tables would be possibly 40 feet long with the men sitting right elbow to elbow. And the cookees or flunkys, as some called them, were busy from the time the men sat down until they left refilling the plates, for those men had wonderful appetites. A lumberjack really can eat.

(And a left-hander at the table would really get in the way of the next person, is that right?)

That's right. They used to tell a story of men sitting so close to each other that they had to wear stove pipes from their wrists to their elbows to keep the other fellows setting next to them from jabbing them when they reached across their plates to spear something.

(Did you use the typical utensils, the knife, fork and spoon?)

That's right, only they were very inferior quality. They were what was known in those days as "case knives." They were of dark metal, no coating over like your modern knives are today.

(Breakfast used to be over by six o'clock?)

Oh, yes. It had to be over by five-thirty.

(Then, was it quite a ways out from the logging camp to the operations usually?)

Yes, the distance would vary, measuring it today, from three blocks to three miles from camp.

(Did you always walk it or did you sometimes have wagons to take you out there?)

No, we always walked it.

(Your noon meal would be brought out to you, is that right?)

Yes. That was an odd thing of the woods. We might be working within sight of the cookshack, which might be half a mile away, and they'd still bring dinner out. I imagine a young fellow today would think it was something terrible. I don't know. You'd take down that scalding tea and the beans would freeze on those tin plates if you were a little slow in eating, and you'd stand with your back to the fire. The bullcook always built a good fire and the stuff came out very hot in those big dishup kettles.

(Did you have any sandwiches at noon? Was that a typical item?)

No, not as we know it today. They'd have big kettles of roast beef and brown gravy and a couple bushels of boiled potatoes. One thing about those cooks in the woods, they were real bakers. They could make wonderful bread. It would beat anything I've ever seen.

(Was it usually white or dark bread?)

White bread and occasionally, probably once a week, what in those days we called "johnny cake" or what we call "corn bread" today.

(What was a typical operation in the woods? Did you work in pairs or teams or singly or did it vary?)

Well, let's see how we could describe that. Let's start with the swamper. That's the lowest grade in the lumberjack parlance in the woods. The swampers would be in groups we'll say around each skidway. There'd be four or five teams hauling logs into the skidways and there'd probably be one or two swampers to each team. You could call that a group. Then there'd be the loading gang, and sometimes instead of a loading gang there'd be a decking crew. There'd be a group of five or six men working together there. If they were loading what we called "hot logs" right off the skidways, then there'd be a loading crew of four or five men there, one man tailing down, and the groundhog, and the top loader, and the **crosshaul** teamster.

(Isn't there a story about the crosshaul where the greenhorn was sent over to the next camp for the crosshaul?)

Yes, that's been done time and again. I know one time there was a young fellow who came from the cities. He'd never been in the woods and he was always telling that he was anxious to become a full-fledged lumberjack. He wasn't a very good worker, although he was willing, so the foreman sent him down to Camp Two for a crosshaul and he said, "If they haven't got a spare crosshaul, bring back a sulky neck yoke." You can imagine what a sulky neck yoke was.

(No. How would you define it?)

Well, sir, I don't know what a sulky neck yoke would be. It was just a phrase that they used, the same as a "left-handed monkey wrench." In other words, there was no such animal.

(Was there ever such a thing as a coffee break out in the woods at mid-morning or something like that where you got a few minutes to rest?)

No, you didn't take off time to rest between meals. You'd get too cold when it was around 40 or 45 below zero. You were busy working.

(Well, that brings up the question of what kind of clothing you had. Did you buy your own, and if so, what?)

Every camp had what was known as a "wannigan" or commissary where you could buy your snuff, clothing, shoes, mittens, tobacco and occasionally a towel if you wanted, as well as underwear, jackets, mackinaws, overalls.

(And those were all purchased by the lumberjack himself? They were not furnished in any way?)

No, they were not furnished.

(How about the tools, the ax and so on? Did the company furnish those?)

Yes, that was part of the camp equipment. I have seen what was known in those days as "undercutters" -- they were men who cut the notch in the tree before the sawyers felled it and the notch guided the tree in the direction they wanted it to fall -- there were a few of those experienced undercutters who carried their own axes.

(It was a sort of specialty with them and they wanted to keep the ax in shape themselves?)

(Well, they had it ground thin and a good axman would soak his ax handle in a barrel of kerosene and that would give the handle a limber, whip-like effect, which was very good in drawing the ax into the wood.

(About how much did a typical ax weigh, would you say?)

For undercutting they usually used a three-and-a-half or four pound ax. The swampers used about the same but not as good a grade of ax as the undercutters.

(In case a man got a frozen ear or frozen nose or something, what was the cure for it?)

They used a cure in those days that doctors frown on now. As soon as you noticed that your chum had a white nose or a white tip to his ear, you'd holler, "Grab some snow and rub that lug there. She's starting to freeze on you." But they gradually got away from the snowball idea and used a dry woolen mitt which was by far the best. All you had to do was rub it gently and get the circulation back in it again.

(As far as accidents are concerned in the woods, would you say there was a tremendous number of accidents, or was logging a comparatively safe operation considering the hazards that would be normal?)

No, I'd say that lumberjacking was a hazardous occupation. But looking at it in another way, you had to be all man and half wildcat to stay on the job. A man working at that kind of work in those days was very quick and sure-footed and there had to be something really contrary to the ordinary work in order for a man to get caught. I've seen men perform some awful feats getting out of trouble. One of the main hazards in those days was the big timber. When a tree fell, there was sometimes what was called a "widow-maker." The widow-maker was a limb that was broken off the tree when it was falling and that caught on another tree. That tree would bend over and send the limb back like an arrow. If you weren't watching you'd get hit with it. I've seen some serious accidents from that. I've also seen some severe cuts from axes by swampers for the reason that the swampers were a class of men that went broke in the cities and had never worked in the woods. They'd come up there without experience on account of an employment agency shipping them out, and they really got cut pretty bad sometimes.

(Were there hospital tickets available in the camps that you were working in?)

Yes, they had a system in those days that I thought was wonderful. It cost you a dollar a month and you got complete hospital coverage. In some places

it was a "company hospital" but in most places it was a "sisters' hospital." You were treated very nice at those sisters' hospitals but in some of the company hospitals it wasn't so hot.

(In your logging experience did they still use oxen or was it all horses and then later on, of course, automotive equipment?)

Oxen gradually disappeared around 1907. Prior to that most of the skidding was done by oxen and the hauling by horses. Where my parents homesteaded north of Nevis, my father drove the last yoke of oxen that was used in that country there.

(Do you know if there are any photographs of oxen being used in Minnesota camps?)

No, I wouldn't know where you could find any around here now. You might possibly find some in Canada. As I remember, the last yoke of oxen was shipped up into the woods, up across Rainy Lake, in about 1927. There was one thing about those days when they used oxen -- along in the latter part of the winter when the skidding was pretty well done and the boys were getting shy of meat, then they'd butcher one of those oxen, and boy, believe me, some of that meat was so tough you couldn't get your fork into the gravy.

(It wouldn't be the best meat in the world, I'm sure of that.)

Well, it was awful nice tasting but boy, some of it was tough!

(What are some of these terms that are typical terms like a "go-devil"? Did you use a go-devil?)

Yes, a go-devil was used mostly in summer logging. You'd roll the front of your log up onto this go-devil, or "dray" as it was known in some places. If you came from Quebec or back in eastern Canada, it was called a "travois."

(You mentioned before the use of a "steam nigger.")

The steam nigger was the name of what we mostly called a "steam skidder." You used a line in the crown tree for dragging the stuff through the woods. Then we also had the steam hauler. One of the first jobs I had as a young fellow was running the steam hauler landing camp.

(Was that a job where your back kept warm but your legs froze? I've heard people describe it that way. The steam boiler would keep your back warm but then your legs were out front there with nothing to keep them warm.)

That was very true for the steersman had to sit out in front facing the weather. But the lumberjacks got kind of wise on that. Some fellow with a lot of ingenuity brought back a pair of chaps from out in Montana. You've seen those wool chaps that the cowboys wear, usually made out of angora or mountain goat? They worked very good. And then another fellow with a lot of ingenuity tapped what we call the pet valve, or pet cock, on the cylinders. That's for drawing water off the cylinder when you're starting up. And they put a coil in under your feet in a little box right there and then you could put your robe around you and the heat would come up there, and it was just as good as if you were staying in one of the big, swanky hotels.

(About what was a typical load that one of those steam haulers would carry? About how many pounds, or however you want to measure it?)

It was measured in board feet. On ordinary logging roads, like the logging roads we had when we were logging off Itasca State Park, we had about an 18-mile haul and used from 10 to 15 sleighs, grouped in trains, and those sleighs would carry on an average from 10,000 to 15,000 feet apiece. In other words, they figured at least 150,000 board feet for every trip the steam hauler made from the Park to the landing at Two Inlets.

(Where did that timber go from the landing? To the mills to be sawed?)

It was landed on Two Inlet Lake, then it was driven down to Hay Creek into the Fishhook string, and loaded at Fishhook Lake and shipped to Little Falls, Minnesota.

(And was sawed there at Little Falls? What mill was that?)

That was a Weyerhaeuser syndicate mill.

(In going over the history of the transportation of logs in the woods, you say the oxen came first, then horses replaced the oxen, and then came the steam hauler and other automotive equipment?)

The steam hauler replaced the horses on the sleighs on the logging roads.

(About when did the truck come in as a means of transportation?)

The truck came in in modern times. The gasoline motor was not developed very efficiently until during the first World War.

(So that would be the late '20s?)

That's right. And those trucks were just nothing compared to the kind of logging trucks we have today.

(Let's go back to the typical day of the lumberjack. We left you out in the woods eating lunch. The loggers' day would end with what?)

Sundown, or else it was so dark you couldn't see to work any more.

(So that would vary according to the time of the year?)

That's right.

(You didn't work by the hour then? It was by the day?)

From daylight to dark.

(When you got back into camp from the day's work, did you have to rustle up your own water to wash?)

No. They used to hook up empty kerosene barrels or vinegar barrels through a hot pipe system onto the big heating stoves. Those barrel stoves would take a four-foot length of wood and the water was always kept boiling hot. They had a long sink at the end of the bunkhouse and there'd be from three to ten wash dishes there according to the size of the crew. For 110 men, if your bullcook was real industrious, you had three towels for those 110 men to wipe on, which wouldn't be called very sanitary today.

(You would come in from the day's work and wash up. Would the evening meal be ready at that time?)

After about an hour from the time that you got in. The first thing that you did when you got in from the woods was remove your wet clothes if it had been thawing a little and take off your heavy rubbers. Then you'd take off your socks and hang those up to dry, and you always had what is known as "stags" to put on -- a pair of shoes (possibly a dress shoe you'd bought when you were in the money down in the cities) that you'd cut the tops off to make kind of a slipper or a brogan. You'd put them on. And over this heating stove, or barrel stove, there was a rack about nine feet wide by about 20 feet long, with poles laying lengthwise on it, and that's where you hung up your socks.

(I imagine the odor from that was really something?)

Brother, you said it! As well as the socks there'd be the sweaty underwear that'd be hung up. They had a skylight over the stove with a cut in the roof and it would raise up and the steam would be purging out of that thing at night just the same as the steam out of some of these paper mills around here.

(Getting to the laundry and bath facilities, you mentioned that most of the camps had no arrangement of any kind.)

Oh, yes. They had a wonderful place to wash. All camps were built alongside of a little lake, or a "pot hole," as we called it. That would be a lake from an acre to 160 acres in size. You could go down there and cut a hole in the ice for water, and there were always some extra five-gallon lard cans around. You could build up a brush fire on shore and boil up to get rid of the cooties. But that didn't do you much good because the fellow in the bunk next to you probably didn't wash at all during the winter, or "boil up," as we called it. The cleaner you kept yourself, the more the cooties came across the dividing line between the two bunks. There was something else too there that was kind of interesting. We had two kinds of bunks. There was one bunk that was known as the "side delivery." That was built lengthways to the deacon seat, and the other was endways for the "muzzle loader," as it was known.

(Which would you prefer?)

I think I'd prefer the muzzle loaders. You slept with your head to the wall and it didn't bother you when there were other fellows sitting on the deacon seat which run along the ends of the bunks.

(Did you have a straw mattress or was there any mattress at all?)

You'd go out to the barn and get a bale of hay and loosen that up and put it in your bunk, which was a board bunk with no springs in the bottom. Some fellows would get kind of aristocratic and they'd go and cut spruce boughs or balsam boughs and put in a bough bunk. They'd always had an idea if you used boughs of cedar or balsam you wouldn't be bothered with bed bugs or cooties.

(Did it work out?)

Well, the lice were so thick in some of those camps it took more than that to keep them out of your bunk.

(Was there ever any attempt when some of these fellows didn't wash from the beginning to the end of the season to take them forcibly and give them a bath?)

Yes, I've seen one or two instances where they told them to either wash up or get out of camp. And if the man was stingy, he usually got out because he didn't want to spend any money for extra clothing during the winter.

(Was soap furnished for your bathing and laundry, or did you buy that?)

Yes, you could always get a bar of soap from the bullcook.

(Did you use pajamas or nightgowns or anything like that or did you sleep in your underwear or fully clothed?)

In those days there weren't many unionsuits. There were usually two-piece underwear and you'd sleep in your underwear, either unionsuit or two-piece.

(What was a typical evening in this bunkhouse life? You say you got through with work at six o'clock and through supper probably by seven o'clock. Did you go to sleep by nine or ten?)

That was one of the interesting parts of lumberjacking. At one end of camp -- that was where the grindstone was set up, usually up at the end where the wash basins were -- you always had a homemade barber chair. Well, in the evening after supper that was when the tall stories were told, and men of different experiences told of their trips. You know, in those days you had a wonderful class of men. I've been in camps where there were priests, preachers, lawyers, ex-bankers, and what have you, down to, we'll say, horse thieves. And believe me, some of those men were real orators. Every camp had one or two storytellers, who were known in those days as "oracles." I don't think they use that word nowadays. They were known as oracles and they were good entertainers, and that's where they'd start the tall yarns. The seat of honor for these fellows was in this barber chair, and us young fellows, we couldn't get too close to them. We were kind of outcasts yet; we hadn't been let into the inner circle of lumberjacks. But we could sit around the outside and listen if we kept quiet and didn't do too much giggling. One of those fellows would get to talking, telling where he'd been. There were men that had been in Europe and all over the world, and lawyers telling of the experiences they had in lawsuits and cases, and ministers. Believe me, they could certainly talk. With 120 men in camp you could actually hear a pin drop when these fellows would get to telling some interesting things. If somebody in the camp was a little noisy and was inclined to stretch things and he'd get to telling a yarn that the fellows wouldn't believe, that was when the Paul Bunyan stories first started. They'd say, "No living man could do what you're telling about." "Well, Paul Bunyan did it." And then they'd go on and elaborate about what Paul Bunyan could do -- in other words kind of get rid of the idea that you thought they were a liar.

(Could you recall some of those stories, for example?)

Yes. One of the stories there that used to make a greenhorn's eyes bug out was when they'd tell about Paul Bunyan's dog and about how healthy the country was in those days. Paul Bunyan went out to get him a bunch of rabbits for the camp and some moose, and that dog -- he was a monstrous big dog -- was chasing this moose. So Paul got down alongside the skidding trail where the moose was coming up and he made a pass at the moose with that big ax of his, and he didn't lead the moose enough. He had a little too much speed and

he missed the moose and cut his dog slick and clean in two right in the middle. Well, he was excited over what he'd done and he stuck the dog back together and in just a short time the dog healed up. When the dog was able to move around he seen he'd made a terrible mistake. He'd stuck the dog together with the hind feet up and the front feet down. But the dog went out hunting and they found out he was better than ever before because he'd run on his hind feet until he got tired and then he'd flop over and run on the front feet and let the hind feet rest.

(That's a pretty good story.)

I remember one time -- this was an ex-priest and I never heard why he was kicked out of the organization or what -- but there was a bunch of us youngsters talking pretty rough one evening and telling our experiences, and he said, "Boys, did you ever stop to think what would happen to you if you lived this life on forever?" And he started in telling the wayward ways that a young fellow could get into, and the thing I noticed was that there were about 40 fellows standing around there listening, not sitting down, but standing up listening. And if you ever heard an interesting sermon, that fellow certainly gave us one, and believe me, I think it helped out some of us young fellows. We weren't quite so loud and mouthy after that, but it certainly was an interesting talk. I'd like to have had that sermon taken down on the tape you're running here now.

(We certainly wish that we could get some of these old-timers back again. When it came to choosing the foreman out at the camp, was it usually done on the basis of experience or what were the qualifications?)

Partly on experience and partly on his personality and ability to get along with the men. He had to be able to take care of himself for once in a while you'd run into a man that would kind of like to whip his foreman. You got quite a reputation if you could handle the foreman. If the foreman couldn't take care of himself, he didn't last very long around the bunch of men. They were all pretty good men.

(Do you feel in your own experience that the employers have treated you fairly out in the woods, or do you feel that there were times when the employers took advantage of the men?)

No, in those days I don't think the employer could have taken much advantage of the men. There were too many camps, and if an employer was what we called "haywire" -- that's an expression used for a fellow who isn't any good or a camp that isn't run right -- he had a hard time getting good capable lumberjacks, and he'd have to take all the cast-offs from the other camps.

(You mentioned before an employment agency down in the cities. Was this a commercial agency that would send men up into the woods at a fee?)

That's right. It cost you \$2.00 for a ticket and free transportation from the city up to the woods. And that was taken off your first month's check. \$1.00 went to the employment agency and I always suspicioned that the other \$1.00 went to the contractor.

(You mentioned before the wages being paid at the end of the season. Now, the wages were usually paid in cash. Then you mentioned the credit, a due credit bill.)

Yes. A lot of these scalpers, or contractors, didn't have a very big capital to operate on and they wouldn't get their winter's pay until the logs were landed at the sawmill. They'd give you what was called a "time check" or "due bill," and that due bill was usually due in May. You left camp around St. Patrick's Day and you'd have to hang around the saloons or what have you until those time checks were due. Consequently, the ordinary lumberjack would sell them at a discount, possibly of 30¢ on the dollar, to the saloonkeeper and that's where the saloonkeepers made some big money in those days, cashing time checks. They'd hold them until they were due and get the face value.

(Do you know of any logging operator that actually just slipped out without paying the men?)

There might have been a few scarce cases, but I never ran into any personally myself except one year when I was in Colorado. They went through bankruptcy and we lost our last month's payment.

(You mentioned the deacon seat before. Would you describe what that was?)

Every camp had a deacon seat. You see, you had no chairs or anything, and the deacon seat ran along parallel to the bunks. Then this other part that I spoke of before, when I spoke of the orator, that was known in some places as the "amen corner." That was where the old-timers gathered and had their reminiscences of what they'd gone through and so forth.

(You mentioned before we started recording that you had a poem you'd like to record.)

Yes. This poem is a very nice poem and was written by an ex-lumberjack up at the town of Ray. It has a lot of truth and humor in it. I always liked it and I've used it in quite a few instances. This is the way it goes:

"There's many a change in the ways since the early days
In this land of Bustakogan
When the redman's needs were simple indeed
And there wasn't any logging.

The pine trees stood in the solid woods
Up on the hills and ridges
And the Big Fork flowed clean betwixt the banks of green
Unhampered by snags and bridges.

The moose and the deer ranged far and near
Among the hills and rivers
And the hoot of the owl and the timber wolves' howl
Echoed from the forest's cover.

From the ridges of oak, smoke curled and broke
From the wigwam of Old Busty.
There he lived in peace minding not in the least
For he was strong and lusty.

Until one day from far away
There came some men with faces of white
With a welcome hand he bid them land
And with him spend the night.

They climbed the hill and had their fill
Of Busty's game and fish
And then began to plot and plan
For gain was their only wish.

With a cunning guile they talked awhile
The aged chief thought them friends.
He took no heed of the white man's greed
To gain their ends.

They went the way, 'tis so they say,
And shortly in the future
There shown the twinkling lamps of the logging camps
As they stripped the robes of nature.

Where the pine tree stood in the solid woods
There's now but barren ridges.
Draped with snags like beggars' rags
All the bends on the Big Fork now have bridges.

The moose and the deer don't reign so near
As they did in those days of old
But live in dread of that deadly lead
On those burnings bleak and cold.

There's many a year in this vale of tears
Since Busty made his rounds. He hunts his deer
'Tis far from here
In the Happy Hunting Grounds.

The present race is pale of face
In this land of Bustakogan
And there's the tongue of the midnight sun
And the all-true Copenhagen. "

(That's quite a poem! It really is.)

Yes, I think it's wonderful.

(Do you know any other of the poems or songs that they used to sing in the camps?)

I don't remember the songs. There used to be one song that was very popular called "The Little Brown Bulls." It seems that these little brown bulls were fast and great skidders, and in the other camp there was a yoke of oxen bigger than the brown bulls known as "The Spotted Steers." And there was a lot of rivalry between the two places, so they held a skidding contest. All that I can remember now of the last verse was: "Little they thought when the day come around that one hundred and forty the little bulls had hauled around."

(Were there people that played music in the camps?)

We had some wonderful musicians. I've heard singers and musicians in the camps that would be worth a million dollars on the radios and TVs today. In fact, a great singer in the early days -- I don't know whether you remember him in your time -- was a fellow by the name of Len Spencer. There was a team of Ada Jones and Len Spencer, and Len Spencer was a lumberjack.

(How about playing cards in the camp that you worked in? Did they allow card playing with gambling?)

That was strictly forbidden in 99 1/2 per cent of all logging camps. The only place I saw gambling at all was in Colorado and there you'd go in the wannigan at night, or commissary, and get your day's wages in chips and go into the poker game which was played in the office.

(How about liquor in camp?)

None whatever. If the men brought in liquor it was just too bad for them.

(I've heard stories that the lumberjacks would get together and some of them would even put on flour sacks to dress up as girls and they'd have dances.)

Well, that was Saturday night entertainment. During the weekdays the lights had to go out at nine o'clock and everything was silent after that. But on Saturday night there'd be an accordion player, or a violinist, or a harmonica or mouth organ and another fellow'd get a washtub or a wash board and you'd have a real orchestra. I know one time I belonged to the orchestra and I had a tambourine that I picked up in the city. Somebody had dropped it, I suppose, from a Salvation Army group. And you'd either wear a flour sack apron or you'd take a white handkerchief and tie it around your arm if you were going to be the lady of the square dance. Believe me, those fellows could tamrack her down too. Talk about your professional square dancers today, they're just amateurs alongside of the lumberjacks with caulk shoes on.

(How about a typical Sunday? Did they have roving preachers that came around to the camps and gave sermons?)

Yes. This T. B. Walker that I mentioned before, his wife paid the salaries of one or two preachers that made the rounds of the camps of the T. B. Walker interests. One fellow was known as "Leggins" and their pet name in those days was "sky pilots."

(Yes, I've heard that term before.)

There were very good speakers. You had no newspapers in the camps, never saw a newspaper or magazine, and those ministers or sky pilots were really walking newspapers. They could tell you where all the other lumberjacks were, and who was hurt, and who was in the hospital, and who had died.

(Getting back to the commissary again, when you went to buy your equipment, do you feel that the prices were fair prices or were they jacked up over what they really should be?)

They were very fair. They were sold at the average retail.

(About what time did the unions start to come into the woods here in Minnesota in your experience?)

From my experience and from what I can remember, I think about 1918 was the first time. That's when the Wobblies tried to organize the lumberjacks.

(Do you feel that they had a just cause that they were fighting for? Do you think they did any good, or was it all bad?)

They had a just cause. We never got big wages in the camps until they really did get organized. I've seen wages down as low as \$15 a month when that same contractor could have paid \$50 a month. It was just a case of where they

had to be organized. Now they have very good unions in the woods. The lumberjacks even have white sheets and pillow slips in their bunks and only one man to a bunk where you used to have two. We've got painted floors and a washroom and library in the camps. We even have grapefruit on the table. If a lumberjack had seen that in my day he'd have fainted dead away.

(Do you feel that's entirely due to the union organization, or do you believe the employers themselves have tried to benefit the men?)

I'll give them a fifty-fifty break on that. The average logger or company nowadays has his men's interests at heart. The last company I worked for, the Mando Paper Company, they had wonderful camps. They looked after their men.

(Let's spend a few minutes talking about your Paul Bunyan exploits when you went to Washington, D.C., and so on. Could you tell how that originated and a little bit of the experience you had.)

That started in 1934. We had a big Fourth of July celebration here at the Falls and they told me to be in it -- I was one of the biggest men around in the country -- and to rig up something for Paul Bunyan. At that time there was a fellow in Fort Frances who had a yoke of oxen and one ox was pure white. So we got ahold of that fellow and asked if it would be all right if we calcimined that ox. So we calcimined him blue to represent Babe, the Blue Ox. That night it rained and that poor ox was a pretty streaked looking specimen the day of the parade, but it made a real hit and from then on I got several calls to impersonate Paul Bunyan at conventions and fairs and so forth. Then I rigged up this lumberjack band which became real popular and we travelled all over the country and eastern Canada.

(You went to Washington, D.C. Could you give us a little bit of your experience there?)

In '49 I went down to Washington, D.C., to represent the Minnesota Centennial. It seems as though everybody from Minnesota that works in Washington, D.C., gets together for a party every year and I went down to entertain them and had a real nice time. I went through the Capitol, and quite an interesting thing happened there. I'd come to the Capitol just the day after that guy was parading around there with a big knife. He was a little bit off, or "coo-coo" as we'd call him, and the plant guards sized me up, with this big ax and my caulk shoes and my makeup, and they said, "Well, what do you represent?" I said, "I represent and impersonate Paul Bunyan." "Well," they said, "Come over here and talk awhile with the captain." So I was really put under arrest. I think it was a kind of put-up job with State Representative Blatnik, who was instrumental in getting me there. So they took me over into a side room. The President was just coming in then for a noon-day conference and pretty quick Blatnik comes and says, "We're ready for you in at the luncheon hour." And they said to Blatnik, "Blatnik, are you taking care of this fellow?" "Sure," he says. "This is Paul Bunyan

from Minnesota." They said, "Why don't we know about some of these things instead of making monkeys of ourselves like we did today?"

(Do you feel life in the woods has been worthwhile, or do you feel that you would rather have it under the conditions today?)

Well, the experience that I went through in the woods is something that I wouldn't want to miss for it was a wonderful experience, but I wouldn't like to go through it again. Modern logging today is so far ahead and superior to the early days that there's no comparison.

(Do you feel that the lumberjacks really have it easier today?)

Yes. Better working conditions, better living conditions.

(Do you feel that the employers of the old days really raped the woods or do you feel that they just logged the best they knew how?)

They logged the best they knew how but they had the mistaken idea that you never could use up all the timber that's growing in the United States. In later years the companies began to realize that you couldn't slaughter timber that way and they had reforestation.