

Forest History Foundation, Inc.
St. Paul, Minnesota

ORAL HISTORY INTERVIEW

with

Morris H. Jones
Portland, Oregon
1954

by John Larson

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(Who originally held that land?)

The Bend Timber Company bought this timber from Booth Kelly - I can't tell you the dates - but anyway they got in trouble and they couldn't take care of their bonds so they lost their common stock. At that time we were interested and we looked at the timber with the idea of buying, and we were all ready to buy it, and George resigned as trustee and Fred Ames was put in. Then we took another look at the timber and we got into some timber that wasn't quite so good and we thought, "Oh, gee, let's not do it." So we gave it up and then went to look at the Hill timber. A short time after this the man who was president of Cascade - well, anyway, he bought it for a million dollars and the story is that he said he only put up 50 thousand dollars. Anyway, he sold it for two and a half million dollars to Pope and Talbot and then they started their operation up there. Of course, the timber is worth a whole lot more than that now. And then we afterwards went in on the Hill Estate on that contract.

(How many people are buying Hill timber, would you say?)

Just two of us. The Santiam Lumber Company and the Willamette National Lumber Company.

(How long have you been cutting the Hill timber?)

Oh, I guess about eight years maybe. Dave Mason could tell you.

(He's on our board, you know.)

He represents us - a very nice arrangement. If he's satisfied, we are. They pay their capital gains on the basis of what they get for the timber that's cut during the year.

(I see. That's a much better arrangement than just getting rid of it, for example.)

Oh, if they sold it all at once, then they wouldn't get the advance from the timber.

(That's right. Of course, the Hill family is still something to reckon with in St. Paul; they're still a great legend.)

Cordy Hill and Louis Hill are two nice young fellows. They're trustees and they handle things and come out every fall.

(Of course, their mill was originally tied up with the railroad and all that sort of thing, I guess.)

Cordy Wagner's wife is a Merrill. That was the old Merrill & Ring. What else can I tell you? Dant and Russell were in the lumber business. They started the same time we did here, mostly in Salina, by car, lumber by car. They would loan money to these retail yards and then, of course, that would get all the business. And they gradually enlarged. They did a nice business.

(Did they develop a chain through there?)

No. They just had a lot of fellows, had a lot of retail yards that they sold lumber to.

(Then they did their own logging and milling?)

No, they were just wholesalers to the retail yards, to get them started and then they had their business, five percent. And then Russell died and Dant bought the interest, started alone and then afterwards he got in with a line of ships for export. He did very well during the war.

(Was that the second or first war?)

I don't think it was the first one with the ships. It may have been two.

(Is Dant South for the winter?)

No. Charlie Dant died.

(Oh, it's his son that's alive?)

His boys are all alive. Charlie Dant and Van Duser used to go fishing a lot, over on the east coast of Oregon. Charlie Dant came up to our house on a Tuesday night for dinner and he had a little heart trouble. There was a Dr. Watkins there too. And the doctor had him out on the porch and he seemed to feel all right again. Then that week-end he went over to fish with Van Duser, which he shouldn't have done. And he was not so well over there so they started back on a Sunday morning. He dropped Van Duser over at his house on the East Side and on the bridge coming over Charlie had a heart attack again and he died. He should never have gone on that trip. He had quite an interesting life over at Coos Bay and he had three boys who are doing very well.

(Mr. Jones, I am interested in getting some of the background of this company in Portland which seems to have the reputation of being one of the oldest, if not the oldest, mill in one site in this area.)

Although there were other mills that were started here before that time, the fact of the matter is - there are the old Hogue mills down at the foot of about Jefferson Street. You see, we didn't start our mill on our present site until about 1863-1865. Prior to that time, about 8 or 9 miles west of the city, at a little town called Cedar Mill, that's where the mill originally started in '59. Although my great grandfather and grandfather and his brother (that would be my great uncle) were the ones that came out here in '53.

(From what part of the country?)

Well, they originally started out from upper New York State.

(Had they been in the lumber business there?)

I don't know.

(They came by water, I presume?)

No, they came overland, but the machinery from the original mill came around the Horn. Their original start was in logging down near a little town of Clatskanie. That was about 70 miles by road down the river, and they logged around there for a while.

(Do you remember any stories of those early logging operations, how they carried them out?)

Well, they practically felled the timber right into the slough.

(No transportation?)

What transportation was involved was with oxen. Then when they left there, they settled up at this little town of Cedar Mill; the little town is still there. There was quite a stand of cedar timber in that area which they cut. The present highway - it isn't really a highway, it's a county road that goes right across the dam of the pond. It was a water-driven mill, and they used a muley saw.

(What was the approximate date of that operation?)

Well, from '59 to '63. And they brought their lumber in by ox cart or by horses into Portland to sell.

(This was their market?)

This was the market for that lumber and they cut the cedar. They also did custom sawing for the farmers in that North Plains area, out there in the valley. It was a very old area as compared to some other areas.

(By custom sawing you mean that the farmer brought in his own logs?)

Yes. They'd bring in the logs and they'd cut them into the length that the man wanted, and then they'd split the profit. In the wintertime they'd have to - you see, there were no gravel roads - the only way to bring it in in the wintertime was with a sled over these mud and dirt roads.

(There wasn't actually the snow and ice like they have in Michigan and that part of the country?)

It was a sort of mud sled.

(Was it a special make?)

I don't know whether it was or not. They were quite travelled at that time and gave far more bearing in hauling logs. They wouldn't sink - while a wagon's wheels would, you see.

(What about their crews in those days? Where did they get their crews and what type of men were they, I wonder?)

Well, I suppose their operations were more or less spasmodic. I don't think it was a continuous operation. I imagine they would call in a few farmers around there and they would all get busy. Possibly the man who bought the logs would lend a hand. It was probably a community project.

(Well, these were predecessors of the mill here?)

Yes, you see, there were three - my uncle, my grandfather and my great grandfather who were active in it at that time. I suppose they cut the timber off in that area and then they started to move on the river because of the movement of the logs and cutting of timber available to the river.

(Did they move from that site you just mentioned to Eureka?)

Yes. That was in the '60s.

(Where they changed to a circular saw?)

That I don't know.

(Well, they probably did before the band.)

I imagine that when they left Cedar Mill and came here they went into circular. I never heard of a sash and muley being used.

(Is there any reason why a muley should be more convenient with water power - direct water power?)

Yes, the original mill was water power.

(When they moved here was the market still essentially Portland?)

Yes, a local market. Sold directly to the customers from the mill. We had a small yard in connection with the mill.

(Did you buy the logs while they were ... ?)

Yes, the logs were bought on an open market. They cut fir, spruce and cedar and hemlock.

(How far does your own memory go as to the operations here?)

Oh, about 1905-07.

(That must have been right around the time of the San Francisco earthquake. Were you able to take advantage of that?)

Yes, we shipped by rail. You see, we were above deep water although once or twice during the June high water here, the small, very small schooners came up to the mill, but it was not a water shipping mill as one thinks of it even at that time. By the late '80s - I think it was the late '80s - the Southern Pacific, you see, completed their road between Portland and California. However, we were located on a narrow gauge and we had to ship on this narrow gauge down to a point in the valley and then handle over and ship on the narrow gauge at this point.

(And then you did after that time when the railroad ... ?)

Yes, there was some shipping by rail. And then they put in a standard - I don't know when that standard gauge went in - sometime around 1900 or after.

(What were the significant changes in the mill at the time you remember it in 1905 or so - at the time the mill closed? That's a pretty big order but sometimes mills don't change.)

Well, we went to a band mill in 1905, from a circular to a band.

(Did you have any trouble getting bandsaw filers?)

Well, that was always a problem. There was a lot of experimenting in steel and a filer would learn the steel, say for instance, of Atkins or Simonds, and if he switched to another bandsaw, he was liable to have trouble because alloy so it wasn't always the difficulty in getting the filer - it was the question of the filer being accustomed to the type of saw that he was working with.

(What about the degree of completeness? Did you put out a more complete, a more finished product in later years?)

Well, we started on three and a half acres and when we finally sold out in 1946, the mill was still operating, and we occupied about twenty-five acres. And dry kilns were added.

(When were they added? About the first World War?)

No. I'd say about 1900.

(That early?)

About 1900. Then the molders for refining the product, making moldings, and at one time we manufactured quite a number of the wood paving blocks and had a creosoting plant on the premises. A lot of Portland streets were paved with wood block at that time.

(That was quite common in wooded areas, I believe. In Minnesota we had the same thing.)

Then later on the output of the mill was about 4,000 foot an hour up to about 20,000 an hour as far as production was concerned. Planers and sash gang and resaws and equipment was added at the mills, and the method of handling - it was after World War I, 1918-'19 that we switched over to straddle flint lumber carriers and they were known as Ross carriers, although Ross brought them out early and others followed suit shortly after. Then with World War II, or about that time, the front forklift carrier for stacking ...

(All of this, of course, made movement around the yards more convenient. Before this time how were things handled?)

Before the lumber carriers came in it was all on two-wheel lumber dollies.

(That had to be pushed from one place to another by hand?)

No, horses. They would load it on the dolly and throw the chain around and whip it on and then the team or single, depending on the size of the load ...

(And it all had to be loaded by hand?)

Oh, yes, everything loaded by hand. That was the big problem in practically any industry, to cut out handling and transportation. It was a very critical thing not only in lumber but with any type of material that had to be handled.

(What type of people would you hire to do that work in the early days? Any particular nationality group?)

It was mixed. We had one Negro, a teamster, and his name was Detties. There were Scandinavians. I worked with a fellow by the name of Casey, handling and loading lumber. That would be about 1913. There were Irish, Scotch. Fact of the matter is, our barn man was Scotch. Some German, English. The boom man, I don't recall exactly how to spell his name. It was, as I recall, Guoite; he was French Canadian. I don't remember just how that was spelled. We had Dutch, a family of three. We called them Pollard, which is an English name, but in Dutch it's spelt with a Peauyl, something or other. It was very difficult to pronounce so we Americanized it to Pollard. As far as any one particular nationality, it's a little difficult to say. Italians ...

(Did the Portugese get up this far?)

I don't recall Spanish or Portugese, or I don't believe Greek. I have no recollection of them, but I do have of Italians.

(Pretty much Anglo-Saxon crowd on the whole then?)

Yes, mostly Anglo-Saxon. Now, in some of the mills there were Chinese, Japanese, and what we called Hindus, or the Indians. Of course, in the early days there were our North American native Indians working in some of the mills too from time to time. I suppose that had something to do with the reservation being awarded the government.

(How did your payroll change over that period of about 50 years?)

Well, in my recollection the payroll was about 60 up to about 180.

(This was partly due to the fact that the output had more than tripled.)

Yes, that's right. Primarily due to the change in techniques in handling, power, speed of the saws; the saws could carry heavier feeds, planers where you get 90 to 100 lineal feet a minute - finally got the thing through, you see, at 300 or better. And saws, a band saw that you could carry a feed in a given cut, we'll say, of about 10 to 14 inches per second - through the alloys and the putting of tension and tire on, the techniques changing, you carry, oh, 18 to 24 inches per second feed in the same time.

(Along with these changes were wages going up?)

Oh, yes. You see, when I first started to work at the mill the basic minimum was 17 1/2¢ an hour or \$1.75 for a ten hour day.

(This was pretty high compared ... ?)

Oh, yes. Back in the '90s that was about 10¢, 10¢ to 12¢ an hour, or \$1.00 to \$1.25 a day for ten hours' work.

(I know that in that period, or just prior to that period in Wisconsin, they used to raise wages 25¢ during harvest time, up to \$1.00 to \$1.25, to keep them there and from going into the harvest so in that area at that time \$1.25 must have been pretty good wages.)

Well, in our particular plant we built up our inventory during the winter because in the summer you were up against two demands on labor. One was fishing, and the other ...

(For pleasure or business?)

For business. You see, down around Astoria there were lots of Salmon seining grounds and they could make good money in a short period of time during the fishing season - during the summer. And in the fall you had the hop harvest, and then, of course, there were the ordinary crops during the summer. The production during the summertime when you wanted it was always a little difficult but if you had space to store, you could accumulate your inventory in the winter and then sell out in the spring, summer and fall.

(I suppose your lead people would stay with you?)

Oh, yes. Although it was an amazing thing. Some of the men would go to Alaska; others would go to the Sound or along the Coast for the fishing. They'd leave anywhere from May on, and they'd come back in the fall.

(The same people?)

The same people, and this was more or less a customary thing. And it was a little different that you find in some localities where you'd have your large production during the summer and you'd be down in the winter.

(Earlier we were talking about the place of the foreman.)

Well, very often your management would find themselves in a bad spot because the foreman felt, and to hold his position, would do things that were contrary maybe to the agreement or just good human relationship and the management couldn't back him up.

(He was in a nervous position?)

A very bad position and if he didn't exercise his authority, why, of course, he'd be run over so he was in a very, very tough position. And that's the reason why I stated that these foremen, if they merely recommended the hiring or the firing of the men, let that go to a higher office. That gave

them strength; gave them a limited authority and it also gave management a chance to coordinate the entire operation and to hold things in check. But the unions would want the men in the union at one time and then they wouldn't at another.

(Depending on how much control they had, I suppose?)

Depending on how much control or how much they could influence the foreman. I think they still have that argument even today as to whether some foremen are in or out, and I don't know what the test is as to whether it's a bona fide foreman or whether he's merely a lead man in the league. But that was a very difficult situation and management had just as much to learn as the unions did. The fact of the matter is that from 1935 until the war - then, of course, the government stepped in and you had your "no strike", you had your ceiling on wages, you had all that that you worked under - both labor and management were going through a lot of growing pains just like a bunch of youngsters getting together to try to find out who's going to run the show, pushing one another around. The difficulty was that so many would permit bitterness to come in, prejudice. That was true on the part of management and true on the part of labor. There'd be an injustice and management would maintain that there wasn't any and from that there would develop some terrific situations. So here in the meantime was poor Mr. Foreman caught like between the millstones. He was in an awful spot. And there were a number of years in there where a foreman - if you had a foreman - you did everything to protect him so that he could exercise his authority, but always with the thought to keep him out of trouble because here he was dealing firsthand with the men and you had a very awkward situation. For if you'd lose a good foreman, you'd go out in the crew and try to get someone to take the job, but no one wanted it. But no one wanted it; it was a thankless job. Well, then the professional foreman started to come in. That never went very far. He was a technical expert on human relations that wouldn't know anything about your operations but he was there to manage the thing for you. I think that when I was over in the Philippines in 1925 looking over the lumber, we did bring in some of the Philippine wood.

(Hardwood or ...?)

We brought some in to see what we could do with it, but it didn't fit; it was an entirely different operation. But over there everybody either wanted to get into politics, or wanted to become teachers, and the politician, he figured that if he could become a good politician, he could tell everybody what to do and the idea was that if you became a teacher, then you could tell everybody how to do it. Really, it was amazing to run into that over there. And yet ten years later we had the very same thing here in a different way with the advent of the new laws and regulations. I'm not particularly a lover of the Chinese today although I have spent some time in China. But they have attributed to Confucius - whether it is or not I don't know - but it's a little saying, "Don't mouth your convictions on steel rods that won't

accommodate themselves to circumstances." And I have found that in these labor relations if you can remember that and be flexible, you really will have fun - at times - not continuously.

(You were speaking of your relationship with the men more or less in later years, and how you might meet them on the street and talk to them. Is that quite different from what it was back in the early days of the century? Were relations more formal? Was the boss something pretty much beyond the men or not? How did it work?)

Well, when I first started working in the sawmill, which was about 1913, I worked right along with them. I was just one of the employees, and I knew practically everyone in the plant, and as time went on and I fell on the books, I could reel off these 80 names in rotation. We always kept our payroll on the basis of seniority. The oldest man was at the top of the list and so, as you became acquainted with the list, you only had to pick up a few names each month. From that I could walk out into the plant and I could ask Swenson or whoever it may be, Joe Barriers how his wife or how Willy was, who had the measles and so on, and you knew the family - not directly, but indirectly through the men on the job, and I always tried to maintain that as time went on, but as you do when you're not working right directly with the thing, I got off the books and I wasn't working directly with it, and I lost that touch as time went on so that if a new man came in, I wasn't familiar with him. But on the whole, the smaller plant, whether it was logging or sawmill - I'd say any plant with 100 employees or less, in most of our sawmills and logging plants - the owner was on the job and he knew his men either by sight or by name.

(He wasn't caught up in high politics like the big men, involved in things that couldn't wait?)

So there was a degree of intimacy in the sawmill industry that I don't think you find today because of the size of the plant. Now here's one thing, a story, years ago at Inman Poulsen. Bob Inman was the top man in the sawmill. He did the planning and the layout and so on.

(Which Poulsen?)

Inman Poulsen, right across the river now. They're still operating. There was one time they put in this fast feed works on the carriage. Well, the men used to walk across the carriage track and the sawyer would stop. But Bob said, "Don't do that. The next fellow that does that, you just go right ahead and push him right out to the end of the mill." If you pushed him out to the end of the mill, he'd drop off into a refuse heap. Bob was the first fellow who walked across the track, and by golly, the sawyer took him at his word and pushed him out to the end of the mill. Bob pulled himself together and walked up. The fellow was just about ready to grab his hat

and his lunch pail, and Bob socked him on the back and said, "Now, that's exactly what I meant." And that was one of Portland's big mills. And there was one of the owners. Now, that was the association that we had, as just one example. And today there's been a wedge driven in that and you don't have it. Now, whether or not it is good, bad or indifferent, time alone will tell. But it certainly deprives most men from a degree of association.

(It reclassifies in a way; it sets management apart.)

Yes. You see, a disadvantage could be taken by both the men and the management to circumvent union leadership if it was permitted to go. But as time goes on, I think that is coming in; there's a little bit of that old friendly feeling coming in. We could detect in '45 and '46 right after the war. The labor leaders aren't near as jealous because they have found out that they can be kicked out by the membership, and that just simply because they happen to be the walking delegate there's no reason they're going to have that job indefinitely.

(There's a leveling off.)

So the growing pains are definitely over. We think of the "good old days" prior to World War I, but I doubt very much if we could just turn the clock back without any difficulty or that anyone really would want to go back, and I think if you did, you'd be fighting like the dickens to get where you are today. Here's your mechanized mill, transfers and lifts, and gosh almighty, for a few dollars and a few cents an hour you can give a man something that's operated with a one-horse motor. You're not exhausting him to the point where he can't use his head. And more and more as these mills are mechanized, the man is called upon to use his head more and more, and that is a fine thing because if he uses his mind on the job, there's no reason why he's going to shut the door and not do it while he's away. Whether it's formal education or not, it's still good education.

(He becomes less a beast of burden and more an individual.)

That's right. All of those things have taken place and it's far better. You have your wild-eyed labor leader; you have your obstinate wild-eyed, hard-nosed employer, but it's just as well that you have a strong-armed labor leader control the hard-nosed indifferent blood-thirsty employer and it's good to have that employer there because, my gosh, he's running all your interference for you.

(He's got the world to face.)

He's running your interference for you, and if you're at all attendant or observing, you'll find out what not to do. I can remember when we had a fellow by the name of Abe Mueller in 1935, when the AfofL was organizing the sawmills and logging camps - in fact, all the wood working - and more

out of curiosity, he was the top man, and I finally got to talk with him and meet him firsthand. What he said made a lot of sense to me - I went with Mr. Van Duser to talk with him. Van Duser was president of Inman Poulsen at that time and we talked to Abe Mueller. Well, sir, a lot of the other employers around thought that we had just about committed treason.

(Made a pact with the devil?)

Yes. But practically everything that we talked about and discussed I've seen come to pass and some of it quite easily - some of it gladly given by the employer. I've been amazed. When he was talking, he said, "Why, we're not going to let up on you until we get \$1.00 an hour minimum." "Well, maybe so, but I don't think you'll do it." But it's just those things, and if you can calmly sit down without any prejudice and animosity and discuss the thing just like I'm shooting off my mouth here with you, you may or may not agree, but we'll both learn something out of it, even by getting it off my chest. The union had made certain demands, and I just happened to meet one of my buddies on the street one day, and I told about the demands and he said, "Well, what are you going to give?" And I said, "Well, the employers seem to think they would..." and I rattled off whatever they were, about five or six points. And he said, "Well, that's all we expect." And I said, "Well, fine and dandy!" Well, sir, I got back to the office and had a phone call from the union representative, the president of the local, and he said, "I want to see you." I said, "Fine." He said, "Where can we meet?" I said, "You name it." So we met up here at this church right through here.

(At the church you met?)

Just outside. And then he said, "You're willing to give that?" And I said, "Yep." "Well, the thing's all settled but we don't want to settle it yet."

(It doesn't look like a good enough fight?)

That's right. "Well, we don't want to strike," I said. "You won't have a strike," he said. "We can use this." So we finally - my gosh, we had a series of about five or six meetings over about a two weeks' period.

(It was all settled over at the church?)

Sure. He knew what we were willing to give and that was sufficient and that was all there was to it, but we had these meetings, and we went round and round and round. I would stop short and object to some of the things they were going to ask us to give, that we couldn't give that much so then, gosh, that gave the opportunity to come back, and we just kicked it around.

(Everyone was happy in the end?)

Finally it was settled; at the right time it was signed, sealed and delivered, and that was done just twenty-four hours before some hotheads in Tacoma went out on strike, and that's the reason they wanted to delay. They wanted to get this settlement, which was the settlement they wanted, so we settled it and called up Tacoma and told them about it. Somebody grabbed the ball and ran with it and got the fellows out on strike. They were out for three days, and then they got them back again. They knew they had this difficulty with some of the union men in Seattle and so they wanted us to delay and give in at the right time but if it was in forty-eight hours instead of twenty-four hours, I think it would have been better. Well, now whether or not that's crooked - I don't think it is. Because they knew exactly what they would back down to and be satisfied with, and we knew how much we would give. Well then, why not ...

(As this thing goes on, and labor gets to know management and management gets to know labor, I think it will be possible more and more to realize how much each can give and come to settlements without this dragging.)

Well, we ran one summer, we ran here for two months on a settlement, by golly, but some of the wild boys up North wanted more and I guess they had about 80% of the mills down up there, for two months. And you could attribute that thing right back to the obstinacy and militancy of the Wobbley deal in World War I.

(That has stirred up so much antagonism that it was no good at all.)

They would not permit them to forget. It is far better rather than to break by running, it's far better to shut down and talk, talk hard, fast and earnestly.

(It will take a good many years to get over that.)

In other words, if you and the wife have a disagreement at home, you don't attempt to break that strike by going out and getting another woman.

(No.)

Well, that's what you're doing when you attempt to break a strike by strike-breakers. But you can imagine the attitude and the remembrance; it just doesn't work. Once in a while you have to clop the unions over the head. They've got it coming. Sometimes you've got to hit the employer over the head. It isn't all one-sided. Sometimes the only thing to do is just to close up and pull a strike because the leadership is bad and you've got to educate the men to what that leadership is. Then, when they realize and find out and settle the strike and up comes the election, that fellow goes out on his ear.