

Forest History Foundation, Inc.
St. Paul, Minnesota

ORAL HISTORY INTERVIEW

with

Neil A. McCallum
Point Arena, California
1953

by John Larson

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In the 60's they built a mill at Garcia. I guess it was about a 40,000 board feet per day mill; that was quite a mill for those days, you know. And they had a flume attached to it, the lumber at first was flumed down to what was known as the Iversen flat. Then, afterward, a tunnel was put through a small hill, it was run down to the bench of land that comes down there to the ocean.

They had a set of rollers that were run by a big water wheel. That water wheel was twenty-four feet in diameter and four feet four inches across. It had buckets on it and that's what operated these rollers. These rollers were about five inches thick and had a little three-cornered pieces of iron gripped in them that grabbed the lumber. Here is a picture of the top of it. This is the only one in existence that I know about. Now this is looking at the top, and there are the rollers. There was a shaft running from the big wheel; it had segments of gears on it, all around the sides. And the gear on that drove bevel gears on an iron rod that ran up here and it had bevel gears connected with these rollers. And it was down there at the coast. Let's see if I can see this one a little better. At this period this chute was used to take out ties.

This mill burned down about 1907. The White Lumber Company bought it about 1890. And they owned it even then; they made enormous numbers of redwood ties all over this country. You know in modern days they don't make them. They don't use redwood ties now; they're rather soft for the heavy rolling stock and diesel motors they have now. They sent those ties down the flume to something over a mile from the shoreline. They had a railroad about three miles long. They hauled them down to the landing and shipped them over the water chute. But in the old lumber days when they had lumber, they had a wooden tramway. They had a tramway along where the railroad was put afterwards, with wooden timbers which they had covered with strap iron, and they pulled the tram with horses until they got to a point where it was downhill, and then they went down by gravity. They pulled them up with mules again. The mill was five miles southeast - you could drive right to it, that is, drive where it was. If you could cross the river, you could drive right to it, but you couldn't get across nowadays with a machine. It wasn't very far from where the road is; in fact, the same road was there then.

The logs were mostly cut on the flats and oxen pulled them in over what was known as skidroads. You know what skidroads are? Use water

and grease on them. Chinaman goes along with a pole and a couple of buckets, you know. Whitemen didn't want that job. They used a double circular saw in the mill. I don't know if they had it when they started, but they eventually had that. That was before the days of band saws. They got one probably before the mill was done away with, but they had a double circular.

I was born in the plumbing business; I started in plumbing and metal work in 1895. But there wasn't any plumbing much as we understand it nowadays, and the old tinsmith did what was practically going, you know; dozens of changes were putting it out. So I worked for some time at places like that; rest of the time I'd work at the pipe work. Of course, things changed after a time. We went to San Francisco and learned a little more about plumbing.

The early timers, they were all Canadians and people that came from places like Maine, and Nova Scotia, Prince Edward Island. My folks came here from Prince Edward Island. My father was born in Scotland. But they were the central people here then and they were sound. Just a scattering of Germans, Swedish. The Finns didn't come in to any great extent until later, along about 1890. They were good woodsmen. And there was a scattering of other nationalities. Then about twenty years later the Italians commenced to come in.

Man named Pound and his company were the pioneers. He built a little mill about eight or nine miles down the Mendocino coast up near what they called Sleek Rock Gulch. He had a little outfit that he had taken across the plains with him about 1855. I guess all he had was maybe one little saw such as they do in a gang saw, but I don't think it was a gang. And he made a shaft for it, and the crank to make it run up and down. It was run by a water wheel. I presume he made everything connected with it, almost every inch of the building. Course I never saw this mill. It was gone years and years before I was born. The bench flume was quite a little engineering feat. At tide times they'd come down three in a raft as we used to call them, held together with those dogs. Well, they used to have a flume way down back of Sanger - I never saw it - it was used to flume logs. That was done away with many years ago too.

I used to cut down timber and make ties and do things like that. We used to make the ties right in the woods. They were sawed out by hand with a cross cut saw into mostly 8 foot lengths. There were some 6 foot ties that they made out of timber that they couldn't get an 8 foot piece out of. But they were mostly 6 x 8. Then they did make them 7 x 8, and they made 7 x 9's. If you got 15¢ a tie you were getting good pay. A good man could make about 20 in a day. Some made more than that. Some figured on making

23 ties a day. If the men lived close enough they lived at home, if not they lived in camps. You'd saw the logs out in an 8 foot length, then split them out with sledges and wedges, and then you'd lay 2 pieces on the ground and make it so there was a flat place to work on. Then you'd lay your split tie on that and hew it with a broad axe. Took a good man, an experienced man to hew a good tie.

An interesting feature connected with that - J. C. Halliday came to Point Arena in 1875 and started to make steel wedges. Before that you know they mostly used old axes with the eyes plugged with wood, or iron. He had worked in Martin's Axe Factory in Nova Scotia and he was the finest steel worker I've ever seen, or finest blacksmith. And then he started to make steel wedges, and he made them as long as he was able to work. He quit work about 1900. And his wedges were the finest ever made. Then his partner, he took a younger man into partnership with him later, his name was N. P. Howe, and he continued to make the same kind of wedges; he had, of course, no competition anywhere. The old California Barrel Company up near Eureka used to take a ton of them at a time. His helpers hammered them out. I was there once. There'd be, oh, ordinarily four men striking on a wedge. Afterwards, they got a triphammer. That triphammer is over here yet, but I don't think it was used much in J. C. Halliday's time. The wedges were all hammered out by hand. Well, they run it with a gasoline engine belt. It's still run that way, whoever runs it. Those people had almost no competition.

However, the business went, * _____ bought N. P. Howe's line, he's been dead for many years. But I spoke to him one time shortly before he died, asked him if his business wasn't largely gone. He said it was. They aren't making many split ties anymore, and the barrel company used to take a log into the mill and saw it up, and then two men would go to work on it with sledges and wedges. Now they put it under a tool like a steam hammer and split it up that way. There's no more place for wedges you can speak of.

In those old days when they didn't have machinery to take the log out, they had to cut it up where it would fall, and they would work to have a tree fall in the best place and sometimes it didn't lean that way. And they could work it over with a long thin wedge. Nowadays where they have machinery such as tractors to pull a log anyplace - they're not so particular where they cut them. They cut down a tree and let it fall where it will go without much wedging. Some of them use the millponds. But they take them there with tractors and trucks, you know. Fort Bragg has a pond yet, Caspar has one.

They took the lumber from the head of the rollers there, from this tramway down to near the wharf. There's a wharf there yet. And where the

* The tape was indistinct and the interviewee could not recall the content of the statement in making the corrections.

boat lands was what was an old fashioned chute. You know they didn't have wires, this wire transportation wasn't invented yet. A man named Halladie invented the cable car system there in San Francisco. He invented a cable system for moving things. Then finally they worked it out to run a wire out for several hundred feet and get the vessel under it and drop the ties right on the deck. But before that time, they had what was known as apron chutes. The vessels were most strong in those days, mostly schooners. They'd come in close to shore and they'd have some derrick affairs built out into the ocean, and two wires run down with slats across, and they would put the lumber into that and let it slide down. And at the bottom there was a sort of gangplank extending out from the end of it on hinges that they could fold back when they weren't using it. That was the apron - that was where they got the name apron chutes. When a vessel would come there, they would spring out this gangplank onto the deck. They had a couple affairs for braking when the lumber started to come too fast. They'd slip one down and when they saw they took it away, they'd send down another one. They'd come down fast, you know. They had quite an angle to them. The crew would have to handle each board. There was a place where, by pulling a lever, you could bring two pieces of wood against the board and slow it up. Then there was a second one on this one that you could brake on at the top if it started going too fast.

And that is the way that they shipped the oldtime lumber, but when Billy Wood Lumber Company got it, in fact, before they got it - they bought that when they bought the rest of it. They had this wire-rigged donkey engine by which they hooked on to the ties and brought them down that way. They would take up twenty 7 x 8's at a time or thirty-five 6 x 8's and they'd change around. Then they had a block which hung on the carrier. The carrier was brought right along the wire to suspend the ties from and they would pull it up to the carrier with ropes at first and afterwards cables. When they got the boards up, they would snap into place by dogs, you know. And then when they got down onto the deck, you could pull a rope and it would unhook the dog and down they'd come. In those days they would lower them onto the deck and on top of a couple of other ties. Then one of the sailors would come along and take one tie and carry it where it was going. I've known two or three of them killed by straining themselves inside, rupturing an intestine or something. Afterward then they had two men do a tie instead of one, and they handled them just as fast. Two men could handle their ties as fast as one man could handle one. But that old apron chute was done away with and they used to send the ties from the water chute. But all that business is just about gone now.

You know coastwise shipping is just about gone. The union rules got too severe. The sailors got rough treatment; they had to do too much and too hard work, long hours. A great many things was the matter with it. Then the Union was formed and they gradually improved the conditions for the working men, but they went too far with it.

Steam schooners were a Pacific Coast invention too, I think. It was a larger investment than an ordinary schooner. It was built a great deal like one, and had the schooner rig. After while it took so many men to run these vessels that it didn't pay to run them. So it's all gone now.

Then the trucks came in and they would take your lumber where you wanted it. Well, where you had to ship it to San Francisco and have it unloaded onto a lumber yard and take it from there, now the truck takes it right from the mill to where it's going. Of course, at the present time, Fort Bragg ships most of their stuff by railroad. The railroad runs right in there. Caspar, I think, ships some of theirs by railroad and some by truck. Good many others ship by truck altogether. Those that are on the railroad can ship the car where it's going right from there. The Caspar Mill is now gone.