

Oral History Interview

Fred Cabral

With

John Larson
(March 1953)

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CABRAL: I was born in [place missing]. I was sixteen when I came to Samoa. My folks lived in Scotia for a while before they moved here. And I worked in the mill before and after school, and vacations when I was fourteen, I guess. They was putting kids mostly in the shingle mills. Making shingles, packing—wouldn't let us saw when we were young; sometimes they'd go and try it out. We worked ten hours then, six days a week, two holidays a year, Christmas and Fourth of July. My pay I think when I started in, while I was going to school, was 75¢ a day, a dollar. It bought a lot more in those days though than it would now. Oh, I imagine about four, five times as much.

My first full-time job I run a trimmer. I was a pretty husky kid, I could handle it. I also run an edger, run an edger for about a year and four months.

At that time, it was more laborious work because they didn't have so much equipment to handle the lumber around camp; it was mostly man-handled. The saws were all band saws. The filers were scarce, good men, and that was the big problem. If they had a good filer and good lumber then things went along pretty good. The sad part of it, the companies and the filers, a good filer, they wouldn't teach the young fellows how, they were afraid of their jobs, I guess. That kind of held it up in later years.

LARSON: I met a man by the name of Furlong down at Ft. Bragg. Did you ever hear of him?

CABRAL: Yes, [missing name] he's an old-timer. I don't know him, but I know a lot of him. He trained about twenty men in his time. They all turned out to be pretty good. And they really had to pay him. Teach them nothing till they were paid. Sawing the same way. Fellow out at Scotia there he made a lot—they didn't here, never charged anything here. Scotia they did.

I went from edging to the filing. I took up filing. I worked at that for twelve years. I didn't have to pay a fee. I learned from a fellow by the name of Murky, Bill Murky. He was a good filer, and he liked to have fellows that were ambitious to learn. I was, and he seemed glad to have me. Got along fine.

Well, I filed for twelve years, then the war, World War I, came on and I took charge of that little sawmill down in the ship yards there.

Had a little shipyard and built seven first class ships, wooden ships. And I run that mill. We built the ships for the Government. Well, the shipping that was for the Government. There was a labor shortage, very short. They were drafting all the young fellows—good deal like it was here in this war, this last war. The only thing they didn't employ women. This last time they did. Tried to work them in the sawmill but it wasn't very satisfactory. I was at the mill during this last war and we had quite a few. I don't recall how many. They just took jobs that were light enough that they could do. We had strict laws on employing women for lifting. I think the maximum weight that they could handle was 35lbs. We just figured the heaviest lifting they would have to take, and then that would be the limit of the job she could do.

Between wars, they gradually made improvements here and there, you know. I don't recall the outstanding things. Handling lumber in those days was all man-handled and horse-drawn equipment, trucks; then they changed to the modern system, and I think the next move for handling lumber was Gatney cranes. And carriers and hoisters, which we have at the present time. I guess there was more change made in woods equipment than there was in sawmill.

The actual saw, the band saw, is pretty much the same. They use heavier saws is all, they feed a little faster. Oh yes, there's been considerable change in the carriage. We have here electric dogs now; we used to have the hand dogs. That's the log carriers. They had no log turners in those days. There did here, but not at Scotia when I was a boy out there, but they had them here. There turned the log gear. They used chain instead of cable, we use cables now, but they used to use chain to throw under the log and a man had to put a hook in it and turn it over and then they had knees to shove the back up. They had men on the fast carriages. They have one today—they'd have three on those fast carriages, a man on each dog—they had the hand dog. And then when they put the electric and air dog, why the setter handled it, no doggers at all.

Most all the steam driven was engine and drive shafts in those days; then they finally electrified. We electrified here, started in 1922 and completed in about two years, I imagine, -- two, three years. We still have steam fitters. We have some air power that needs fitters, hydraulic lifts. Use about the same type and amount of maintenance men, in fact, I think we have more

now. But there are less men doing the work. As I recall when I came here it was 84 men; I think it is about sixty some now. I imagine now we do as much in eight hours as they did in ten. Easy so.

Their men were pretty near all natives like myself. Kids that grew up in town. Then the outsiders would come in. We had a lot of them come in from Maine called "bluenoses". Lot of them out here yet, of the offspring. All the old-timers settled here, but mostly from Maine and Prince Edward Island.

They shipped mostly by boat, rather than by rail. The railways were much higher than the boats. I think it was about three dollars higher. We used to have sleds coming in right at the end of the sawmill and run the lumber right out of the sawmill into the boat.

But all horse drawn equipment down there. Yah, those horses knew when to quit, too. I used to get a kick out of it, it would take them ten minutes to come back to the back yard here to take a load to the boat just before noon, and they'd put in five minutes of their time coming this way, but you couldn't hook them onto the load to go back. The whistle would blow and they'd get their feed. They had a fellow that was driving have a harness there that he'd hook that chain into and they'd swing themselves so he just couldn't hook it.

Grading lumber has changed some. The two different names for the grades and some of the grade they've doubled up now that they used to have two grades. Grading the lumber more or less for its quality, that was about the same then as it is now. I wouldn't say there are more grades now. If anything, less. It's about that same as it is now. Maybe they dropped some grades and added some—I would saw pretty much the same.

I came to work for the company here in 1902. I worked in the shingle mill out in Scotia when I was going to school, but after I came here, I went in the mill. I just took a roust-about job until I got an edger job, and I run an edger for a year and four months, and then I went to filing. When I came here there was only two band mills operating; they were building the third. Two operating, The old original 1901.

Then we built number three and when that was complete we started right in building a fourth rig. The only difference in them was our two head rigs, original ones, were, well one was nine foot when I came here, we put in two ten foot afterwards. And then the number three rig was a doubt cut—sawed smaller logs. We used all three kinds of saws. Simonds, Disston, and Atkins and How. I think Hoe was about the oldest. A blade was supposed to be ready to use when it came, but then we generally had to work it over. The factory men didn't know how to put up a saw to make it run right. They'd take a tape measure of the round wheels and they'd cut them the way we wanted. We were using thirteen gauge on the big rigs. They used smaller than that before I come, they used fourteen. The last changed to thirteen. You could feed a heavier saw faster.

Fenlick was the general manager in 1902. He came here shortly after Mr. Hammond bought the plant. Mr. McMillan came here a year later. He was new when I came here in 1902, I don't remember just what month he came. He was here ahead of me and, oh I don't remember how the officer was here. There wasn't many, only about half a dozen. But pretty near all those old families is all gone now.

When I came here the only new part of the town was up there where Archie lives, that's all new. Sunset avenue and Fenwick avenue—still call it that I guess, don't they? This is Samoa now. And the older houses is along where I live there. There was some privately owned property here at that time and right on this corner there was a store here. Or else he owned the house that was torn down, I don't remember which. And Burkholder, he was a legend in the sawmill, he owned a house here. He was with Vance before Hammond came here. And Erick Abrahamson, Elmer's dad, they owned that house, I think. And so on up. There was others too. John Abrahamson, that was Elmer's uncle. He was Scandinavian. Yah, most of them came from Minnesota. Erick Abrahamson, that was Elmer's dad; Emil Lundgren, remember him. He was a saw filer.

The setter sets the logs out on the carriage. He rides the carriage. There is jobs in the mill they have different terms for, but that's in different places, localities. Like we call a board-puller here, the fellow who takes the lumber away from the saw after it's cut; they call them off-bearers most places. I guess the off-bearer is the proper name, they just happened to hang that name on the job here and it's been that way ever since. Oscar Benson the dogger, he handled that hang dogger. We have now air doggers and electric doggers. He was a French man, sawyer.

Glenn Hagen he was a sawyer. Earl Cartwright, he was a dogger, he also set when I was here. Sawyer got a hundred and fifteen. He was one of the best paid. Holmes was a sawyer; D was a sawyer. D got more than Holmes. He got a hundred and twenty-five. That's the way they used to pay them, if they were better men they'd pay them more. The dogger got two and a quarter a day. They must have. The board puller got, let's see, two and a half a day—ten hours, that's twenty-five cents an hour. [Name missing] was an edger man. Ninety-five dollars a month, they must have been paid straight time too. Here they have Lundgren; he was a saw filer, six dollars a day. When I was filing, Murphy had a contract for filing, he got so much a ridge and he paid his own help, out of the contract. Because we were all paid by the company we put our time in just the same as [Name missing]. [Name missing] eight dollars; he was the store manager. And he worked for it too. [Name missing] got 50¢ a day. Hog walloper. He was the dishwasher. Pearl divers they called them.

Well, of course they had to feed them and they used to eat more those days and that's why they gave them less money. We had to get in the woods and slop the hogs along with that outfit. Yah, they raised all their own pigs. You know all the old time lumber outfits they raised everything. I remember out in Scotia there [missing texts] he raised everything that you could think of, vegetable, their own stock for cattle. They butchered it themselves, they had their own slaughter house and they'd [missing text]. Yes, they had all their living right on the plant. Hammond has the dairy, that [missing text] and they raised everything out there. Livestock, and vegetables and...

In the mill itself, what you called your skilled labor, that was your filer and your sawyer and your edgerman and splitter, they were all on a monthly rate and the rest of them were on a daily rate. They set up at that time the basis of hanging on to those. All the rest of them were expendable, I would say. Yes, those jobs there was very little turn-over on sawyers.

LARSON: Did you eat pretty good?

CABRAL: Well, we had rules that we went by. They didn't have refrigerators you know in those days. The meat was hung up in an open section with a screen around, so you watched the cook. If he ate meat, you ate meat; if he didn't eat any meat, why you didn't eat any. You said you just didn't feel like eating any meat.

LARSON: What did you have for breakfast, for example?

CABRAL: I don't remember. We had hot cakes always....

They had different whistles you know, when they wanted water on the chute or wanted water into the donkey. Finally all the whistles was blowing up in the woods; we knew the men were going to come in, but they didn't come in. Pretty soon old Bill come down the track. What he didn't call us water bucks! He informed us that he was till running the camp and when he was going to shut it down why he'd let us know. He felt pretty cheap going back, starting those darn horses and going back up there into the woods, he got the razzberry from everybody along the line. He couldn't fire us all, though, 'cause he wouldn't have had any water.

LARSON: What did the water bucks do?

CABRAL: He has an old horse and two water bags on, a water bag on each side and he went to a spring, got the water for to take up to the donkeys or on the chute or on the main road. He dumped this water into tubs. You'd go up to one of these tubs and pull the plug out and let the water go in there, you don't want to let more than about half the water get out because that horse was going to start in turning around because the saddle would start in shifting. You'd better get that plug in there. Brother he didn't waste any water because he start in turning around and take the water out of the other side. Those horses, talk about horse sense, by golly they sure had it. Wasn't 17, course I got \$35 a month and my board.