

Oral History Interview

James Hart

with

Roy R. White

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Mr. James Hart

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Mr. White: Mr. Hart, tell me first about your company, how it was formed.

Mr. Hart: Well, I started working for them in 1932 (Alger-Sullivan). I worked for Mr. Hauss and - it was before my time when they started the company, back in 1900. I had heard them talk about it, different things. Of course they logged with trucks, mules and skidders. I can't give you the history all the way back there because I don't know. I started with them when they first started moving by what you call trucks [?] From skidding, they had always skidded with old oxen and mules and put it on the log cars and carried it down to what they called the run around and they had the train that come out every day from the mill and picked up and carried 24 logs. That was tree length, we just cut them down and cut the tops out of them. Big long cars had a 30 foot ridge pole. My experience with them they had a man named Mr. Ely Ellis who was the woodsman who surveyed out the railroad, that is through the woods. They just went out with the eye, you know what I mean, they didn't have no compass or nothing he just went out through the woods to lay out the railroad where they thought it was most convenient to get the timber to the track. I had a good bit of experience with him staking out railroads and such as that. Mr. Ellis was getting much up in age and he wanted me to get where I could take it but I didn't particularly like it, it just didn't suit me. You see, I was trying to get them to get into trucking. It was so much easier in hauling. Of course they didn't think too much of it at the time. Eventually they bought an old second hand truck and trailer to haul them to the railroad. Still they were loading them on the cars and still hauling them in the train. I wanted to carry some on to the pond and put them in it, just rather had them on the truck. Eventually they agreed to it and they started off and we were up here in hugs tract known as the Michigan tract. They bought that I understand during the first World War. They left a lot of the timber that they couldn't haul across the L&N Railroad. They didn't have any way to go over or under it and they wouldn't let them go across it. They left some tremendous timber in there. They did a lot of this selective cutting, in there, they thought it would affect the trees and everything, they wouldn't try to take the best of the timber. They were hauling up above evergreen over there to Tipton, you see, and leaving this highway, bringing them up there, throwing them on the ground, loading them on the railroad cars and having them carried down to what you call the run-around and this train come the next day from

Century. I wanted to - it wasn't but forty miles from there down to the pond on a black top road, we were traveling on a dirt road. They eventually got more and more into trucks. They never cut down all the best. They made crossties, these two faced crossties for this railway, you know. They just cut down these choice trees, face each side, and cut them in two with the spikes. They were just losing the choice timber like that you see, so eventually they just kept adding trucks but I left there before eventually they took the railroad up. They built a lot of their own dirt roads, roads for the trucks and I left there in about, well about 1940 I guess it was. Then they went more and more into trucks. I left there in 1940 before the second World War.

Mr. White: How much land were they operating then?

Mr. Hart: Well, I used to hear them say. I think they had with all their holdings about 240 or 250 thousand acres of land.

Mr. White: That was in the 1930s?

Mr. Hart: Yes. They had all these holdings and the Michigan tract. That was the one they bought during the first World War before my time. I had always heard them discuss it and talk about it. Then they owned all this land they had bought. I've heard them talking and I think it was 250,000 acres they had.

Mr. White: Were they leasing land?

Mr. Hart: No, Sir, they owned it. They told me that when they come here they bought this land way back there when they were selling it cheap. I don't know how they acquired the land but they wouldn't buy timber, you couldn't give them any of your own timber. They wouldn't let you haul logs, nobody in the world. They manufactured their own timber because I know a lot of people tried to sell them good timber and he wouldn't buy, he wouldn't buy nobody's timber.

Mr. White: Why do you think he wouldn't do that?

Mr. Hart: Well, I used to hear him say. You know, as I said, they acquired so much of their own, I guess, and there was a great demand for piling here in this country and we had the best select of timber in the world to make those and when they wanted them he would just let them go out and have them. They would just go out, mark the trees and cut them. He would make them pay for them if they broke or hit the ground that was just their hard luck. Then the railroad bought worlds of them and the way they would do he would just send an order up there and it wouldn't be a question of the price just let them cut so much and he would send them a bill. Mr. Hauss had a son-in-law, David Miller, that was Mr. Hauss' son-in-law you know he is a tremendous holder in this up here and they run a huge creosote plant and they would always want to buy

and he would always tell them to cut their own timber, that he didn't want to sell them any. That he wasn't in the piling, he was in the sawmill business. He would tell you that every time, he would tell anyone that. He was a shrewd man, a good fellow and I think the smartest business fellow I've ever been under in my life.

Mr. White: Did you have any turpentine operations?

Mr. Hart: Yes. Now at the time - you know the turpentine was different. From logging it was. Old man Long and his son was in turpentine. I've forgotten just what the name of that thing was, it went under a different name. But you know that came up about this selective cutting. They went into it here and they claimed that, oh, they had all kinds of processes, that turpentine they were losing more by the way it was affecting the timber, the value of it. That all came under the same thing and they eventually quit turpentine. I can show you the first time they came out in the woods, they decided then, you know they used to cut everything that had a face on it, they only faced them for three years. The turpentine just kept ahead of the logging. They decided if they quit the turpentine and they debated a long time whether to cut these trees or leave some of them to see what they would do. And now they've cut a lot of them and I know the particular time they started. They got to arguing, Mr. Earl, Mr. Slater, Mr. Hauss and they experimented in all kinds of ways, that was the idea. They quit turpentine a long time ago.

Mr. White: When you first went with them were they looking to sustained yield operation or were they just cutting?

Mr. Hart: No, Sir. Mr. Huston Jones was the woods foreman, the woodsman. I remember back in '33 and '34 I was sitting down here one time. Of course just working as a laborer like I was I didn't see much future and I didn't think about it but they would figure out 4, 5, 6, 7, 8 years ahead where they would be, what they would be cutting and everything. But I just thought just starting out to working, it didn't sound so good to me but as I worked along in it I realized. They planned ahead, they got to doing their cutting, marking timber and planting, though of course that came later. But then they topped it [?] They had what was known as a topping crew. Mr. Hauss wouldn't let anyone skin his trees if he could help it or nothing like that but you know how you cut tops away. Well they had crews that went along behind the logging and kept the tops cleaned out to keep worms from getting in it. They did that for years. Growing timber and keeping in and protecting it.

Mr. White: Did they control burn?

Mr. Hart: No. At that time they didn't. Mr. Leach was the man in control at that time. We didn't work too much. We worked on "Hoover time," we worked maybe 2 or 3 days, usually 2 days and we would knock off but we were required if they had a

fire anybody around there had to go help fight the fire. It didn't make a difference how many, ten, fifteen, or a hundred, men in the woods. They tried to keep the fire down that way but they didn't have fire lanes, they didn't have things to do with except trucks roads. That came on later on but they were always against fires all right but you know you had a lot of people in the woods that would set them on fire. The main thing I think, the biggest problem was that the cattle people - they had open range then you know - they would set the woods on fire for the cattle in the spring of the year to get green grass. And they would do that but since Mr. Leach is there - he took Mr. Earl's place since he come back from the war - he used some control burning. Up here they tried it and I think they were successful at it. They really had some terrible fires. They didn't control burn all of it, they had some plots and it was very successful. I was always interested and watched it because what I learned there working has been worth a lot to me in my own dealings and everything else. I have been always proud of it.

Mr. White: You said they weren't planting then?

Mr. Hart: Of course you know they didn't let us know too much about the business. There was just 2 or 3 fellows knew and they just told us what they wanted us to know. But they were planting. That's what Mr. Slater was doing. He was trying to show them how to plant for the future of the timber, that they could grow wood. That was his point he was putting over to them. How they could grow it, take care of it, do selective cutting and it would grow faster than they were cutting it at the time. That's where that got started in with them I think. That was the object of it because they would meet and I would go with them a lot of times in the woods. Naturally I would just be standing there and hear them talk. You didn't have anything to say and they didn't ask you anything. You just learned what you heard.

Mr. White: They were hard hit by the depression?

Mr. Hart: Oh, I'll tell you the truth. You see they only paid off once a month and they had a little commissary. I can remember when they weren't able to work 2 days in the week. I remember drawing 20 or 25 dollars a month above my board. They fed in camp. You didn't get to work. That was before the NRA came in of course. I can remember when the NRA started. I was there before that started and of course that brought on a whole lot of changes. They cut out the coupons in the commissary, the people that traded there in the woods could go there and the timekeeper would check your time and write you out a coupon. They wouldn't let you go above your time. Just like you worked today and you had two dollars coming to you or four dollars they would write you out a coupon for the same thing in money. They would take that out of whatever cash you had coming. They paid off in cash. It was the same as cash but you couldn't trade that thing except here in the woods or down at the Century mill. It wasn't good anywhere else.

Mr. White: Your job kept you in camp?

Mr. Hart: I lived in camp. I didn't go anywhere else. There wasn't anywhere else to live. Stayed in those regular camp cars. They fed them there and everything. Some of the people had their family. They had cars they would stay in. You see, I was single then. Yes we stayed right there, we lived there.

Mr. White: Room and board was part of your pay?

Mr. Hart: Yes they paid us and that came out. If we weren't working they would feed you. They fed you good. In other words if you didn't work but two days you stayed there all week and they fed you right on. That's what it amounted up to. It didn't make any difference how many was there or what.

Mr. White: It was in the camps that you came to know Dr. Cary?

Mr. Hart: Yes. You see he would come up and Mr. Hauss always notified us he was coming and then they would make arrangements. In one of these cars on one end they had a kind of a guest room they called it. They kept a nice bed there in the woods. Just a little above the average, not too much more. They kept it for just such as that. A lot of people would drop in and want to spend the night. But when he would come he would come up there and stay. Mr. Hauss would write and tell them. You see they were way up off the ground, they had four or five steps, these railroad cars on tracks. That was the camp cars then made out of regular cars because they moved them ever so often. They had a door at the end and at that time we didn't have screens, just had old double doors, you know. I remember they would always make provisions for him because he always walked in his sleep. He read a lot. We had kerosene lamps in those days, we didn't know what electricity was in the woods, you know. We had regular old kerosene lamps. Nearly everybody that worked got up extra early in the morning, they had a certain time to go and didn't burn much oil but at night in summer must everyone would go to bed. But he would read. I remember he read a lot and we would have to nail boards across the end of this camp car no matter how stout a latch of that door was because he would - lots of times I would wake up there but he would be reading and I guess asleep. But he was bad about walking in his sleep. We were afraid he would walk out of one of those doors you know. He would get up early in the morning. He was right there in the camp.

Mr. White: What sort of work was he doing. In the woods?

Mr. Hart: Yes, he would just go right out in the morning with them, stay out all day and would have them pack him a lunch, just like they would - you know most fellows would leave, it wasn't convenient to come in for noon time, you know. He would have them to pack him one too and he was out looking at the pines, working and experimenting with them. He used to bore them to find out about the ages and different things. I remember they

sent somebody with him and he usually worked out a ways. That's where I came in on it but the best I remember he didn't take up too much details with me. That is, I remember the best I remember because I was always taught to listen not too much because if you get to probing a fellow - you know jobs were hard to keep then and I might get to hearing something that I didn't have no business and I might get back and I might be left without a job. That's just to tell you the truth, the whole thing in a nutshell. I could have asked but that was what was in the back of my mind all the time.

Mr. White: Did the company have sample plots he was working on at the time?

Mr. Hart: Yes. They had - I remember they had some little old plots that they were experimenting with that they would burn, they would fire it. You know they would put fire in it and some they would keep fire out, you see. And they would try to get over to the people who worked. Some they would pick out different plots and they would leave it thicker and they would try to see the growth on it. They would check the growth and others they would thin out to where they could show the difference in the growth. They would show where fire had hit it and where fire would hit it. It burned. Small plots now. They would set them off about an acre the best I remember.

Mr. White: He made his tests on those plots?

Mr. Hart: Yes. He would come back and he would have a record. He would get the growth and such as that. He had the trees numbered. He would clean them off and put numbers on them. Some they had they had fired and some they hadn't and some they had thinned out. They would have a plot side by side but still they would control one burning and the other they would just burn. In other words that was the main [...?]

Mr. White: Did you cut those plots at all?

Mr. Hart: Well, I don't think they did. You know the logging went on ahead. I don't think - the best I remember I think they did come cutting on it but I think they didn't let us do it. I think they come cut there themselves or somebody else you know to do it. I don't remember us going in there to do any work like that because logging was such a big operation and I don't remember. They were usually where we weren't logging, behind us or somewhere. They picked out a plot and we didn't bother that you see.

Mr. White: What did he look like? Can you describe him?

Mr. Hart: Yes. He was a little fellow. I guess he would weigh about a hundred and forty-five pounds. His hair was just as white. And then I'd say he was just as hard as we younger fellows. He wouldn't complain no matter how bounced around he would be. You'd figure, you know a fellow with hair that white you just couldn't say. But just everybody noticed, especially the working people. Yes, he had all kinds of friends. He was liked by nearly everybody. He was a good mixer. You know, he didn't

make anybody - you know the working type of people that you have - he always made them feel that they were welcome and that he was just a part of one of them. He was one of them. That was the reason everybody seemed to like him so and glad to see him back. I remember that very much in him. I never did read much of course with the old lamplights they had but he would read. He would bring a tremendous bunch of books and it would take him long to read them. He read a lot at night and he would come over there and ask if I had anything he could read. At that time the superintendent was the only one got a newspaper. We never did see one unless we went over there and borrowed one from him or something like that and we didn't go over there and do that. Best I remember that was about the first time I ever owned a radio. For a long time I didn't even own one. You didn't hear anything except what some one told you. I told him I didn't have any kind of books or nothing he could read. I didn't read much myself and nobody else there had any. I remember he went bareheaded nearly all the time. When it would be cold, I remember the ground would be popping open there in the morning and he would particularly think about what a wonderful morning it was. He would get out and it looked like he enjoyed the fresh air, you know, and I guess that's the reason he was a specimen of health.

Mr. White: He was so active it was noticeable?

Mr. Hart: Yes. That's what I said. A man with his hair, and his age, and the vigor he had to go out there all day. You would think he would go stay a while and come in with the car or something. He would drive his own car. You just show him the road and he would go right on. It was the vigor he had, and the energy.

Mr. White: You are speaking of the early 1930's?

Mr. Hart: That's about in '32 or '33 because I remember it was along in there when I started. I have a picture back there of Mr. Earl as superintendent. You know they kept the camp cars, the quarters they stayed pretty nice. Of course ours were good. He had a picture made one time of this thing. I got one of them in there now and its just amazing to see the difference there is now. I could go right back to the same place just as good as I could this house but they have cut all the oaks and its all gone all but the old railroad bed. To go back now and see it just makes you think about the good old days. And it was good days.

Mr. White: Was the company very conscious of forestry? Did they talk it up to the men?

Mr. Hart: Yessir. I remember in the woods - you know the people running over and so many people would just knock down the trees carelessly and a man would skin it. You know they sawed those trees in those days by hand, two men to a saw, and they had a ruling that they didn't want but a 12 inch stump and that had to be mighty low for two men to saw. He would come through the woods with the saw boss or superintendent and find one of them stumps a little high and he would make them go back and saw it off

again. He would make them stay out and lower that catfish or come up a little on it. We would go to other woods visiting some times, you know, and the stumps would be a little higher. But most any kind that's the way they cut them in those days. He kept them down. He was raise more sand about it when they got them up a little. They wouldn't let you get them up. You would just lose your job. You had to get down and keep them down there. Running over timber is where it came in about the topping and everything, you know. Fixing the roads out and trying to be as good as you could to save the timber, just to keep little stuff coming along, you know, and not running over. You could cut out some and run over and damage more than you do.

Mr. White: They were using selective cutting and thinning then?

Mr. Hart: Yes. They were starting on it then. There was some of it at that time. I remember when this fellow and Mr. Slater and all were here it was kind of a new thing through here then, you know. I think some of these companies up here had started and every year they would have a - these different companies each company would have a - each year they would have it at a different place. You would go to a different place to see how they were logging and have one of these meetings. I've forgotten just what kind of meeting it was but it would really make us appreciate the thickness of the woods and the logging and I guess it would just make you really appreciate what you had coming up. They would come back to the woods and tell them of the land and the facilities and it would just make you proud of what you were working for. Of course they would visit over here and they would go different places. I've been told there was some other companies way back that first started that and I've heard Mr. Hauss talking about it and through rumors and that's where Mr. Slater come in down here and they got then started in. I think that's where it all kind of originated.

Mr. White: Did you ever know of Mr. Slater and Dr. Cary working together?

Mr. Hart: Well, usually when they come. He would come here a lot of times when he knew Dr. Cary was here, all right. But I never did go with them much. See they would go with Mr. Huston Jones. He was their head woodsman. Now that's a fellow - I don't know whether you have contacted him or whether you know him or not.

Mr. White: Is that James H. Jones?

Mr. Hart: That's him. Mr. Huston Jones. Mr. Jones could tell you. He was - I called him the woodsman over all of them. He's the man who ought to know more about it than any man in the country. Mr. Huston Jones can tell you because he - I'm just sure I can remember he was the fellow that would do the planning ahead, where our camp would be, where the logging would be and how long, where we would move. When he was speaking at the time it sort of went in one ear and out the other. I couldn't see myself but as I grew older I could [...?]

Mr. White: Mr. Jones was your woods boss?

Mr. Hart: Yes I guess you would call him that. He worked out of Century here. I called him the land agent, head of all the land. He went all over the land. I don't know if he had anything to do with Mr. Earl. Mr. Earl was superintendent of the woods. I know Mr. Jones had a tremendous job. He had the whole holdings, land lines, and every conflict they would have. A fellow would steal the timber and a fellow would cut over the line and that was his job. He would have to go to court and you see we were in three counties here.

Mr. White: And there was timber stolen?

Mr. Hart: Oh, they would do that. Folks would do anything in the world. They had all those people who had adjoining land who would get over the line and they were never satisfied. They would cut their timber and maybe somebody had sold it and somebody would go down there and cut in and be over on the company because they kept other men, their own men, who pretty well knew where the line was. It would be reported and he would be the man who would solve it out in court. And he bought land for them.

Mr. White: Were there many small operators around here at that time?

Mr. Hart: Well, the only thing I knew was back up in the Evergreens little old peckerwood mills. They called them peckerwood mills. The railroad cut the rightaway out and they had to do that by manpower, they had no bulldozers at that time and they would pile the trees and it would be a while before they would get there to pick them up, to get them to the train to load. In the summertime they would peel the trees to keep the worms from eating them up before they could build the railroad to them. Some of the little mills would try to buy that but they wouldn't sell. They wouldn't sell you nothing. They would just pull that stuff to the side and let it rot. I remember a lot of them little mill fellows would come there and try to buy it. They didn't cut much hardwood those days. They were pine-timber men they called it and they would pass up the finest hardwood.