

Oral History Interview

James H. Jones

with

Roy R. White

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Mr. James H. Jones

Pensacola, Fla.

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White: Mr. Jones, you were telling me of the early history of the company you worked for. Can you tell me how it got started and the men who were involved?

Jones: Well I'll refer you to this paper. The names are all in there. The tract of timber that was originally bought in the year 1900 was owned by Mr. Martin H. Sullivan who lived here in Pensacola and died here. He and his brothers had accumulated the tract of about 250,000 acres. He had sold off one township and we - that is the company - bought about 225,000 acres. They came down here and bought it and built a mill up at Century. It was an Alabama corporation, Alabama lands. When he sold it there was a clause in the deed that said that all of his timber land was in Alabama, pine lands in Alabama. They organized and went to work in Century. By the way I carried the stakes in my arms when they staked out the first camp before there was ever a bush cut there so that is when I started. It's the only job I ever had. I started there as a timekeeper and I received and checked in all the stuff when they started the mill. I was the first receiving clerk you might call it and I sold the first nickel's worth out of the commissary. The mill was built by - well, the Chalmer's people built it. That is they furnished the drawings and sent a man down here from Duluth, Minnesota and he came down here and built it. Before they got it built they bought another company out in Alabama up north of Century about 15 miles, along the Sullivan branch of the L & N Railroad. It was an established going mill so they sawed most of their stock for building the new mill in their own mill up at Foshee. It later had labor trouble and they shut down the Foshee mill after they got started at Century. The whistle blew one night and next morning it failed to blow. They had a box car in front of the office and loaded the office equipment and moved to Century. Mr. Hauss worked there.

White: What date was that?

Jones: It was in 1901 that happened. They ran that mill at Foshee up to that fall and as I said had labor trouble and closed down that mill. They had begun operations at Century so they brought down all the good men and the troublemakers they just left them up there. They ran day and night about 12 months, about 1 year they ran day and night. And then they started to start up to Foshee mill again, we called it. In 1903 they started the Foshee mill and eliminated the night shift at the Century mill. They came down here expecting to cut out and be through in 15 years and gone. But just such men as Dr. Cary caused them to see different and - [?] They ran the Foshee mill and the Century mill both until the Century mill burned in 1910 and they used the Foshee mill to cut for the new mill again. When they started to start up the Foshee mill again in 1903 they sent me up there to check in that stuff. They sentenced me to 12 months but by good behavior I got out in 9. So I came back to Century and they continued to run the Foshee

mill right on. They ran that up to - I've forgotten - they ran it about 10 years. Our people - General Alger was the first president and Mr. Hauss was the assistant secretary. Mr. Hauss was related to Colonel Alger who was connected with it and the piece will give you that story. They were in the American Foundry Co. in Detroit and Mr. Hauss came down here as assistant secretary and while he was that they had a man named Mr. Dillon who lived in Duluth. He has a railroad in Duluth. The Northern Minnesota Railroad they called it which was at that time a logging railroad in northern Minnesota. They hired a man by the name of Glover who had been probably a Canadian and lived up there on the border line somewhere as general manager. He took over in Century and he died there about 1910. Then they made Mr. Hauss manager. He had gotten to be secretary. Mr. Hauss handled the key to the cash box from the beginning and when they wanted to make him president they had to hold a special stockholder's meeting and change the by-laws so a man could be treasurer and president. They elected Mr. Hauss president and he managed it on up until they sold out. He's the only boss I ever had as far as that's concerned. Dr. Cary showed up, I've been trying to remember just when it was. In 1910 though when they bought what they called the Michigan tract of timber, that's 45,000 [?] acres they paid 2 million dollars for up in Conecuh and Monroe counties 80 or 90 miles from the mill. In fact they had a ninety mile railroad for logging up in there. Then they created the position of land agent and I fell heir to it. I had 250,000 acres of land then and several men under me as woodsmen. I still stayed at Century to handle the office end of it and as time went along and different ones died when the secretary died I was made secretary. They cut out the Michigan tract. They paid 2 million dollars for the tract of timber up there and they paid a million dollars for their sawmill and I told them they made the stuff pay for itself so they didn't have anything in that. But Mr. Cary showed up and my recollection is he was a logging engineer for the Agricultural department. He was a peculiar fellow. I've never seen a man just like him. I don't know where he come from yet. But he come in, blew into town and he went to the boss' house, the first place he went. If he was going to sell a bill of goods it had to come from upstairs, coming down. He come in about 1920. it was about 1920 when I first saw him. He went over and stayed at Mr. Hauss' a while and they wanted to go to the woods so I chauffeured them. I took them on a trip and Mr. Hauss was very much interested and of course I was interested. We had a well - I'll have to hand myself that bouquet - we had a well-managed woods operation. We had 20,000 acres up there right above Flomaton that had been a tree farm operation. Nearly all of this first Sullivan tract had been cut over at one time or another in a ditch logging process. They cut big tall logs and cut ditches out of the creeks and run logs down. They used to run a lot of them up here at Molina and Escambria down the river. Then they had built a mill over on the Sullivan and on the L & N above Mobile over there. But they hadn't operated. In fact I went to work for Mr. Sullivan in 1897. He came out in the woods to my father's house and traded up with him. I was already familiar with what he had and I guess that's why I got this other. I worked for him until he sold out. But he began to talk conservation. We had a wild Irishman out there in the woods who was logging superintendent and he couldn't see it at all. But he was cooperative.

Following 3 or 4 trips maybe three months apart down on the property and around he got to talking seed trees. He was a conservationist and he was really very interested in turpentine. He had bought some stuff over near Gainesville, over in Florida there and he was interested in that. He met up somehow, I don't know in what connection, he met up with Eloise Gerry and she came down and went out in there. Our company first started with a bull team operation. I had over two hundred head of oxen up there and big wheel carts, that's the way we started out. But we were cutting the best timber all the time then, that is the best timber you could get ahold of. But following his suggestion Mr. Hauss kind of - I think he coined the expression - of prolonged operation. They come down there to cut out in 15 years and go west or somewhere, you know.

White: When did they change their opinion about that? I know Mr. Hauss must have been the one.

Jones: That really started about the time we shut down the Foshee mill. I've forgotten just exactly. The Foshee mill ran about ten years or something like that. And when we shut it down we began to - when we bought the Michigan timber we had to get some money and we started the turpentine operation.

White: Then you did operate some in turpentine?

Jones: Yes. In fact we operated one year in turpentine. We operated the first year we were down here and then went out of the turpentine business. We could all see the damage and the fire hazard it was and the heck of it was there was no restriction on fire burning at that time. Just everybody was doing it. The government agents or some of their foresters when they began to start their forestry business down here we were members of the old Southern Forestry Corporation and I attended their sessions at Bogalusa, La., and at Savannah, Ga. They operated for ten - they stayed in existence for a long time and I attended all their sessions. Mr. Hauss, you had to know him to like him but he was like a second father to me. He was one of the best men knew [?]. And we talked and went out and took the foremen in our confidence and talked to them. I had a picture. I don't know where it is now. It's gone. But when we bought the Michigan we were earning a little bit we started turpentine again. Alger Sullivan too 75 [?] in the new company, the naval stores company, and we got an experienced turpentine man to run the operation and he had the other part of it. He got 25% interest. But after 8 or 10 years we began to see these turpentine faces - we first turpentine down to 9 inches. Then we went up to 10. And the next year we raised the minimum tree size to 12 inches. We tried to have the logging operations come in and cut everything that was turpentine. We had some pretty woods after we got through with it. We would sometimes have a storm, we had two or three bad cyclones and that would change our operations. But it was my trouble to go ahead and tell the loggers that next year we wanted them to log over on this township or this over here. We would try to keep the turpentine people just ahead of them. But we run out of the turpentine business in about 1927 or '28 and closed out the turpentine operations.

- White:** What was the reason for closing out. Demand for naval stores was not as great but was it also because the operations were damaging to the lumber?
- Jones:** We were looking at it from a conservation standpoint. They organized a \$50,000 company and I suppose they paid dividends of - well, not 10 times that, but it is possible. But you had to change, because of stormy weather or something, you had to change the location of your logging operations and you would leave some stand. And you would go back there and you would find some of it dry-faced. They would turpentine under restrictions but old timber would dry-face worse than young timber and then fire would get in it and we would have trouble so we just went out of the naval stores operations. We never did anymore until World War II there was a cry for turpentine and naval stores and we ran about two years in a limited way. We permitted the son of the old operator we had that knew turpentine pretty well, we got him to come in and give him 20 some odd crops and let him work it for 3 years. And we experimented all along. One year I wouldn't let him put more than a cup on a tree on the theory, studying our lesson all the time, on the theory that two cups would sap the tree more than one cup would. You would put a second cup on the tree but you would wait till you took it off this side and put it around here. And you would increase the output. We got more out of it that way. We had an awful time here with the government when they were trying to turpentine. They wanted to limit you to so much. The government got to butting into everything they did over there and they would tell you you could put up so many crops or they would say how you were going to do it and we told them we were getting about 65 barrels to the crop and they didn't believe it. They were getting about 30 or 35. That was the limit with them.
- White:** But they kept on regulating?
- Jones:** Yes. They were regulating.
- White:** When was that?
- Jones:** It was during the first World War.
- White:** The first World War?
- Jones:** The first World War. That went on for about a year. We used to log with steam skidders. And they would just tear the woods all to pieces. And the government don't deserve any credit for us quitting that. We quit it ourselves. Then we got to using a ground skidder up beside of the swamps. We would move it to teams or tractors and then the trucks came in and we gradually shifted from a railroad logging operation to a truck logging operation. We tore up all our railroad. We finished tearing it up about 15 years ago. Now we are trucking all together. We haul some in logging trucks as high as 75 miles. You can go into the woods with a truck and not do near the damage you do with skidding. We just quit railroad hauling.
- White:** That was a company policy because of damage done to the woods?

Jones: It was company policy. It's true Dr. Cary would see a tree skinned in the woods - he was conservative. I'd lead them the way in the woods there dozens and dozens of times and there would be just he and Miss Gerry and myself in the woods. I always had enough to feed six if there were three of us and enough to feed ten if there were five of us. Old Doctor Cary would worry about that. He'd say, "Think of the poor people in the world who didn't get enough to eat." I reckon Alger did the first thinning operation that was done in a commercial way down South. I had a picture. They took I don't know how many pictures of us in about 1922 or '23. they come up on us - we had 20,000 acres of this Sullivan tract that had been creek logged and all the bald places had come up in long leaf pine just as thick as could be. And I had a dozen men I reckon out north of Flomaton about 10 or 15 miles and we were thinning that stuff. There was no market for it; you couldn't use it for anything. We just thinned it with axes. I started out by - and I believe - can say with some modesty that it was my idea - I would take a dozen men and go through and half thin it or a little better than half thin it and then the next year I would take on man that I had trained and five him two men. I didn't have a large crew, I just let him go through the woods in a hurry and it didn't create so much litter on the ground. I made a little talk to the Congress once and said we were going to have to approach this thing through the public schools. That's where you are guarantee [...?]. We burn the woods down here and always have done it and you are going to have to start with the children for us to grow out of it.

White: It was a long time before you had any success with fire control.

Jones: Yes. It took a long time. We tried a policy with the public. We drafted a hunting permit; we have anybody, white or black, that wanted one a hunting permit. But cut off 30,000 acres over here and wouldn't let them hunt on it. They thought we were fixing to rent hunting privileges and we had more opposition than a little when we first stopped them from hunting on that game preserve. Five years later we opened it to everybody. Anybody could go in there who wanted to - for 2 days. We just opened it for 2 days. And then we had the public solidly behind us. That preserve, I don't know just what they are doing with it now. A new concern owns it. They ran the mill on. They didn't cut all of it but they finished as far as they were going on the Michigan tract that belonged to the Michigan syndicate. It was a peculiarly owned proposition. You would own this forty and your wife would own that forty and me and somebody else would own this forty over here. I think it took some 40 or 50 names on the deed to record the ownerships together. They formed a syndicate. But they came out of there in 1923. we used to have our logging camps. You had to have a place for you men to live and we had logging camps in the woods and cooks. Men went out there on Monday morning or Sunday evening and stayed until the next Saturday evening. We had no wage and hours law but we never did run but 10 hours. All around us companies ran 11 hours and poked fun at us but we stuck to 10 hours until the labor law made us go to 8. The property I think was handled conservatively. I reckon I'm the first man that [...?]. Mr. Chapman of the University took pictures. Lightning would strike a tree and we would cut it down. We couldn't haul it and you couldn't eat it. We would harvest it and I later got to using it for cross ties.

We would cut it down and trim it up and pile the brush. Then we got a good market for crossties. I recollect one time there at the end of the year the boss saw an item of 2 or 3 thousand dollars for stumpage and crossties. I had sold the dead timber, you know, and salvaged every bit of it. But I got that dead tree out of there to keep down the bug damage. Mr. Chapman saw one of those trees trimmed up and it was a sight to him. He had never seen it. But we followed that. We got pretty near everybody on that - we finally got the turpentine men, to where that - and this last 2 or 3 years turpentineing we didn't let them burn the woods. They were very conscious of it. And we didn't have much fire. In these hunting permits we have out we restricted it. If they burned we wouldn't let them hunt any more. We preached conservation all along.

White: It was a policy of education?

Jones: Yes, of education. The permits we have out were restricted and if they burned we wouldn't let them hunt any the next year. We worked pretty close with the T. R. Miller Co. at Brewton and Mr. McMillan. They had policies that didn't always match but both were going for conservation. I think Miller did the first planting. I used to have the idea you had better take care - I told them at meetings that you had better take care of what God Almighty give you first. So that was the theory that I followed. But we got to where we got real cooperation from the neighbors before it was over with. Getting back to Dr. Cary, he would come in and go out in the woods and talk to the men. He attended all these forestry conferences. He would lead you along. He would give you a thought and let you think about it. Then maybe the next month he would come by and ask you what you thought of that suggestion. He didn't drive you at all. But as I say he would come down from above before he went down amongst the men. He was a useful man. He got over his opinions and his ideas and he just had a way of approaching people and getting his ideas over to them. Then he had a wonderful follow up on them. He had a little old book and he nearly wrote a book full a day. We would go out on a trip and he would write a lot. Then six months from then he would pull out that same little old book out and read what you had said then. Even after he resigned they hired him down at Gainesville where he died. Alger-Sullivan, T. R. Miller and W. T. Smith lumber companies hired him for 2 or 3 months a year just for 2 or 3 periods. I don't remember the exact dates. I could get it, it's all in the record. But he would go out to the camp and stay a week or two. I remember one time in particular while he was under that arrangement he had already retired from the government but he would come back and work with the people he thought well of. They paid him for it. Mr. Early - there's never been but one Mr. Earls - he died - he called me one day and said, "You know, Dr. Cary had an accident out here." He was out at the camp. He said, "He was walking up the track coming up to the camp here and he fell down and hit his head on a rail." I said, "Did it hurt him," and he said, "No, it never hurt him but it bent the rail." They all liked him. He was a likable old cuss. He stayed with these companies maybe a week at W. T. Smith and on down to T. R. Miller and stay 3 or 4 days and then on down with us maybe 10 days. He usually stayed only 2 or 3 days when he was with the government.

White: You used to go out with him when he went to the woods?

Jones: Oh, yes. In fact when we had a 250,000 acre tract to go over you could just make one circle in a day around through it and I usually was the chauffeur and Mr. Hauss and Dr. Cary and maybe Miss Gerry in the car with me.

White: Did Mr. Hauss go along too?

Jones: At first he had to go or else Dr. Cary wouldn't go. He felt if I ain't worth going with I ain't going. He was just that way. If you were not interested in him and if you didn't have time to go with him he didn't have time to bother going with nobody else. That was his theory. After he had worked with us for 10 years why he would get in the car with me and spend maybe all day today and work into the camp 80 miles from the mill and spend the night and then we would work back the next day. That's how I got to know him as well as I did.

White: Did you have sample plots laid out?

Jones: Yes. Back in the beginning, back in the early 20s, we took an acre of land up there and made 4 plots of it. We thinned one plot, good thinning. We partially thinned one plot. We left one plot unthinned. And we got records of all that stuff. Some plots were without fire lines around it. We let it burn. Some of it we annual burned and some of it we protected. We did a conscientious job and we tried to do a good job and I think we did.

White: Did the company ever have a policy of controlled burning?

Jones: No. We never did. We did in the turpentine operations for awhile. We controlled burned. We would only burn at night or we would just spot burn when it was so damp it wouldn't burn all over. We tried to keep down hot fires. We had to do a lot of missionary work with our men. This man, Earle, who was logging superintendent, if there was a rough place or a bad place to get to he would burn it off. He just had to get it done. But we finally converted him and got him to where he didn't want to burn. The company had a loyal crew.

White: A lot depended on whether the crew were careful and fire conscious?

Jones: Yes. If this crew were logging over here and they saw smoke over across that branch over yonder they - used to nobody every thought of going to it but we got them to where they would lay down their work and go ahead and put out the fire.

White: Were very many small operators in this neighborhood?

Jones: Yes, there were peckerwood mills, dozens of them. We never had a solid township anywhere. Those little fellows, some of them we bought out. We bought them if we could. I bought some 20 odd thousand acres just to get it. Before this conservation came in they would give you more for the timber on the land and save the taxes than they would for the land and timber. But in time land proved to be a valuable asset too.

White: These small sawmill operators and the natives were pretty hard to convince of the value of the extra effort you were putting into conservation, weren't they?

Jones: Oh, yes. But it's like - it's catching as the measles as far as that is concerned. A good farmer paints his house and so his neighbor paints his and it goes on. I remember one distinct time up close to Repton where that Sullivan division of the L & N Railroad was built up there, Sullivan, had a ditch log operation up there. They built that railroad up to Repton which now belongs to the L & N. They would take a pine 80 feet from end to end and they would get the best 50 feet of it and leave the balance right there. Well, we came in there and started logging, particularly for the Foshee mill in 1903 and we cut them down to here. Then we come back in there in 1928 and we cut them down here. We would put a man on each stump and take pictures of them.

White: Was Miss Gerry doing any work here? Was she down here when you were turpentineing?

Jones: Yes, she was down here when we were in the turpentine business. She knew more about what went on in a pine tree than anybody I ever saw. I've heard her make numbers of speeches. And I've seen her with her whole lap full of these chips they had cut off and she would analyze them, put them under a microscope. And she would take them back to Minnesota with her.

White: They made quite a team, didn't they, Dr. Cary and Miss Gerry?

Jones: Yes, they did. They worked together in harmony and what was of interest to him was of interest to her. I've heard her once or twice at conferences and there would be 50 businessmen there, 50 leaders in that kind of work, and she would make addresses about what goes on inside a pine tree. She knew it too.

White: Did Dr. Cary hold any small local meetings around here?

Jones: No, he didn't. I remember one conversation I had with him about a man that lived up in Butler County that was in the Civil War and came back out in there. He was a rather shrewd kind of a fellow who got a little money and loaned it to the farmer's for a mortgage on the place and he used to own a dozen little farms around in that country. He wouldn't sell you the timber on a certain 40 or a certain 80 but he would sell you a hundred off of it. They were selected. Dr. Cary was just as interested in that as he could be. That was right down his alley.

White: I certainly thank you, Mr. Jones.