AN INTERVIEW WITH

CHARLIE BONNER JONES

by

Peter MacDonald & Michael Clow

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Explanatory Notes to Accompany the
Interview of Charlie Bonner Jones
by
Peter MacDonald

When you saw the bobtail truck, you knew you were in the American Southeast. When you see the wheeled drive-to-tree feller-buncher, you know you are in the American Southeast. That is because these machines, given that they were and are peculiar to the Southeast, capture the essence of how its tree harvesting was and is organized. In much the same way, the figure of the wood dealer was at once pervasive in and unique to the Southeast.

With the expansion of pulp and paper mills in the South, the demand for pulpwood rapidly increased. As most of them were based in the North, they had little awareness of local conditions. Of these local conditions, one of singular importance was a pattern of land ownership characterized by a large number of relatively small holders. Another was an impoverished potential labour force lodged in a waning agricultural sector. Somehow all had to be articulated. The historical solution was the wood dealer.

Charlie Bonner Jones is a retired wood dealer who spent his working life in Georgia. This interview provides an historical window through which to observe and comprehend this vital function in the Southeastern wood supply system.

Typically wood dealers were well-known individuals of reputation in local areas. Because they knew and were trusted by small, local landowners, they were able to purchase stumpage. Because they knew many of the people in their area, they were able to facilitate the assembly of a labour force. Because they themselves were successful businessmen, they were able to provide financial assistance to their producers.

Northern mills contracted with local wood dealers to supply their pulpwood. Commonly they would assign to the wood dealer a monopoly over a given region. With this contract in hand, dealers would purchase stumpage and hire crews to harvest it, delivering it to wood yards often owned by these dealers. When delivered to the mill, the dealer would receive the contracted price from which he covered the costs incurred by the above activities.

Thus, the wood dealer functioned as a concentration and articulation point in the wood supply system. On the one side were numerous land owners and potential workers; on the other was the single mill. The wood dealer was the intermediary combining these dissimilar entities.

From the (Northern) mill's perspective, this way of organizing their wood procurement had the advantage of isolating them from a host of potential problems – from finicky landowners, from recalcitrant workers, from liability issues; in sum, from what in many ways amounted to them an "alien" culture. Moreover, it permitted them to displace the risk inherent in the tree harvesting enterprise onto the wood dealer. They simply and passively payed the contracted

price for the contracted volume of wood. And as the interview indicates, the flexibility needed to deal with fluctuations in the required volume was borne by the wood dealer.

This interview also contains useful information regarding the evolution of the historical wood dealer system. As Bonner Jones relates, some mills moved to a preferred or direct producer system which meant that the mills themselves assumed some of the dealer's functions. In some cases, the mills later required these producers to purchase stumpage as well. In other words, producers became their own wood dealers.

The wood supply system in the Southeast is, to the outsider at least, a confusing amalgam of wood dealers, direct producers, "floating" producers[1], and gate wood[2]. The task of comprehending the social organization of tree harvesting must include sorting out this supply system, realizing that historical modification has subjected the system to even more complexity. This interview is a good place from which to commence.

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[1]These are short term producers employed at the times when the volume of wood required increases.

[2]This is wood that is delivered to the gates of the mill. As there is no contract for it, the prevailing market price is paid.

Peter MacDonald (PM): Today is Saturday, 22 May 2004. This interview is with Charlie Bonner Jones, retired wood dealer and I'm Peter MacDonald, primary interviewer. With me is Michael Clow, and also Dale Greene, Professor of Forest Engineering at University of Georgia. So Bonner, I'd like to begin by just a little bit of biographical information so people will know a little bit about you, where you're from, how you got into the business, that sort of general thing.

Charlie Bonner Jones (CBJ): I'm Charlie Bonner Jones from Milledgeville, Georgia, one of the few foresters that you've ever met that had five job opportunities, never left home. I began my career with the forestry department in the state of Georgia in 1948 and from there I went with Jeffrey McKraft Lumber Company for about a year and a half here in central Georgia and stationed in Milledgeville. And after that I went with Dixie Wood, Incorporated, a pulpwood dealership, brokerage outfit, that was headquartered here in Milledgeville and I ran the western territory. My associate ran the eastern territory. I worked there until '63 when I went in business for myself and I have been in business for myself since 1963 in long wood production, short wood production, and consulting work.

PM: All right, maybe you could tell us a little bit about how the wood dealer system works, especially in Georgia.

CBJ: Well, so many people have always looked at you when you say you're a wood dealer, what in the world are you talking about. And really a wood dealer is a brokerage outfit that buys and sells wood. In the earlier days, these were done with territories, assigned territories, which you could not work outside of for the mill that you were assigned wood to. You had to stay within your own territory and it worked quite well in those days. You recognize that when I say those days, the '50s and '60s, that you were dealing with short wood and you were not dealing with the long wood that we know today and you don't find short wood anymore except in some rare cases. Short wood was produced, loaded by hand, unloaded by hand and shipped on railcars to the mill or either hauled directly to the mill. We were rail dealers and we shipped, our territory ranged from Washington, Georgia down through Sparta, through Milledgeville, up to Jackson, Georgia, Jonesboro to Atlanta, and back down through Monroe to Greene County. And we had a large area to cover but particular the number of men that we had working. Those were the old days when the roads were narrow and cars didn't run as fast. I think on Fridays when I would pay off the people, I would drive three hundred, about three hundred and fifty to four hundred miles every Friday to pick up bills of lading and pay the people off. To talk just a little bit about, we were saying hand loaded and it stayed hand loaded for a long, long time, but they loaded them on short trucks, bobtail trucks, as we call them, and they would go to the railroad and unload them. And then along about 1956, as I recall, we opened our first mechanical unloading yard, a wood yard as they are called, and we began very quickly to locate them throughout our whole territory until at one point we had eleven wood yards operating. Our greatest drawback in those days was the fact that we couldn't get service by the railroad. And I pulled out one of my old pictures just to show you what transportation does to production.

PM: You spoke a moment about being assigned areas.

CBJ: I'm sorry, say it again.

PM: Being assigned particular areas, how did that work?

CBJ: Yes we had, well, you know, our friend down in Irwinton, the next town below us, had that territory and I was to stay out of Wilkinerson County unless I could bring it back to Milledgeville to load it. And he

was to stay out of Baldwin County. He had Washington County also and they were assigned territories put on a map and that's the area you would work in and it worked quite well.

PM: Who assigned them?

CBJ: The person, the mill that you were buying, selling to and they would tell you where you could work. And, of course, you know they had all the marbles and if you wanted to play you had to play like they wanted you to play. A lot of people had a lot of mills that they supplied wood to so they could mix it up some. We elected to stay with Union Camp all the time that I was with Dixie Wood, which I think in hindsight, was a bad decision on our part. When they got ready to cut us back they cut us from eight thousand cords of wood a week to four hundred and sixty and you can't survive very well on that.

PM: No, I shouldn't think so.

CBJ: That was when I left the company and shortly after that, economic conditions changed a little and they began to let people in this area ship again. They had the mistaken opinion that they could run that mill on wood that didn't cost but five dollars and a quarter a cord to get there, freight. Of course, that's ridiculous. The last carload of wood I shipped to Union Camp I think the freight was something like thirty-nine dollars a cord. Used to freight and stumpage stayed just like that but after a period of time freight began to outrun stumpage. And, of course, in today's market it's no comparison anymore. To talk about a little about short wood production and equipment and stuff that we've used through the years, when I first started working with Dixie Wood most of the wood, all the wood that I bought was cut with Sandvik bow saws by hand. And I carried Sandvik bow saws in the trunk of my car everywhere I went where people could get new saw blades when they needed them. To my recollection, chainsaws were really not a thing that you wanted in 1952. The ones that I remember, the old Mercury was a two man saw that killed both of them on both ends. [laughing] And then McCulloch, McCulloch as all chainsaw people do, but McCulloch came out with a model forty nine sometime during '52 or maybe it was early '53, and people began to buy them quite rapidly and it was a really good saw and they occupied the market. Poulan didn't do anything in those days and one of the other ones, I don't remember, huh?

PM: Homelite?

CBJ: Homelite, Homelite was just coming on the market and it was a little bit later on really. But then they began to use the chainsaw and as the chainsaw people do, fifty nine, forty nine was a good model number I think so they reinvented it and it wasn't worth a tinkers toot after that, if you know what a tinkers toot is. But it, '56 as I indicated, was when we started to mechanically unloading the wood at yard sites that we had built and the favorite machine that we all used then was Hyster machine. And you're familiar with the Taylor Company out in Mississippi and Taylor came on the market a little later with an extremely good machine. In fact, when I went in business for myself the only thing I bought was Taylor. I didn't buy any Hyster. They had what they called a pulpwood dream but it took an MIT graduate to run it and I never did like the pulpwood dream. The short wood business really boomed during the '60s and the latter part of the '60s long wood became somewhat of a viable entity and the mills began to redo their wood yards to where they could accept long wood into the mill. I'll never forget, the Georgia Kraft came to me when we started to loading a little wood and take it over there and wanted me to change our, you dumped it in those days. The machines didn't pick it all up at one time and wanted me to change ours to where that we could dump it off the left hand side of the truck instead of the right hand side of the truck. I thought about it a minute, I looked up at him, I said what you want us to do as I understand it is to where this load can be dumped to the left in case we have a malfunction of the mechanism that keeps it on there and it dumps it while we're going down the road, you want to dump it into the traffic instead of

into the ditch. That ended that. That's as far as we ever got with it. And we began to look at the possibility of doing logging and to go back and talk about my experience in logging a little bit, in sawtimber production but 1948 or '49 I took a survey of all the circular mills in the sixth district in Georgia for the forestry department. During World War II the lumber that was produced was produced with circular mills, little portable mills that were erected in the field and on a good week you might get forty thousand feet of lumber produced, on a good week. And we didn't have any big mills, stationary mills, maybe one or two somewhere around but in the '50s and early '60s they began to abandon the little portable mill in favor of logging and taking it direct into a stationary mill. Obviously the many advantages of that is the better produced lumber and the better yield that you will get out of a log through a more efficient operation. Today it was going through my mind, today I was trying to think of the private owned mills in the state and you've probably discussed this with them but when you get up, the one up in Thomaston, there's one in Thomaston. There's one in Perry and one over in Preston and Sullivan down at Colquitt or wherever they are down there and Thompson down at [Ailey?] and that's about all of the private mills in the whole state of Georgia. They have gone, the original stationary mills had capacities in the neighborhood of a hundred thousand feet a week and as you come on line with the newer mills, that hundred thousand has gone up to two hundred thousand, two hundred and fifty thousand and things of this nature with better production. My understanding of the present situation that this Tolleson down in Perry is probably the best mill in the whole state of Georgia and they are producing a thousand board feet of lumber on about 4.6, 4.7 tons of raw material. Everybody else is somewhere in the neighborhood of 5 ½ and this obviously give you a little bit better shot at it when you're bidding on timber. Georgia Pacific became an entity here in 1970 and at that time the people I used to work with came to me with a proposition that we set up a new company, which we did, Hattaway and Jones, Jones and Hattaway, and we started producing long material, select peeler logs for Georgia Pacific in Monticello. and doing that. And I see now that there's a move that they want you to go back to cutting up again and round and round we go. The forestry profession has always known where they were going because you look at where they'd been and tell that they didn't know where in the world they were going to begin with. It just works that way.

PM: You said a few moments ago that you developed your own loading yards? Your own loading yards?

Michael Clow (MC): Yards, your own wood yards.

CBJ: Yeah, we had eleven wood yards at one time with Dixie Wood and when I left Dixie Wood we had acquired the western territory, which consisted of Bradley and Jackson and Meldrim and I think that my ex boss thought that I was going to move over there and run those but I didn't. I wanted to stay in Milledgeville and I opened a yard in Milledgeville. And these yards would produce anywhere from, which seems so silly this day in time when a small logger's three hundred cords a week, but at small wood yards if you got three hundred cords of wood a week you had a pretty good operation. Of course, you've got to get everything in perspective as you go through this thing, perspective meaning what inflation has done to everything. We forget so much about how things change, what inflation has done, and when pulpwood was bringing back in the '60s, the early '60s, actually when I started to work in the pulpwood business, a cord of wood was three dollars and freight was three dollars and seventeen cents and they stayed right with each other, as I indicated before. But if you take and add your inflation of about twelve dollars to it, twelve times the three that means it ought to be bringing thirty-six dollars. Fact, it's bringing twelve dollars and getting worse, getting worse. I beat my little drum about the fact that the federal government has allowed industry to buy up industry to buy up industry, that we don't have any competition anymore. Savannah River Basin between what you have to go going here to North Carolina you have to go through it and it's not but one person that you can ship to out of there. And when they bought out Champion the price of wood went from thirty-five dollars to fifteen the next day and if you

had contracts you were in trouble.

PM: So you or a wood dealer would be responsible for the cost of developing these loading yards? You'd be responsible for the cost of constructing and operating the loading yards?

CBJ: What we usually did with the wood yards, we built them and found out we could do a better job than Union Camp's engineers and built them and then after we got them built we'd call them up there and say all right, now we'll sell it to you. And we would sell it to them and then we would run it. And that's what we did with every one that we had. In fact, we built three and their field personnel, none of them knew we were working on them. And it was because we wanted to do it our way, you know. But we would build them. We would staff them, and sell the wood to them. It's much more beneficial to the dealer if they will staff it and if they will pay you for what you haul across their scale or across their stick. Then you are through with the railroad. One of the biggest losses I would have every year would be minimum freight charges when you couldn't load it but so much and then it wouldn't be enough to cover the minimum freight you know. And that was a big item. In fact, we fought, I fought along with my partner, the public service commission. We went before them five times and we won five times and we still lost because the mill gave way to them. But we beat them five times in Atlanta. You can't say that a carload of pulpwood can haul as much pulpwood as it can water. Just ain't no way that you can do it. And that was what the problem was. They were doing it on a cubic foot capacity of the thing and you're going have the air space there no matter what you do. You're going to have that air space. Sometime in, talking about equipment though, but sometime I bought a knuckle boom loader in about '67 or '68, never had seen one before and I was going to use it to load on areas that I didn't have a Hyster where I could put in. We'd go there and load it. It worked real well but then we started to using it to load long wood with and they hadn't really come out. The first one, long one thing, they invited us to a meeting up in Athens at there at the school of forest where they were cutting some timber and they were using the whole tree thing and it was quite impressive the first time I ever saw it. That's been really a godsend to the logger and now you go on a log deck now and you don't even find a saw. But if he is sawing with anything he's dressed like he's going to Mars or something you know. It's the only way the insurance company will let you operate. Insurance has always been one of the big expenses in our business. In the short wood business we were in, we had a mod factor of something like fifty-six and we were put on assigned risk and we went from fifty-six up to a hundred and ninety. We were having to pay two times what the premium was and nothing we could do about it. But that's what hurt little wood, short wood so bad was the excessive insurance cost. But when you didn't have any injuries, you know. We didn't kill people every other day and differing from some, got a lot of little cuts but we didn't kill people.

PM: So the wood dealer then bore a lot of the risk?

CBJ: Yes.

PM: Instead of the company.

CBJ: The mills never bore anything. It was all, the dealer had to be adequately insured and his personnel was insured. His producers were automatically insured through the policy that we carried, where their people would be covered in case they were hurt. But the mills never, in fact, if you evaluate the attitude of the mills, they got air so fine, they got everything else, got all of these kinds of things. But when it gets down to the guts of the thing, the person that they've made pick up the freight, environmental and health thing, it's always been the logger. He has to do the whole cotton pickin yard. You agree with that, Dale?

Dale Greene (DG): I do.

PM: So basically it was a system where the company would pay so much per cord delivered to the area?

CBJ: That's it and you had to take.

PM: You had to do as best you could.

CBJ: Do the best you could under that.

PM: And that included wood yards?

CBJ: Included your wood yard, your insurance, and everything about it. They would provide you some silvicultural help that didn't cost you anything and they'd provide you paint that didn't cost you anything. But that was sort of insignificant items you know but I appreciated them anyway. All mills are not the same and I will say this about Union Camp. They were as good a steward and as good a people to operate with as I've ever been around. They ran an exceptionally good company that's gone to hell now. You'll probably have to delete that. [laughter]

PM: So a dealer, where would you get loggers, you know, to meet the contracts that you had with the companies?

CBJ: What we did, we didn't use a lot of loggers. Two to three is about all we ever used. We had to produce about a thousand, fifteen hundred cords of wood a week and usually around a thousand, twelve hundred cords of big material a week and this required two to three loggers and most of our loggers stayed with us all the time. We didn't go out looking for new ones or what have you. In the twenty years that we were in the business together we had three main loggers that stayed with us. And one of them, son got killed and she quit and another one took up and went about ten years and his health got bad and he quit and then we picked up a third one. When the contract between Union Camp and Georgia Pacific terminated, then we terminated our long wood situation. My partner was old and I wasn't young either.

PM: And the logging system, this would sort pulpwood?

CBJ: No, we never did any long pulpwood. In 1970 when we went together we continued our short wood coming into the yard. But we did not do any long wood to a mill. Shortly after that, long wood goes to a mill or it goes to a chipper, one or the other, and we did not do any long wood logging at all because we had the ability to use a short man in there. We wouldn't do any long wood, pulp wooding at all. One of the greatest silvicultural tools that we've lost and Dr. Greene will agree with this is that bbbtail truck that used to do the preharvesting thinning and also the utilization of log yards after a logger has been through. We used to go and they'd be clean as a whistle when you got through with them. Now it's a big pile of trash out there. It's sad to have seen them leave the market but they're gone for sure.

PM: But they were really important back then?

CBJ: They were very, that's why, Union Camp in the '50s ran their whole operation on short wood. And one of the things that you see in that picture that I showed you, we used to control the flow into the mill in bad times, good times, in any other times because we carried a lot of stored wood on the yard. And the day that they put in scales, bip, that was the day we quit storing wood. Because you can't store it and ship it down there and let them weigh it when it's been sitting on the ground for a month or two, you know. You lose fifteen or twenty percent on what you paid for. In fact, I've made a lot of studies on

weights of wood and I have yet to figure out how it's fair to anybody except the mill. And you can't, if you've grown as old as I have utilizing cubic feet and what have you and board feet and all these all these years and you try to get some relationship between it and weight, it will drive you crazy. The better your timber gets, the more you get taken advantage of. And anybody that hasn't ever looked at that side of it is just barking at the moon. It just works that way. I've cut some timber that actually averaged out five, five and a half tons per thousand board feet. Obviously if I'm being paid by the ton I'm getting a lot more money for that twelve or fourteen inch stuff than I am for the eighteen and twenty inch stuff. While we all got to live with it I still say it's not the fairest way to buy wood. Same thing with pulpwood, say 5.350 pounds per cord of wood. Forty-six hundred pounds is about a cord of wood. That's about what it really weighs. And the stuff that they're taking in the mills now if you go over to Riverwood and watch what's coming in, it's so small that it's probably, it's closer to forty-two to forty-three hundred pounds to a cord, to a cubic cord. That size makes a tremendous, original tables were built on mill run including sawtimber and pulpwood because it was coming off the company land and they wanted fiber and they weren't worried about anything else. In those days it wasn't that much difference between everything, you know. And sawtimber wasn't bringing four hundred dollars a thousand. It's sort of like this land today with paper companies. They're selling off. They were buying it for twenty and now they can sell it for twenty thousand, you know what they're going to do with it. It doesn't take a rocket scientist to figure that one out.

PM: So the primary harvesting system then was with the bob tail truck? The primary harvesting system that was used for short wood was with the bob tail truck going to the stump?

CBJ: Yes, the bob tail truck. I was slow to respond to you because I failed to mention something that did come about. Long about 1964 a smart individual over in Harlem, Georgia developed the idea of using what they call a Bobcat, a little bitty short machine. And they built a grapple to go on the front of it. Actually they built the grapple, not the people that do Bobcats. And then you could take that in the woods and you'd just pile your piles of wood in a little triangle and that Bobcat would go and pick it up and put it on the truck. And that was the first thing and about the only thing in the way of loading wood in the woods that was ever invented that benefited the short wood producer. And most all of my...

PM: You were talking about the Bobcat.

CBJ: Yeah, the Bobcat loader or Uniloader, whichever one you had, but I subsidized for my producers. I would pay part of it and they would pay part of it if they would mechanize their woods that way and they did. And it was certainly a godsend to our ability to load, to keep the truck on more accessible areas and let the bobcat run back and forth and bring the wood. And it's rather interesting if you've never seen anybody run one that can really run one. It becomes an extension of their body and it just amazes you what they can do with it. It is really fascinating to me. I notice now that even Caterpillar's making one of them. [laughing] The last one to get into it but now Caterpillar's making one.

DG: What about big stick loaders? Did you have those on most of your trucks?

CBJ: Big stick loaders, we had them on a few. On my major ones I tried to put them with a Bobcat and just the little half ones usually got their own big stick loader. Big stick loader is a lot of work. It may seem like it isn't but it's a lot of work.

DG: You got to pull that cable.

CBJ: Yeah, you've got to pull a cable out, hook it up, pull it back, get it up, push it around. And the little

old bobcat he'd run it, he would load a truck so much faster than a big stick loader. But a big stick loader beat blue steel muscles. Do you know what blue steel muscles are? I have an African American producer that I just loved him like my daddy almost and I was talking to him one day and it was hot as all get out and he was just out there going like a big wind and he looked up at me and said Mr. Jones, he said today like today, said it takes blue steel muscles to be out here. [laughing] He's also the same one that told me, I'll digress a moment. He wanted to move off a tract I had him cutting down around Linton. You know where Linton is. That's tick capital of the world and he said I just can't stand it. Said we'll have to go back after frost. And I said all right, we'll do that. He said you know, Mr. Jones, says I can't see 'em on me like you can. [laughter] He was a good producer though. Did what you told him. Did what you told him.

PM: How long would the crews work? I mean would it be a year round operation?

CBJ: Well, we worked with the exception of the rainy days, which we used to have periodically. We don't have them anymore but we worked year round, year round. In the Jackson area up there as I reflected on it many times we ran really about a three day week because it would rain two days a week. Not in the summertime necessarily but we used to have a lot of rain that we don't have now, which is one thing affecting our ability to produce timber today. Everybody's on quota now and six weeks ago everybody was needing wood and your ability to produce it because of the weather is so good now and because of the equipment, all them the big skidders, the high flotation ties, grapples, and everything, it just enables you to do a better job out there when the weather is inclement.

PM: So what would happen then, when the amount or the volume that the mill wanted would decline?

CBJ: You would not buy as many groceries. [laughter] What you saw in that picture with all that stored wood, probably the railroad was part of it but more than likely we continued to buy and we would carry an inventory on our yards hoping one day they were going to need it. And every so often because they didn't need it we would have to switch it. We'd have to pick it up and put it back down and wear it out, is what we used to say. And we stayed on quota at least six months out of the year. He's done an article on this. You need to read that article.

DG: I'll get him a copy of that.

CBJ: Yeah. I don't know as I can quote exactly the percentages but I believe you summed it up somewhere that we were running on about sixty or sixty-five percent of our capacity was as good as we could ever attain because we couldn't sell it. That's always been the big problem with independent dealers that you can't sell it. Some mills like Georgia Kradt that cuts so much wood on their own company land, control their people that work for them, work more days per year than independent dealers did. But they can't have but just so many of them then that fills them up, you know. I was not one of them.

PM: So did some mills use just wood dealers or if you go back far enough did everyone just use wood dealers and that changed over time?

CBJ: That changed over time. Dale, you correct me if I'm wrong, what happened after Georgia Pacific came in, not using a dealer system excited some of the others to say we're going to do it like that too. And then they began to go away from the dealer system and the dealers continued to survive one way or another. We were fortunate, as I have indicated. We had a contract with Union Camp for a long time to put in raw material and they in turn got chips for it. So it was a little different operation from the normal dealer. But now there's a strong move going back to the dealer. One of the reasons for dealers in the very beginning, it gave the mills an arm reach between them and the public and it gave them someone to

be out there to absorb the liability of the problems and keep them out of it. That was one of the main things in the very beginning on why dealers ever existed. The real fact of the matter is that a dealer could always produce wood twenty- five percent cheaper in the same area than the mill could. We didn't have a checkbook that was big enough to do what they wanted to do you know.

PM: How would you do that or how would a wood dealer do that twenty-five percent cheaper?

CBJ: One of the reasons that we could do it cheaper is that we were known in all of the communities and we could buy it cheaper. It didn't take as much labor to get out there and look for it and to do it and as a general rule, we would be able to buy per thousand or per cord, wood cheaper than what the mill would pay for it. I don't know how much experience you've ever had watching mill personnel buy things.

PM: None at all.

CBJ: But they are under pressure to buy and if you give them an empty checkbook they will, or rather a full checkbook, they'll pay whatever it is to take to get it without any rhyme or reason. I'll tell you, the world's on that used to be Brunswick Pulp. If Brunswick Pulp came out to look at a tract of timber you were looking at when we were working down in south Georgia, we got in the truck and went on. Wasn't any need in being there because they could buy it and we couldn't.

PM: So a wood dealer would have to have this kind of knowledge of the area, the people, and so on.

CBJ: Let me tell you a story that everybody never heard. You know the industry was attracted to the south by the abundance of sawtimber material that was here in the '70s and what have you. How did the stuff get here? It got here through the sivilcultural practices that wood dealers had acquired for landowners land. The reason we did this, people didn't want to clearcut for pulpwood. So we had to figure out some way to encourage them to sell us some wood and we did that through selecting from beneath the undesirable trees and things of this nature on a very conscientious manner, not just our company but every other wood dealer that was around did the same service. They had foresters. They had technicians to do the work. Many is the year we would cut seventy- five, eighty, eighty-five thousand cords of wood that was all hand marked with a gun. You take that and do it over a twenty-year period, you have produced some good sawtimber, and this is where the big volume of sawtimber came from that attracted industry back into the south in the '70s. That's my explanation for it and I think it's very reliable and very accurate.

PM: It sounds like a real risky enterprise to me.

CBJ: Well, you never did make much money on shipping the wood. But occasionally you'd make some good buys on land and timber and things of this nature and that was where you, you know, you can't even comprehend what I'm going to tell you. But we were professional people in the business and between here and Sparta, you didn't come that way, there's a nine hundred acre tract that we spent two hours talking Georgia Kraft into taking and paying us twenty dollars an acre for it. They didn't want to pay but eighteen. We sold them fifteen hundred acres out of Stephens up there, fifteen dollars an acre. Sure did and you can't even conceive that now. But nobody wanted land. I mean land was out there. I bought two tracts one week and I cleared the land and all the pulpwood on it, which was about between three and four hundred carloads of pulpwood, paying the man, they were both timber people, paying them what they wanted per acre for the land, which was fifty dollars an acre. I don't know why they didn't know more about what they were doing than they did but they didn't and I don't feel that I took advantage of them because I paid what they told me they wanted for it in the very beginning. In those

days, land just was not much worth, sort of different today.

DG: There's a lot of people that had land that had been farmed and had trees on it and they couldn't afford to pay the taxes.

CBJ: That's true.

DG: They were fairly cash poor and they couldn't afford the tax overhead of continuing to pay annual property tax. And if they moved to Atlanta or Augusta or somewhere and no longer lived on the land, you know, that was what the previous generation had done. They didn't see the point in it and they didn't have the cash to keep it and a lot of times they'd sell it just to get rid of it.

CBJ: When I began in 1948 while it was classified as forestland, I wouldn't be surprised if forty percent of the acreage in this area of Georgia was in what we call broomsedge fields. They were burned over nearly every year and we began with our forest fire protection when I was with the forestry department. When I began we had pickup trucks with water hoses and two hundred gallon tanks, something like that, which do absolutely nothing. Finally got a jeep with a hydraulic plow on it in '49 and that was a pretty good little firefighting machine. But anyway, when we got adequate fire protection and got people educated to the fact you don't burn every year. If you just quit burning that you'll have a timber crop back. And I have to say this, the good Lord knew who he had when he looked at the citizens of the state of Georgia and said they've got to have some help and in so doing He gave us the long leaf and the slash and the loblolly and the short leaf pine because it isn't much we can do to mess it up to keep them from regenerating and growing another crop, in spite of ourselves. He also gave us a sweetgum too. But here again, we can't fuss too much about that when sweetgum is bringing more than pine now, can we? It's a strange world that we live in, strange world.

PM: What is sweetgum?

DG: It's a fast growing hardwood. One right outside the door there.

CBJ: Yeah, right over here, all of those sticky balls on the ground. This is a right nice little tract of timber that I live in the midst of. It really shows you what land here can do. But sweetgum is very, very prolific and how in the world it can get from here to there and everywhere is hard for me to understand because it doesn't have any wings on the seed to speak of.

PM: So at least earlier anyway...

CBJ: Huh?

PM: Earlier historically the companies depended quite a lot on wood dealers for their supply?

CBJ: That was the only way wood was produced early on. And it was the newer mills that came aboard later on. Well, Georgia Kraft had dealers had everywhere in the beginning but when Georgia Pacific came in they did away with the dealer system. What we call direct had their producers hauling direct. In fact, the ones in this area over here were all working for me hauling to Georgia Kraft and then one day they put them on their payroll, paying them more than they were paying me to get it over there. That's the truth. They paid to produce and more to haul the wood that he was already hauling to them than they were paying me to get the thing over there. Of course, they got the best producers. They had all the best producers in central Georgia.

PM: This is Georgia Pacific?

CBJ: No, this is Georgia Kraft over in Macon. What's their name now? It was Riverwood. It was something else before Riverwood and now it's Matrix or something like that. No, it's something to do with, they've got a new name, a new owner. [Graphic Packaging]

DG: I'm behind the curve on it.

CBJ: I am too. He was setting across the table from me at the board meeting the other day and I leaned over and I said who in the world is that company. That's Riverwood. Can't keep up with them they've been changing so fast, which is good and bad. Everything is good and bad anyway.

PM: Why did they move away from wood dealers?

CBJ: Thinking that they could produce it. Did I hear that you were a psychologist?

PM: Sociologist.

CBJ: Sociologist?

PM: The same sort of thing.

CBJ: Same sort of thing. Well, you know in that particular line of work you recognize how people perceive other people. You recognize that, gollee, man, he's making it! Look at what he's driving around in. Look at that boat he's got. We got to get in. And one of the problems between dealers has been the personnel working for the mills that had a certain amount of envy because they saw us as all getting rich as all get out. So they said we're going to do this for the mill. It didn't work out that way. Just didn't work out that way. Fair analysis?

DG: I think so. I think they also thought there needed to be a different structure in the business as mechanization came along. It was no longer a very low capital, very unskilled producer that needed a lot of the services of the wood dealer in their idea and to some extent they were right. A lot of the producers if they were buying their own equipment they didn't need, many of them didn't need as many of the services from a wood dealer as the short wood producers might have. But many dealers also adapted to that change in industry structure and worked very well with their producers. And what you found as the shortcoming of the direct system, which I think has led to an evolution back towards the dealer system, similar to what Bonner suggested a minute ago, is that when they started asking these direct producers to also buy their own timber, when they weren't just cutting timber that the company had bought or the company had on the land, they said okay, go procure some of your own wood. Often times, that was not something that the logging contractor was prepared to do. He was good at running men and equipment and logging but he was not good at procuring and buying timber competitively. So some of them responded to that by hiring a forester. So essentially their company ends up again looking very much like the wood dealership they evolved from.

CBJ: That's exactly right.

DG: They're back to having logging and forestry expertise in the company.

CBJ: That's exactly right. The producer per se has never been in position to buy his own timber because that's a fulltime job, a fulltime job and the more competition you've got, the longer it takes to buy it and to keep it going.

DG: It's a lot of capital risk there too. You're playing a timber market and if you buy timber in a strong market and then end up having to sell it, the mills in a weak market, you know, you've got market risk there. Buffer some of that with contracts from the mills but that's got to be negotiated. It's a whole nother business. It's not just an extension of logging. It's really a different business.

CBJ: That's for sure. In our short wood dealership, we had to provide the people with silvicultural knowledge as to how to manage private landowners' land. You had to build a good reputation. If you didn't you couldn't buy wood. You had to be honest and a lot of people don't think people are honest but basically I've found that most of them are pretty decent sort of folks and the ones that aren't, aren't going to take up with you if you demand that anyway. And there are some that will not come on a tract of land I'm involved with. You just can't bring him on here. I don't want him. But most of them I can trust and I believe in what they do.

PM: You would spend most of your time acquiring timber rights of land?

CBJ: My job when I was working for the dealer was to service the producer. Servicing the producer would be providing timber and other needs that he needed. And I would have to be looking for timber all the time. When I wasn't looking for timber I was marking timber. But I may go mark all morning somewhere and go cruise all afternoon somewhere. I developed a system of cruising that sort of paralleled marking that I used tally counters to do with and I didn't go to the trouble of line plot and all this kind of stuff because I was in a hurry and I needed to get it done and that tally counting system was extremely accurate and it worked quite well for my needs. We wouldn't be cruising a thousand acres, you know. Here's this man got forty acres out here he wants to sell. This man's got a hundred acres he wants to sell and I can go out there and be done with it. Ya'll don't know it but he knows that I'd rather for you to ask me to cruise four hundred acres than to cruise a hundred acres because I've got about as much work on that hundred acres as I do on the four hundred acres to get the systematic sampling. You can get the sampling on the big one but you've just got to double up, triple up on the small one to do the same thing, certainly do.

PM: So the actual logging processes you left to the producers more or less?

CBJ: That was to him. I would put him on the tract. I 'd tell him how I wanted it cut, where I wanted him, how to get through it and all these kinds of things. In fact, today I mean you've got to pick your log decks and your roads and all these kinds of things. Actually, Bobcat loaders and the short trucks they just didn't make much mess in the woods. I mean you would hardly even know they were out there. In the beginning when I worked for the lumber company we didn't have skidders at all. We used Farmall tractors and John Deere tractors, farm tractors, that had been equipped to do logging with and they used logging carts. A logging cart is a metal device with wheels on it that you could back over the logs, put a cable under them and pull one end up, not both ends up and take them to the loading deck. And these logs at that time when I was with the sawmill people, all of them were powered with mules or either horses, one or the other. All of the cut down was done with crosscut saws. And one of the biggest things we had to do in those days was make people bend over because you know, if you cut it off up here you've left fifteen percent of the volume in that stump down here. And that was the thing that we had to constantly work on is to keep the stump low and also to keep your, make sure that the mill was set up correctly and that you were sawing square lumber and not crooked lumber. We couldn't make chips in

those days. That was one of the funny things that developed back in those days. Union Camp got the bright idea of buying slabs. Did you ever run across any information on that? They had a process and a big barn that they put them in down there at the mill and they would buy slabs. People were hauling slabs to Centerville and then they were shipped by rail on down to Savannah and they' put them in this barn.

DG: I wanted to ask you sort of a follow up if I could. You mentioned how weather used to shut you down about two days a week and you just now mentioned that the short wood system left the woods with less impact. Are those two linked a little bit? A lot of things that I've read also suggests that the short wood system couldn't go to the woods a lot of the days that we take skidders now.

CBJ: Oh, yeah.

DG: So we just, those two days a week that we didn't log were days that we're out there now with skidders and equipment that can keep working but they're having more site impact.

CBJ: Yeah.

DG: Had high ground pressure under it, a loaded truck in the woods and if you got an inch of rain you didn't work the next day. You let it dry out and now you go and work.

CBJ: That's exactly right. I was asked to serve on a committee back in the '60s and the charge to the committee was to determine what was wrong with the image of forestry in the state of Georgia, particularly a response to some logging that had been done on federal government's land. And it took me about five minutes to tell them. I said what the problem with forestry today and the image that we're going to have to overcome is rubber tired skidders because in the beginning, if it was in front of them, they ran over it. It didn't matter how big it was. If they could get over it they were going to run over it. And it looked like a tornado everywhere they cut and people had not been exposed. You know we had been cutting the same places all these years and they hadn't paid a bit of attention to it until the rubber tired skidder came along. Then it took fifteen years, fifteen years to try to train people how to run rubber tired skidders.

DG: Just because you can knock it down doesn't mean you should knock it down.

CBJ: And you know the other parallel to this is trying in working, I've done an awful lot of work in weights and measures and trucking trying to convince a logger that he will come out better in his pocketbook in the long run if he'll haul loads under eighty thousand than he will hauling them over eighty thousand. Canada is an extreme good example of what can happen to your roads. I drove to Montreal and on up to Quebec City a few years ago and you know you're trying to figure out where in the hell, will you drive on this side of these ruts or on this side of the ruts. But you can actually see the truck tracks going right down the road. The short trucks couldn't go when it was wet. It's just that damn simple. They couldn't go and then again we were pulling forty thousand pounds and they're pulling eighty thousand pounds. If a guy hauls under eighty, eighty or under, the wear and tear on his equipment is so much less than what it is when you've got ninety thousand pounds. That's the story and you're not familiar with it but Georgia Kraft over in Macon had a boy named Jack Cox, lived out here at the forks, and anyplace Jack logged you could follow where he'd torn the road up without any problem and pulled on the scales over in Macon one day and they tripped them to weigh them, it broke the scales and the scales were equipped to weight a hundred and twenty thousand pounds.

PM: So he had more than one twenty thousand.

CBJ: He had more than one twenty on it. He actually broke the scales down.

DG: That's another reason. The weather ability of that system also explains some of the inventory they'd carry. They'd carry that inventory to keep feeding the mill. And if you've got a tropical storm or just a real rainy front, you might lose two weeks sometimes.

CBJ: That's right, absolutely.

DG: So that inventory kept the mill. Today we've got all weather logging so we carry very low inventory. It's less than a week in our recent study, weeks worth of running. Most paper mills carry it. But it forces us to go to the woods on, this is something that we're struggling with now with trying to log more, in ways that are more environmentally acceptable or aesthetically pleasing, may be more accurate to say. You know, we're forced to go to the woods on days that we might rather not but the system is designed with minimal inventory. So you know we've got better roads. There's no way we could truck those volumes of wood in those days before the interstates. There are all sorts of things that go into explaining those changes.

CBJ: A lot of the roads, all the roads...

DG: The county roads weren't paved.

CBJ: Yeah, they weren't paved. That road right there that you see by that wood yard, that's Highway 41, which was replaced by Interstate 75 and that thing used to carry, you can't...

PM: Do you have any idea what inventory would be in a Canadian mill?

DG: Canadian mills and northern U.S. mills where you have winter breakup issues to deal with...

PM: They must figure them for sure.

DG: Yeah, they'll have a bigger inventory going to get through their mud seasons, the fall before it freezes good and then they'll pile it up in the winter. And they log all their swamps and wet areas in the winter because it's frozen. We don't have that advantage here.

CBJ: I came through Maine up there and I said gollee Moses, this would have driven me crazy, all the stumps out there were that high. And finally the light bulb came on and I say they cut these damn things in the wintertime. That was where the snow was [laughter], where the snow was. We don't slow down much for weather now, not as much as we should. In addition to, used to be you sat out there on the stool of the skidder, I mean on the seat of the skidder and weather bothered you. But now everything's covered, air conditioned and everything else, enclosed cab and what have you, and a whole different ball game.

DG: We also get a whole lot more production. You talk to loggers today and they'll tell you that by going to enclosed cabs their production in the summertime is probably a third higher. After lunch you didn't get a whole lot done. You'll quit. Even running the machine, I mean it was hot. You'd been in there five or six hours by lunchtime and a lot of them now can work right up to four-thirty, five o'clock in the summertime and guy goes home and still has enough energy to play with his kids or work in the garden. You know, a

lot of them would knock off, work half a day in the summertime. Of course, the days were long. They'd knock off early afternoon. The guys were just spent.

CBJ: Yeah. Of course, they went to work early.

DG: Well, they were there when the sun came up.

CBJ: They were there at the very beginning of the day.

PM: Are we ready to go again?

MC: Yeah, it's on.

PM: Okay. I'm a little bit confused. Short wood and long wood systems were separate systems?

CBJ: Let me explain them to you.

PM: Yeah, okay.

CBJ: Short wood system, you cut the tree down. You cut it up in pieces right there in the woods.

PM: Right.

CBJ: Okay, and then you've got to load that onto a Bobcat or what have you and get it on to your truck.

PM: Right.

CBJ: Today with the feller buncher he comes along and he cuts this one, he carries it to the next one, he cuts that one and carries it to the next one, he cuts that and lays those down. Same thing, he puts those down then the knuckle booms, knuckle boom, that ain't right.

DG: Grapple.

CBJ: Grapple skidder will pick it up and take it to the loading point. That's long wood. And it would be loaded on. It will go through a de-limber, go through a de-limber and then it would be put on the truck. Knock off the back end of it. That was one of the things that I pushed for a long time in GFA [Georgia Forestry Association]. I said you're not losing that much volume to cut it off to an inch and a half or two inches at the back. But the aesthetic look of that truck going down the road with a clean backend versus one with a ragged backend is traumatic on the public. And it is.

DG: Maybe I can help you, Peter. I think some of the confusion you're having is how the systems ran parallel back in the '50s and '60s.

CBJ: Actually, long wood didn't start until probably the latter part of the '60s.

DG: Okay.

CBJ: Middle sixties.

DG: Correct me where I'm wrong here but you had loggers and you had pulp wooders. And specifically a tract, if both products were coming off of the tract, the loggers cut the logs first and the pulp wooders came second and cut the small pulpwood tree and cut short pieces of wood out of the tops remaining after the saw logs were cut. And so when Bonner mentioned earlier that they didn't haul any long wood pulpwood, I think that's what he was referring to is they continued to move their short wood and their pulpwood in short form.

CBJ: Yeah.

DG: Now over time, what happened is the short wood system basically disappeared and you had long wood systems that would cut everything, just sorted it. So it was kind of an evolution.

CBJ: Yeah, that's right.

DG: I don't know if that helps.

PM: Yes, it does, it does.

DG: Okay.

PM: And you ran both at times?

CBJ: Yeah, I would.

PM: But for different customers, different mills?

CBJ: In the late '80s my short wood was going to a different mill than Union Camp because they had phased out short wood. In fact, the one in Jacksonville I think still takes a little and I think down on the coast one or two of them still take a little short wood. But everybody else has phased it out. It all goes in as long wood or chips. There's such a tremendous volume of chips out there today from sawmill operations that it's taken over probably fifty percent of the old short wood market that we used to have. Change in times and it always is going to be changing. It's always going to be changing.

PM: Would you sell your long wood back then to Union Camp? Did they buy both long and short wood?

CBJ: Un-uh. Union Camp set up some chip yards where they bought both long wood and short wood at those same yards. They would take the long wood, sit it on a specially designed trailer run under a special type big saw and cut it into short wood and put it on carloads like I showed you. I mean train cars like I showed you in that picture. There's a uniqueness to that picture, as bad as we needed cars but you'll notice right in the middle that there's one car that's not loaded and we refused to load them. We never loaded them after we found out what would happen to them. They didn't have any, they had about this much brace on the end but they didn't have any brace in the middle and when you loaded it then all the wood would shift in on both ends and you'd lose two cords of wood every time you'd put it on there. You'd never get paid for it. So we refused to load them, quit doing it.

DG: And the thing to keep in mind is that Union Camp mill is in Savannah, which is probably two hundred and fifty miles from this wood yard.

CBJ: About two hundred.

DG: Two hundred miles from this wood yard, okay. And there was no rail shipment of long wood and it was too far to truck it. So the way you shipped pulpwood long distances in that time was with short wood. You could get a much denser load on there and then to unload it at the mill they just knocked it off into a flume or knocked it off on the ground and picked it up, put it in a big pile.

CBJ: Most of it went in a flume. Of course, you're right, a lot of it would go onto the ground and had to be repiled.

DG: There is some rail shipment of long wood today but it really only came along in the '80s seriously, late '80s, and companies had to convince the railroad.

CBJ: Probably the early '90s even.

DG: Right, the early '90s.

CBJ: These cars that you're looking at would be, probably would average about twenty-four cords to the car. And that's about seven truckloads, something like that.

DG: Seven bobtail truckloads.

CBJ: Yeah.

PM: How did you produce your long wood? You know, when you first started doing it?

CBJ: Well, when we started producing long wood, what little long wood we produced, it would come from the logging operations where we had, where we were cutting sawtimber. We'd cut pulpwood along with it. That's what we do now in the areas I am consulting in. I have a timber going, one going now and another one going to start up next week and the pulpwood is harvested right along. And they, you're not familiar with wood yards, I mean log yards, but you may be on a log yard, the man sitting on the loader may be dividing up three or four different products on the ground and he'll stockpile them here. Pulpwood will be one. Chip-and-saw will be one. And saw logs will be one. And hardwood if it comes in, it'll be in another pile. So they may have as much as four piles of different products going somewhere by the loader. Amazing how far those things can reach. I still haven't learned that technique, how you throw trash way out yonder with it though. They can do most anything when they learn how.

PM: But this was, I think you mentioned earlier this is the system that used farm tractors in the beginning.

CBJ: In the beginning when we were with Jeffrey McKraft all the logs were produced with horses and mules and farm tractors and log carts. And the horse, most of them were horses then. The horse would stockpile the logs and then they'd put the cart over it and take it right on to the mill. That's actually a fascinating thing to watch if you ever have the opportunity to watch one of those horses work. It is just absolutely fascinating. They don't really have to use reins on them. They talk to them and make them do it. I saw a picture somewhere not long ago, a little movie where the man was doing their thing.

PM: Lots of wood dealers historically, then not very many and now perhaps the return at least to a new form? I mean how would you describe the situation today in terms of?

CBJ: Actually today, right absolutely today, you probably have maybe twenty-five percent less dealers than you had at the prime. But that went through a period of almost no dealers like he was talking about when they wanted the producer to buy his wood and that didn't work out. And then they come out with what they call preferred system, out of the IP system, preferred buyers, whatever they want to call them. And probably all in all, maybe twenty-five percent less than there used to be when, long time ago. Of course, that's a varying figure because some mills came on line and they weren't there in the beginning and so just to really get a comparison I don't know whether you got anything when you got a comparison about today and yesterday or not because of the new bills that are in that didn't use to be here.

PM: Where do you think it's going to go in the future?

CBJ: We have asked the University of Georgia to give us the forecast on that.

PM: So it's for them to say? [laughter]

DG: They want us to walk out on that limb.

CBJ: I will say this, that there's been a lot in the paper about how sick our industry is and our industry really is not in the great days but if there have ever been any really great days you don't know it and I don't think the industry is sick because look at this room and look at everything in here that demands paper and demands wood products. I do think that we've, IP [International Paper] is an example. They have gotten their people all cut way back and Savannah mill is running what, twelve or fourteen thousand cords of wood a week now and they used to run thirty-two thousand cords of wood a week. And now they're going to buy a million tons of chips from Brazil and that's going to cut into that twelve to fourteen thousand cords of wood a week. Those chips got to be used down there or either in Augusta or wherever in the hell they decide to use them. I can't envision how you can ship chips from Brazil up here and get it cheaper than you can buy it outside the gate. I just don't understand it. Do you?

DG: A little bit.

CBJ: I've been to Brazil and I've looked at all the operations down there and certainly that twenty-five cents a day labor ain't going to last. That's the biggest weakness you have when you go down there is what the labor cost is going to be. You want to scratch that?

PM: Pick up on that, you think that the price of labor in Brazil will rise?

CBJ: Well, the labor of the field people, while we are having to pay a lot more per man for what you do in the field, a man, he'll be producing four hundred cords of wood a week and he won't have but four people out there, you know. And used to if you produced four hundred cords of wood a week you had twenty people working. So your labor costs are probably even less now when you're paying three times the salary rate. But there is no organization, there's no labor unions anywhere that I know of in the south in the logging industry. Of course, one of the things about the difficulty of mills to make money is that the labor unions at the mill, their hourly rates are so high it's hard to make money sometimes. When you're paying the floor sweeper seventeen dollars an hour, you're not getting much out of it. That's what they were paying several years ago. It's probably up now.

PM: I'd like to explore what services did you provide to your contractors that they needed and couldn't have operated without or at least would have cost them more?

CBJ: They would have had difficulty getting insurance, to begin with, workman's comp insurance to the people that, to the Afro Americans that we had insurance companies flat wouldn't insure them as an individual. Wouldn't you agree with that? And while a lot of people charged, we never did, but we ran basically a small loan company. We financed the equipment. We financed the chain saws. If they needed something we paid for it and we never charged them any interest for it. And that's one of the thing that attracted people to work with our organization.

PM: Now, I mean what was the political, more the economic and the social conditions of the people who were working in the industry in the early days? How has that changed over time?

CBJ: If I can use a simile, in the days that we started in, the early days, you could classify them as peas and pot liker and today they're eating steaks and French fries, the workers. I mean we were at the bottom rung and today these people, what was that man telling me, the cut down machine was, he was from Ecuador, did a beautiful job in the woods and he was making six hundred bucks a week. And, you know, I don't think he'd found anything to do in Ecuador that would have gotten him six hundred dollars a week you know. And so he had a pretty good job. The cut down man when we were big in the, if he was making fifty dollars a week he was doing well. And, of course, fifty dollars a week then was a helluva lot. It would buy you something that it won't buy you now.

DG: Also if he didn't do that work he didn't eat.

CBJ: That's right.

DG: In those days, this was before the welfare systems were in place. So people with that level of education and job skills had no choice but to do some of that work, or you'd starve.

CBJ: Yeah and whether you, in your work you may not see it up in your section of the country but the Afro American and menial labor here in Georgia has almost been replaced by the Mexicans. And they're really a hard working group of people that do good work.

PM: So the people actual doing the labor work were mostly black and the contractors mostly white or were the workers that cut down...?

CBJ: The contractors were both but most all of your labor, most all of your labor when it was handwork were black. White muscles wouldn't take it. I'm serious. I'm not being ugly. They just weren't man enough to do it.

PM: What you called earlier blue steel?

CBJ: Blue steel muscle, yeah.

PM: Now the people who were doing the actual labor work, what were their alternative economic options, nothing or sharecropping or going to the north?

CBJ: Well, sharecropping had about gone by the wayside. They would be doing menial labor for a contractor or for somebody else but mostly even though they were not educated most of the pulp wooders that went into the business were sort of talented. I mean they were good chain saw operators and they could run the business pretty well and if they didn't drink they would do pretty well. I mean I had to drive a dang Electra Buick because my producer one and I didn't want him having a bigger car

than me, you know. [laughter] I say that as a joke but Pete Hogan drove an Electra Buick long as he lived. He and his son, he and one other, they would work together and they worked you know. He did it to the day he died almost. Good producing.

PM: How big would the contractors be in terms of the number of men and number of trucks?

CBJ: I hate to tell you that. I hate to tell you that because most of them, the average contractor in short wood would be between thirty, the big ones would be around seventy cords of wood a week, and nothing like what you experience now, nothing like that.

PM: How many man would it take to produce seventy cords a week?

CBJ: If he had seventy cords of wood a week he would be running two trucks and need to have about four people per truck, about what it would take. And, of course, money went somewhere then. Gosh, when I started to work in 1948 I made two hundred dollars a month. I could save forty though you know. [laughter] And had all I thought I wanted. I remember the day I said you know if I ever get to making ten thousand dollars a year I'll be something. That's the way the times were, way the times were.

PM: Now contractors today and the laborers are they a much more desirable business to operate, a much more desirable job to do than they were then, even though there will be more economic opportunities for people today?

CBJ: Little do you realize that most any logger, when we talk about a producer now or a logger, I think probably the average investment that they would have is around a million dollars. Ain't that about right?

DG: Maybe a little less but half a million to a million, depending on how old their equipment is, how big a spread.

CBJ: Let me rephrase it, if you started in it and bought all new equipment you'd have a million dollars in it. Today the logger has usually got a computer set up just like I've got. He's got his business in the computer and they're business people. And that was not exactly the case. The ones that really did well that worked throughout our territory, the white ones that had a good business head and had good black people working for them, made good money.

PM: Gee, have we run out of questions? What do you think?

MC: I think so.

PM: Dale, what do you think should be added to this to round out the story and keep Bonner telling more?

DG: What effect did the advent and introduction of social welfare programs and the civil rights law changes in the '60s have on the logging business? I know there are a lot of things that have happened in the last forty or fifty years that help explain the changes we've seen. It's not just one thing. There are a variety of things that help explain how things have changed, population shifts down here. There are additional job opportunities available or industries that are here that weren't here thirty years ago. But just focusing on that for now, what impacts did that have if any?

CBJ: I really don't think it's had any impact on where we are today. And I say that maybe with tongue

and cheek just a little bit but we could never, we could never go back to what we were before. That opportunity, that option does not exist to go back where you were before. All the whole climate has changed. You don't see, not just our business, but you look at contractors, you ride and look at road construction and everywhere you go now down here in this area everywhere you go, Mexicans are doing what the Afro Americans used to do. And what they're doing, I don't know, outside of selling drugs. I don't know what else they're doing. Of course, we've got, here in Milledgeville we've got a middle class or middle upper class of black people that do quite well. Our residential areas out where I came from in town, I guess a third now are Afro Americans out there, all intermingled and nobody pays any attention to it. You don't get people up north to believe that but that's true. One of the things that we have here, we have this big prison system in Milledgeville and the blacks have equal opportunity. In fact, there are probably more blacks working in it than there are white people working in it and it pays good money and good hospitalization and all these kinds of things. So our community really stays pretty stable. We don't attract much industry because we've got so much government money here in town.

DG: But when the welfare, when some of the great society programs came along and there was, you can read some of this, I was a kid when this came along, as you know, but did that make it harder to attract people to do some of the work that we were doing by hand in the woods?

CBJ: I never had to hire anybody. They hired their own people. Pete and them, they would hire who they could be compatible with really because he wouldn't put up with anybody wouldn't work. It really did not, my personal business, it did not have any effect.

DG: Okay.

CBJ: Didn't have any effect on it. Because you know, they were in the crude sort of way all little small businessmen and they were looking after their own hide, not mine, you know. They depended on me for services and they were provided that but so far as hiring them or sending somebody to them, I never was involved in that.

DG: Looking back at your career, what were the big changes that came along that you had to deal with, with your business and you saw the profession deal with?

CBJ: Of course, there are a lot of things that have come along. The interesting thing and, of course, in cruising and procurement, in cruising and procurement they've got so many new fangled to do your cruising today over what they had when they first began. I began using strip cruising. I quit that after a very short period of time. But the interesting thing about it is most of the people that buy timber still use the old method. They don't use a prism. They don't use any of this stuff. They use the old method with some variation of a little range finite type thing or what have you. I use the old method. It's time proven and the volume tables are good with it. The thing that I do enjoy is the opportunity to take my stand table and put it in the computer and have it spit it out in a minute where it'd take me three or four hours to get it done you know. There are so many improvements, the GPS and what have you, that helps you with lines and particularly if I were an industry forester and needing to know accurate acreages on sites and the different timber types and what have you. But those things, if I've got a drawn plat, a surveyor's plat, I don't need a GPS because I want the outside boundaries. I'm not worried about the inside boundaries. I still argue with some of these smart alecks that if you know it's a hundred acres you don't have to plot out the hardwood and you don't have to plot out the pine. I mean your percentages are going to be right if you use the hundred acres. You follow where I'm coming from?

DG: Un-huh, I do.

CBJ: And I said whenever you start trying to get X number of acres for the pine, X number of acres for the hardwood, you have cranked in another possibility of an error. And that's true. If you can avoid that just avoid it and go on with it. The only way that you can ever tell what...

DG: Well, you dodged this question a minute ago so I'm going to ask you again. Where do you see us going ten, twenty years from now? We've got a lot of land being sold. Companies aren't owning land, big population pressures, growing Hispanic population that we're starting to see in the woods. We can import particularly hardwood fiber, eucalyptus fiber from Central America and northern South America in the gulf coast ports cheaper than we can get hardwood in a lot of cases. How's that, what are we going to be looking at as far as a change down the road, landowners, wood dealers, loggers?

CBJ: I think we're going to see a great deal of change over what we're experiencing even today. I think we're going to see a new method from laminated boards. I think OSB [Oriented Strand Board] type boards are going to become more prominent. I think plywood is probably going to be phased out through the years. I think that there will always be a market for good structural timber. One of the things that I fault some of our silviculturists with is that they've been trying to produce too much fiber too fast by showing how much growth you can get on a tree and when you get it done you haven't got anything but fiber. And what we need to do is to find out how many trees we can grow and maintain a good percentage rate and maintain a good ring count. Ring count for you, you may not be familiar with it, you look at my hand imagine this being a years growth in timber. Each one of them represents a year's growth and if they were like that you'd have good strength. But if they were like that when the sun hits it it's going to roll into the lake down there. I saw a two-by-eight the other day it had five rings in it. Great Southern had treated it, had five rings in it. That thing was green when it was treated and when it does hit the sunshine it's going to be something else, whoever buys it. I look at rings when I go to buy lumber and I try to get no more than five rings to the inch. I really prefer more rings than that but I want some rings in there.

DG: What about the environmental rules that came along in the '70s?

CBJ: I made a talk at Virginia Tech several years ago at their forestry forum dealing with production and environmental rules and my conclusion and what I told them was that we need to live with them. We can live with them. We need to adjust to them. We can adjust to them and we can still get the same production. I feel that way today. I do not feel that we can live with what river keepers and certain environmental groups want us to do because they've never told the truth in their life and you can't depend on them. You can't depend on what they're putting out there. Sierra Club is bad about this and you know it. The Georgia Conservancy takes a pretty, they had Cecil Smith or Cecil somebody was their executive director years ago and he resigned and wrote a letter to the whole conservancy when he left and he says the only way that we're ever going to accomplish our mission is to begin to tell the truth and we've got to state the facts the way the facts ought to be stated. Said we can get the support of everybody. And that's true. They can get the support. The media is the worst enemy the forester has. They never print anything good and anything they print is slanted. Just like in yesterday's paper they're talking about Bush's healthy forest initiative and they're saying that the loggers are winning. The loggers aren't winning anything. Hadn't anything been sold yet. Loggers weren't doing this to begin with. Did you see that thing in the paper over in Macon?

DG: I did not but I've probably seen similar things.

CBJ: Yeah, about that logging job down...

DG: Oh, the one along the river?

CBJ: Yeah.

DG: I did read those articles.

CBJ: And it wasn't a line of truth in it. She even had the forestry commission with the department of natural resources as one of their units and on and on and on. Lot of us wrote letters to the editor on that but none of them were printed. But the forestry association did get an article in there that was very good.

DG: Yes, they did.

CBJ: Very good.

PM: If fiber coming in from elsewhere, chips coming in from elsewhere becomes a major part of the mill's wood supply, what will happen to the local forest industry, the local harvesting industry?

CBJ: Every ton of fiber that they buy that comes from a foreign country, will be one ton of fiber that you don't sell as a private landowner. It's not going to affect the industry. It's going to affect the private landowner and their ability to sell the product that they're growing. That the way you see it?

DG: Un-huh.

PM: Will it mean either fewer people cutting wood or will you try to adapt by, as you were saying, trying to find different wood or getting it streamed as a different product so that you move what you're producing and where it's going in order to keep your harvesting end in the thing running?

CBJ: You know what basically motivates society to do anything new is need, need to have something to do. And I think that we're going to be motivated down through the years to develop new ways to use the amount of fiber that we're growing. One is and, of course, today it doesn't bring much money, but one is that the fiber that we've grown could be used to produce energy. Central State Hospital, you may not be aware of this, but Central State Hospital runs all their thing off chips. They've got dirty chips going in out there into the boiler making all their stuff and what have you. I don't know whether they use if for air conditioning or not. I know they use it for their heating system and I don't know how the air conditioning works. We've got to continue to move forward. Something that the University of Georgia did and I may be incorrect but I think I'm correct, but the Chinese that worked so long up there on glue was one of the primary factors influencing the OSB and pine pulp or plywood market here in the south. He developed glues that were reliable and would hold the stuff together. Used to when you got a piece of plywood, rain hit it, it separated it in fourteen pieces of particles you know and doesn't do that now. Through his research at the university he developed some significant glues.

PM: There's been a continuing dispute between Canada and the United States over soft wood lumber. Why do Americans buy Canadian soft wood lumber anyway?

CBJ: Well, I'm not in the middle of that but I certainly am equally aware of it. Our lumber, a two-by-four, our two-by-fours probably weigh twice as much as your two-by-fours. And the resistance that you meet in driving a nail into a two-by-four, or whatever board you're using, ours is probably twice as difficult to nail into as yours. Our greatest arguer that we ought to be buying Canadian lumber is the Home Builders

Association of the United States and they're a very strong political force too. They're on your side. You see all these apartments up here when you came by them? There are two hundred of them in there and the only southern pine they have in them is the treated lumber on the decks. The rest of it came from Canada. And that's what's happening to our business. And the other thing is that you produce it up there, you send it down here, and you can sell it much cheaper than what we can produce it and take it to the same market. And the other one, and while they continue to say we don't do it, if you buy a tract of government wood here, you're going to have a minimum of three hundred dollars a thousand in your lumber. And you buy a government tract up in Canada, you might have ten dollars in it. So that's a little uneven playing field that we have to contend with. I'm not in the solid work market so I don't, I mean I do sell clients timber but I know it's going to affect Canada a great deal because this isn't just here, it's all over the country that this lumber is being sold. And they have been dumping it and that's no imagination. It actually has been dumped. But it will be worked out. We ought to be smart enough we live on the same piece of land that we can get together on something. Of course, you haven't been able to get your French and your English people up there together too well.

PM: Yeah but we've been doing it for a long time and the body count's real low. [laughter]

CBJ: I'll tell you when I was in Quebec, Quebec City for a forester meeting up there, certain places there wasn't a need to go because they won't talk to you unless you can speak French and you just didn't go there. Even if they could speak English good they still wouldn't talk to you. Interesting, that was a nice trip.

PM: Well, I'd like to thank you very much, Bonner, for the interview and say how much we appreciate the help that you've given us. Thank you.

CBJ: Well, I hope it'll be some good to come out of somewhere. I know ya'll have looked at this thing every time I've touched it. That's a remote for hearing aids in case you're wondering what it is.

DG: I'd about figured that out.

CBJ: It's one of the greatest things I ever bought. I've got three different channels to use for the telephone and what have you and I can turn them up and down left and right. For instance, if you're in a car and wind noise is bothering you, you cut the left one off and turn the right one up a little bit and you can listen to the people that you're riding with. It has a lot of versatility.

MC: My mother should know about this.