Lyman Sutton

I was born here eighty-six years ago; I'll be 87 if I live till the 12th of April. The only thing that bothers me at the present time is when I look around and see some of these boys like Marx. You can just spare me that. No, I put in, what I thought was my whole life-time in the woods.

(You started out at what age working in the woods?)

About twelve. I didn't stay long that time.

(What did you do first of all?)

I sort of helped the cook, was about all that I did the first time. Then I went up. I thought I was going to be a full-grown man, but it didn't work out very good. And I did a little work in the kitchen and a little outside. I helped them swamp and got to know something about how it was, but I only stayed a month and then I was willing to go to school. And I went to school one year and then I throwed it all up, when I was fourteen, and then I stayed there.

(Did you ever go to school after you were fourteen?)

No. No, they did everything in the world they knew to make me go to school. They thought by punishing me and put me to work hard, that I'd be willing to go to school and it worked the first winter, but after that

it wasn't any good. But, you take it now at twelve years old I drove a pair of horses from here to Klamath, that's where we was camped. There was two of us. Another man had a four horse team and I had a pair of horses.

(What company were you with?)

I was with your father. He was a logger, he was the only one left. I got started in to log for myself when I was twenty.

(Were you logging for yourself that young?)

I started in at twenty.

(What kind of a logging company did you have? Was it a partnership?)

No, not that one. That only lasted two years, that's all I had, but there was the funny thing at that time, I had a contract. A fellow went up and looked up this piece of timber along the St. Croix and he come down and went over and he told Weyerhaeuser how much he thought was on it and what he'd put it in for. And Weyerhaeuser told him alright and he went to work and bought the piece of timber and Weyerhaeuser told him he wanted to start me, that I was bound and determined I was going to start something, so he started me up. I had eight hundred dollars saved. And there's the difference in your banking today. During that winter I didn't have any contract, and I never had one. I wanted to buy some horses and I come down here and went over to your First National

Bank and borrowed eight hundred dollars on my note - me only a kid now - everything went fine. Borrowed from the three times there. Just told them what I was going to do and they said it was all right and everything went right straight through all right.

(That's pretty young to start in on logging. How much of a stake, what did you have as far as equipment was concerned in that first operation? And how many people were employed in it?)

There was twenty-four men. That took in everything.

(How many teams did you have, Lyman?)

I had two four-horse teams hauling, and I think it was four pairs doing what we call skidding.

(What were the terms of your contract? You said you didn't have a formal contract, but what was the agreement?)

Four and a half delivered here in the lake. That was for logging and the driving. I had to pay for the driving. But I made money. The men were paid practically nothing.

(That didn't include the price of the stumpage, did it?)

No, actual logging.

They bought the stumpage and let the contract to me.

(Stumpage wouldn't be very much those days would it?)

That stumpage turned out, probably didn't cost them, I doubt if it cost them a dollar. I don't think it did because it was twice as much there as what father said. Instead of being one winter's operation, it was two.

(There was larger white pine too, I presume.)

Yes, it was. It was up on the St. Croix.

(Was it common for companies to let contracts and not have a formal contract drawn up?)

No, it wasn't. That was unusal. There was many a deal that amounted to a great deal of money that was just set up that way.

(Was there any penalty for the non-fulfillment of a contract?)

There wasn't any. They just took the people's word that they'd go ahead and do the thing, and of course, they always done them. Everybody paid their bills in those days. Everybody. And of course in those days too, if you had an awful bad winter or anything of that kind, the decent mill men, or down river fellows, they would help out. Everybody paid their bills.

(Who got those logs, you know? One of the Weyerhaeuser concerns?)

Weyerhaeuser, yes.

(Then you just logged for yourself a couple years, Lym?)

Then I switched over and went with the company.

(Was that the William ?)

Yes. It was and different ones.

(What did you do for that company?)

Oh, I don't know, I was a sort of a head man around the woods and the river. He was an uncle of mine and he trusted me absolutely. I really think that that is one of the reasons that I got along as good as I did is that I was honest about it, as far as was concerned, but the railroads, why I wasn't. You take in them days why instead, if I had twenty-five men going up to Gordon or going up the river, going up to any point that amounted to anything at all, why where the fare was four or five dollars, why they just give me so much cash. I always had cash from them, but I'd pay their fares. I'd probably pay two dollars a piece; I turned the other back to the company. I gave that money to the conductor; the railroad didn't get it. The conductors probably turned a little in to the company. That went along for years and years.

When I see the kids now they baby them sort of. I don't think it does any harm to work. I don't think it does anybody any harm. But you take that time I told you I went up when I was twelve years old. Well, when I cam back why I got in to Hudson--I come down on the train--the train run as far as--just this side of Spooner, and come into Hudson about four or five in the afternoon, and I had to wait there about an hour for a short line train that brought me into

Stillwater, but I walked home. Well, now you can see a twelve year old kid doing that. now.

(Did you check books?)

Oh no. I never had anything to do with bookwork. No bookwork. Mine was all the logging operations. Handling the crew; supplies, and everything of that kind. I always had a bookkeeper. They always tried to furnish me a very good bookkeeper too, because they knew I needed one.

(Did you make a formal report then to the ?)

No. Just reported verbally. We never sent them any word at all, we just went ahead. Oh, you take it in them days it was all primitive. One of the most interesting things that I had with them was the year when we started railroading.

(What year was that?)

I couldn't tell you that year until I'd look it up. I think I'm just mixed on dates. But that was the first railroading that was done. It was the year after the big fire.

(The big fire was in '94.)

That's when it was.

(The Hinckley fire?)

Yes. Well, they had a lot of timber burnt that time, so I was on the

rafting grounds here for them, and he called me in on a Thursday, and he told me he wanted me to get ready to go out and put in twelve, fifteen, twenty million up there--wanted me to go and I had the railroad, and I told him he'd better try to get somebody else for that, because I had never seen a tie laid. I never seen one laid. He was going to have four camps in there and he had about two miles to the main line and then all through a section and a half of timber. So I told him, I said, "My god, what do I know about building a railroad?" He said, "You'll know something when we get through. I'll be up there to help you." And that's the first year that they used what they call their steam loader . . never seen one of them; didn't know how they worked. There wasn't one the in country or anything of the kind, but he was going to do all that.

(Who was that, S ?)

And he was going to boost me and Moffat was over at Gordon and he was going to help me, they were all going to help me and they were all going to do all those things. But it was up to me to do them. And I went up and well, we managed. We got along. I think from the time I started, - in sixty days we had to have the first train load of logs, thirty cars going--and we want along about fifty days and we wasn't anywhere's near it at all. He was up there all the time and couldn't make the haulers work, we just couldn't do anything at all, that's all there was to it, we was stuck. So he was there all one day with me and when we got through

we come in at night and well, he said, "It's all up to you from now on. You may have to throw that steam loader away and get back to the old times, 'cause we got to get these cars in." "Well," I said, "I don't know how we're going to do it." "Well," he said, "neither do I, but when I go down I'll leave an order at the office. You can have any men or equipment or anything else that you want, but I want thirty cars to go out on this date." He was there with me about an hour and his train went south about 12 o'clock; another one want north about one, an hour afterward. Just before he left, why he asked me what I was going to do. I told him I was going to get on the train going north if he was going south. And there was some other fellows trying the same thing we were trying. I was going over and see how they got along. But I did a lot of running around that winter to different places, trying to get ideas of what they were going on. Them were very primitive days.

(How long did you stay with the S ?)

Why I was with them a long time.

(Were you with them til they quit?)

No, no. I was with them a total in all, oh, ten or twelve years or more. Don't you remember when S went into the mining business?

(Yes, I remember.)

He had three mines, so he picks me up in the fall of the year and said, "You aint making no money, you ain't getting no place in this lumbering business.

I'm going to put you in where you can make some money." I told him, "That's what I'm looking for is to get a little money." "Well," he said, "I got three places to take you to--only two that amounts to anything. The Black Hills and Mexico. Look them over and when you get through why take a place." We stayed about a month in each place. So we went out to the Black Hills and was out there a couple weeks. Big show, money, and everything else. Then we went to Mexico and I was suppose to be down there three weeks. He come down with me and left in three days and I was to stay about three weeks and get familiar with it all and see if I wanted to stay there. After I had been there about two weeks, why I got a wire from him, he fired everybody and took control of everything down there at the mine.

(You were in charge of the operations of handling the crews and one thing or another with S ?)

Yes sir.

(How did you go about getting your crew? Where did you recruit your men?)

In Stillwater.

(Right here in Stillwater? Did you ever get any large number of men from foreign countries? There were Danes and Swedes and Germans coming over here; being brought over here, did you ever recruit any from those groups?)

Why yes, all of them. Everything that you named there. The Swedes and

Norwegians, very strong. You see, then we carried crews from one year to the other. I had men that worked for me for twenty-five years. In fact, men that worked their whole life-time.

(But you didn't have a contract with them, did you?) No.

(It was all a very casual arrangement.)

They worked for me in the woods, and when I come down here they worked on the river.

(They were lumber jacks in the woods and river men on the drive.)

Yah. And on the lake. Or there was some that was farmers. You take it up north of Taylor's Falls there was a big settlement of Swedes in there and someway or another there was two or three of them came to work up there and that developed into, oh there was times that I think I had twenty. They were young fellows and their folks was homesteading and going along and they always knew that they could come wherever,--they wasn't with me in the summer, they went back on the farms--but they always knew they could go to work for me wherever I was and they just looked up wherever I was and would get the information down here, and they get in touch. They'd come and bring others with them.

(Did you ever know of any companies that would actually import people from foreign countries to work in the woods?)

No. None of them that I ever knew.

(How would they come? Their boys would come out here and then they would write home, wouldn't they, and have their brother come out?)

A lot of them came from Canada.

(How do you account for that big immigration from Canada to the U.S.?)

Oh, it was just a better place. They got more money and more work.

(One reason was that it was cheaper to go from Europe to a point in Canada than it was to go from Europe to N.Y.City and then out here.)

I haven't any idea on that at all.

(You never heard the men mention that?)

No, the men that came down here from Canada mostly was--then there was a lot come from New Brunswick.

(country. Blue noses, weren't they? Didn't they call them blue noses here or was that just out west?)

I guess that's just out west.

(Did you ever hear the term 'hunyak' applied to a nationality group?)

Yes. (What nationality group?)

I don't know. I couldn't tell you off-hand what it was. It wasn't very complimentary, that's all I can say.

(I've hear that the Swedes were called heads or hunyaks, and I wondered if . . .)

They was called everything. Oh we had a lot of Swedish and Norwegian people. A lot of them worked for us.

(Were they among the first ones to come into the work or were there other nationalities in before the Swedes and the Norwegians?)

I couldn't tell you that, because even when I started there was Swedes and Norwegians and all various kinds.

(Course the climatic conditions here were a good deal the same and the logging conditions I guess somewhat the same.)

Well, they seemed to get what they wanted here. You take, there was a lot of them wanted to farm. They had good chances to go out and homestead at that time and that had a great deal to do with it. The reason I was in contact with them so steadily and kept the same ones was that they could always depend from one year to the other on work. There was always work.

(They would work in the woods in the winter and then do their farming in the summer and clear the land.)

They could do, they could go back wherever they wanted to go and we were pretty good to them in this respect, — they might want a little money in the winter or in the spring or anytime. They could always get it from us. I was always awfully close to the men, and they could always get the money.

(I've heard it said that almost any young fellow that grew up on the farm

around here and had to pull stumps and saw a little lumber, wood once in a while, could adapt himself pretty readily to life in a camp because he knew what a saw was and an axe was. Did you have much trouble training the men or did they fall in line?)

No, I didn't have to do any training. I didn't have to do any training. They did that themselves.

(Taught one another?)

They taught one another themselves.

(What was the discount on time checks?)

Oh, that varied. Depended on the concern that they were with.

(I have heard it's twenty-five percent. Have you heard of discounts higher than that?)

No. I don't know as I have.

(And the lowest I've heard is two percent.)

Never heard of two percent.

(That seems pretty low to you?)

Yah, that's low. For something that was coming to--that isn't low, there shouldn't be any discount and that was one of the reasons it was, that I

because there never was any discounts on their checks.

(Did you ever hear of Paul Bunyan in your early days?)

Not in the very early days.

(About when do you think that you began to hear about him?)

R said he never heard of him in the early days at all. Where did that start? Did Walker start that?

The Red River Lumber Company up in the upper Mississippi? Yes, yes. It seems to me that when Bemidji began to be talked about, was the first I heard of it.

(It originated right there in Bemidji?)

That's what I think.

(Was that around 1910 or '12?) I wouldn't give you the dates.

(That's when the Red River Lumber Company pamphlet came out with a picture of Paul Bunyan.)

I think the Walkers caught onto that thing and capitalized it. Of course they use that always for the advertisements, but it did start in Bemidji. Well, I wouldn't even be sure of that Bob. My first recollection of it is that I connect Bemidji and that together.

(The lumber jacks here didn't talk about Paul Bunyan in the early days?)

No.

(There was no such character or legend in their minds.)

I didn't hear anything of it that I can remember in the early days at all. It's something that come, as I recollect it, from the Bemidji district.

(Remember John Parker?)

Very well.

(I believe it started there, come to think of it. I believe it did.) Was your family from here, Mr. Sutton?)

I was born here.

(And your parents came from where?)

Merasheen, wherever that is. Newfoundland. Mother came from Ireland.

(Was your uncle?)

brother.

(He made a fortune, Mr. did, and lost it all in a mine. Or I guess it wasn't a mine

(Well now Dave T , old David T came out here about--can you remember when he started here or was he here before you got here?)

He was here way back in my earliest memory.

(He started as a logging concern too, didn't he?) Yes.

(Lym, you never saved any of your records or anything of that kind, did you?) No. (Do you know of anybody around town that's got any of the early records or anything of that kind?)

No, I don't think I do. When I left six-twenty--that's where I live now, came back here--why I burnt them all, put them in the dump and everything else up to

that time. Since then I've never-- well, there's nobody had no place to keep them.

(We haven't said anything about amusement in the camp or Saturday night's song fests or anything like that. Can you . .)

They had them.

(How did they entertain themselves in general?)

Well, in different manners. They played all kinds of games.

(I've heard some of the games were rather amusing, can you think of any off hand?)

No, I don't know that I can.

(Well, they had dances too, didn't they Lyman?) Oh yes.

(They always had a fiddle or banjo or something in every camp.)

Oh yes, in all the camps. And of course it wasn't often that had any amusement of any kind in the camps between practically the 15th of December as a rule, until the 15th of March. During that period there was very, very little of any of this kind, it was before that or after that, because from that time on why when the men got in then they slept. They never was all there all together and from the 15th of December till the 15th of March there was very little amusement of any kind in any of the camps.

(What about on Saturday nights? Was there any, did they work all through

the week?)

Well, they worked till Saturday night and the last teams and the last teamsters wouldn't like to put on much of a show at the house when the teamsters, and they were amongst the big men of the camp, that was blacksmiths and teamsters considered themselves higher than anybody—they wouldn't be in till all the way from well, in the twelve years that I was at Grand Rapids, 8 o'clock was the earliest that a team ever got in—from that till one, two o'clock in the morning.

(Sundays you did your washing.) Yes.

(If one were to stop at a camp on Sunday, what would people be likely to be doing?)

Well, they'd be washing.

(How would that be carried on?)

Alongside of the creek.

(Did they have big pots boiling, or what would they . . .)

One, that would be all. There wasn't very much washing done.

(What else might be going on of a Sunday?)

Oh, there'd be some of them out hunting; some of them doing a little reading. There wasn't very much going on. When they first come in in the fall, why then they had some games and one thing or another. They'd practice on pole vaulting and put up a trapeze and all that sort of thing, but they were all through work until they

started to haul logs--they'd be all through work--they'd all have their supper together; they all had their breakfast together, but after they started to haul, why then they never was together.

(Something just struck me. Of all the manuscripts--we must have read thousands of them in the last few years on the lumber industry; I don't believe I have ever read a diary written by a man who was in a lumber camp, that is, one of the workers; I don't believe I've ever read a letter written by a man from camp.)

Well, there was a great deal of the men that couldn't read or write.

(So on Sunday's you wouldn't find any of them sitting there writing letters.)

Oh, very few. Very, very few.

(You say that some would do reading. Where would they get their reading matter?)

It would be brought there at the camp. Just come in with the tow teams--what we called the tow teams would bring them in, they'd pick up picture books or anything of that kind.

(Do you suppose that the fact that they didn't write so much was due to the fact that many of them were foreign? I mean foreign born and they might have written letters back to Sweden but not so likely to write them to people here.)

Oh, the mail was very slim. Of course, in later years, the latter years, it was more than it was in the earlier years. But they didn't write much. You

take my folks whose home was here, they never got a letter from me. I never wrote. They'd write once in a while, but I never wrote.

(The men would fix their families up here for the winter before they went up?) Right. They'd either put in enough in the cellar--they'd arrange it so their credit was good until they came back in the spring.

(In other words, most of your lumber jack crews were family men, is that right?)

No, I wouldn't say that that was right. I think theysplit about half and half. We had an awful lot of young fellows. When they grew up to be sixteen why they they went to work.

(We heard an awful lot and read an awful lot about how the lumber jacks were such hell-raisers and drunkards. Do you think that's been over done?)

No, I don't. On the St. Croix here why they were the mildest and the best as far as I was concerned, but as the years went on they were more hell-raisers and worse. The years that I was at Grand Rapids, they were pretty tough people. Pretty tough people, even the best of them.

(Is there any explanation for that?)

On, the only explanation I can give for that, is that they were tied up like in a prison for six and eight months at a time in the woods, and then when they came out they went wild and went crazy. And just as soon as that edge worked

off why then they was alright.

(Exactly the same thing that you get in the navy today, where men are at sea a length of time. When they hit port they go wild. They disappear for several days.) . . . no particular reason why they should be worse in one area than they are in another. You said that on the St. Croix they were pretty good.)

Well, yes. And I was wondering if it was just the times that was changing that I found them worse up on the Mississippi. I am not sure but what it was. Although I am not too sure of that either. We had a little different class of people up on the Mississippi than we had on the St. Croix.

(How would you say they were different?)

Well, I never seen any Russians until I went to Grand Rapids and then I seen plenty of them. Had lots of them, and that's the reason anybody talks to me about a Russian today why I can tell them all about the Russians. Do you know, Bob, that I went along for three or four years—I was buying all the logs north of Grand Rapids, the other buyers had gradually went out, and I had about sixty of these Russian homesteaders that was banking logs for me. And I had a scaler that suited them. It was hard to get a man that they trusted, but they trusted this man I had, and everything went along for three or four years. I was okay, nobody must say a word. This market down here jumped all the way from two or three dollars up in price during the summer. I went up there in the fall—I generally started about the first of October

for to sign these fellows up. Oh they had all the way from 25 to 100,000. I had a price of $2 above what I paid them the year before. Usually took me about ten days to sign them all up. When do you think I got the first signer on the contract? The second day of January before I got one--from October. They couldn't understand it. They couldn't understand that $2 raise.

(You mean if you had offered the old price. .)

They'd have been signed in 20 minutes. I say about ten days I'd of signed up the sixty, but every one of them signed up afterwards. They all signed up afterwards, but that $2 they couldn't understand.

(Did they think something big was afoot. .)

They didn't know what it was. They could not get that through their heads what it was. But I treated them fellows good. Don't think that the Russians ain't dangerous. You take the second or third last year I was there, I don't know but what it was the last year I was there--I had a contract to take out and drive and I wanted to hang it up. Don't make any difference what the score was or anything of the kind, I didn't want the drive to go out. Going out a creek called Wolf Creek, down to St. Lawrence Lake. I'm just telling you this for to give you an idea of what the real Russian is, and that they were there. I wanted to hang that drive up. I had about what they call, three miles of dead water above Lawrence Lake--it was just quite a wide stream, just sluggish that went down into the lake and there was

of all kinds, everything right along the banks of this river. And I wanted to take and open this dam along about daylight with a full head of water and then have something plug that lake down there. Well, there was two or three of them Russians that sort of led them. A lot of them was terribly friendly to me and I told them that I'd like to have that thing stopped. I thought maybe if we dropped a tree or two across the river down there and nobody knew anything about it why it was answer the purpose. He told me he'd see that there wasn't any logs get into Lawrence Lake, "leave that to me." So I opened the dam at this very hour and I started slucing and scattered my men clear down to place there, but when they got ahead of this three mile stretch, she began to jam. She jammed right back up to where I quit slucing. That river was full of this stuff. I think it would take a crew of men, I figured it would take ten men a week to take it out. They put it all in in the night, these Russians.

(It was full of what?)

Trees, that they'd fell across the river for to hang up this drive and this head of water run off of the dam, I couldn't go any further then and this fellow wanted to know when I wanted that cleaned out. I told him I'd take care of it when I got ready. "Well, no," he said, "you ain't going to touch it, let us know, let me know." So I told him I was ready then, I said we wanted it out. They took that all out, I don't know how many of them there was, but they took that all out and

and cleared that whole river in one night and I couldn't swear that there was any one man in there, them fellows was right there. They did that because they thought well of me, they was loyal to me. Well, now it wouldn't been any but them same fellows I had one of my wagons break down. That's a big four-horse wagon on the road. I left and left the wagon there over night and when I come back the wagon was gone, and I couldn't find a trace of that for about a week, and this same man that I'm telling you about told me, "Don't let on, but that wagon is over on the bank of Prairie Lake." They'd carry that two miles and a half through the woods in pieces. They didn't have any use for it--they'd steal anything in the world that was loose. Didn't make any difference who it was, whether it was their best friend or it wasn't. He couldn't stop them from doing that but he could tell me what they, the things that they took and he did.

(Well, they were decent fellows too, I mean they cleaned those trees out in the quickest time. . .)

. . .when you asked about the sled runners, that's what they made aled runners out of for me. They brought that oak up in sled runner lengths to the camp at a very nominal price, cheaper than in there to make the runners out of. Bars and everything of that kind. Dangerous men. Dangerous men. Them very same men I would be just as sure as I'm sitting here in this chair that I could go to that fellow and say that "there's three men coming up this road tonight

be any question asked.

(Do you suppose obedience to orders unquestionably . . .)

I don't know what it is, they /

(Personal ties though, my impression was that it was more their feeling of loyalty to you as a person rather than as their boss, wasn't that it?)

Oh yes. Oh yes, that was all. Oh, you take, there was a homesteader there, their father was the leader of the whole gang and they got so that they had about forty acres cleared and they had a nice place and they even had a little money in the bank—I'd say they had a thousand dollars—he had four, five boys, and he died. Do you suppose they'd bury him? Well, we had the awfulest time you ever seen. I had to just take and get this other man that I was telling you about that was so close to me, to go home and tell them that they simply had to bury him because if they didn't the county would come in and take possession of him. They couldn't understand that, but over where they come from, anybody died the Government buried them, that was all there was to it.

(Do you remember any more definitely where they came from?)

No, only that they was Russians.

(Were they Ukranian Russians?)

Couldn't even tell you that.

(Were they big people?) Yes.

(Dark or light?)

Blond . . . dug out farms out of that wilderness that would scare you to death. The way they'd work--and they could work.

And then in about ten days from the first of January just the same as if there hadn't been any change in them. When one went they all went--they all went together.