

Idaho Panhandle Oral History Project
Interview with Frank McPherson
October 20, 1979
Senator Creek
Interviewed by David Barton
Questionnaire Information

McP = Frank McPherson
DB = David Barton

Tape 9; Side 1

DB: ...at Magee?

McP: At Magee.

DB: What kind of milling does he do up there?

McP: 'Bout the same; oh, a small operation, his then. Machinery used to be horses. Then they hauled the cut lumber out in trucks.

DB: When did they start the operation where they wrapped a cable around the logs and dragged them up to the top? Is that what you call jamming?

McP: Well, yes, it might be. I think what you have reference to there, though, is the high line on the coast.

XM: Like the donkey.

McP: Yea.

DB: Did they ever use much donkey engines around here?

McP: Not much. They tried them before they got the Cats, they tried to pull on chutes. Worked all right, but, ah, the trail is so long and so heavy, the damn logs will buckle and roll over. It could only take so much, and then if the load is heavy enough, let's say you got a little six inch log, like that. And you got a whole big bunch behind them, finally you get that little fellow, can't stand the pressure and it'll up-end, and that shears the thing.

DB: So now, how did they use the Cats to get 'em up?

McP: They didn't.

DB: They never used them?

McP: Hm-hm. Those that went to, what they called, went to rear. They were rolled off to one side. But it didn't take 'em long, and the Cats came in; they used Cats for trailing and they didn't have that much timber that they could take. And that was about as much as a horse could keep.

DB: Nowadays how do they do most of the timbering around here?

McP: Well, they load them on a big truck. I don't know how they do it, but they bind them things up into bundles, and dump them into the lake; the whole damn bundle of them.

DB: The they boom they up in the lake?

McP: Yea. Boom in the lake. See a truckload of these, oh, from seven to ten thousand feet. In one bundle. You have to have pretty good water to do that and you get a boom of logs like that, tell you, you got timber behind you, mister.

DB: Around here how often did you get mail, and where would you get it at?

McP: As often as I went into town. And I walked but once or twice a year.

XF: That was at Wallace.

McP: No.

DB: Where did you walk to, Wallace?

McP: Well, Prichard.

DB: Prichard.

McP: When World War II started, they cut that out.

DB: So where would you go after World War II?

McP: Wallace. Star Route out here.

DB: When did you get a radio, in here, the first time?

McP: Well, the first radios came in the...about the '30s.

DB: About the '30s.

McP: I'd say.

XM: Mac, Mac? Do you have a pike pole here?

McP: No.

XM: You know, I've asked everybody on the river, and I think that I've got the only pike pole that's been used on the river.

McP: They had 'em on the mill ponds.

XM: I mean this one's actually used, you know. And they had taken that...

McP: And on the boats, they had to have 'em. All the time. Since the boats went out in the river.

DB: What did they use the pike pole for?

XM: To put the logs in line for going down the river.

DB: Is it like a peavey, at all?

McP: Well, no. It's a big long pole with a steel spike on the end of it...

XM: ...and a little...

McP: Then on the _____ it's got a spike out there and another one down here, where you can reach and hook. Before you had, coming up the river, just this spike on the end. You set that, and stand there and push that up, like this. And keep...

DB: Moving them out of the way, or keeping them in line?

McP: Sixteen inch poles...ah, 16 foot poles. You'd have, you'd catch it up here about six feet and you just keep going, and then you get another hold. Sometimes, you doing pretty good, if the water wasn't too high. And sometimes you didn't do so good.

DB: Let's change the subject a little bit. Did anybody in this neighborhood do any mining back in the old days?

McP: Well, no. There were some placer. We had one man. 900 feet he went in. All by himself he went in. He made everything except he bought scrap iron for the tracks.

DB: What kinds of cars did he use?

McP: Wood mainly.

DB: Were they wooden?

McP: He had, he had, ah, little trucks. They're still up there. He worked there for years. 900 feet he ran that in there.

DB: Is that with pick axe?

McP: Well, he had a hammer and steel. Little machinery; all four pound hammer.

DB: Would he blast it out at all?

McP: Oh, yes. Yes, absolutely; only way to get it out.

DB: What did he use, nitro, or dynamite, or what?

McP: Well, dynamite. 40 or 60 percent. Poor old bastard he _____ back. In the back end he had a cave in there. As big as this house. And that rock, the formation looked just as solid as rock. Could take it in hand and squeeze it like putty. And he worked. He worked there for four years trying to get around that damn cave. Couldn't make it. So, he quit and went across the hill to the other side and tried to go back. I don't know how far he got in there.

DB: Why do you think he picked that particular hill to be working on?

McP: Oh, he ah...

DB: Is there a name for the hill?

McP: No. But he figured he had gold up there.

DB: Is that on some tributary of some creek?

McP: Little creek right out there. You passed it; a bunch of cars parked up the way.

DB: Do you remember the name of it?

McP: No name.

DB: Back in the old days what were the best jobs to have, what were considered the best kind of work? Around these parts?

McP: Well, that would depend on your ability. The best paying job was dam building and chute builders.

DB: What did those used to pay?

McP: Well, the chute builder would get \$1.00 a foot. And three good lumberjacks, could make a mile of foot, ah, chute, in six weeks. That's \$5,000 in six weeks. The same fellows would come down in six weeks with \$1,000. Part of it. And in two weeks they would be coming back up there broke.

DB: Where would they spend their money?

McP: Well, wherever they could find moonshine.

DB: Wherever they could find moonshine?

XF: Come on now, you are not that gullible. Ha, ha, ha.

McP: Well, some of 'em would not even go to the cat houses; they would spend their money before they got there.

DB: Were there any blacksmiths in these parts, besides yourself?

McP: Some of the very best. The best in the world, I tell you, mister.

DB: Where were they located at?

McP: All these logging camps. Everyone of 'em had a blacksmith. To keep the horses shod up, and chains welded, and everything. Made half of the stuff that they had there.

They had to be a blacksmith, and I don't mean maybe. No torch or anything to cut with, it all had to be done by hand and heat.

XM: Listen, that art is almost lost now. Really is. Blacksmithing.

McP: Yea. It is.

DB: Where did people go around here to have entertainment?

XF: Ha, ha, ha, ha, ha, ha.

DB: Besides Wallace?

(GENERAL LAUGHTER)

XF: Well, go down the Snake Pit.

McP: Well, a lot of them done their entertainment right at Prichard wherever they could find moonshine. Because, I tell you, they was, among the lumberjack population in Prichard, floaters, they had no home. Wasn't one out of 10 that was married.

XF: Well, wasn't Murray at one time one of the biggest towns in the county?

McP: Huh?

XF: Murray, was at one time one of the biggest towns in the county. Wasn't it?

McP: Yea and Eagle. Had over 5,000 in it.

XF: And Eagle. Aha.

DB: What were...were there most of 'em loggers that would hang out at Eagle and Murray?

McP: Gold rush.

DB: Gold rush?

XF: Miners.

DB: Do you remember some of the old dances they used to have? Did they have dance halls around here?

McP: No, not when I was here. One thing I wouldn't know; I don't know how to dance yet. Oh, I dance to music a lot of them I didn't like, but not for entertainment.

DB: What would people do here for gambling?

McP: Well, they used to...gambling used to be wide open around here.

DB: Were there...was there any specialties? Any popular ones?

McP: No, no, poker games. And all the logging camps and mining camps, there was, for the single men, loners. They always had gambling in those places.

DB: Did they ever have one arm bandits, the slot machines?

McP: Well, let's see, the first one was in 1918.

DB: Where was that?

McP: I broke three of 'em in Wallace one night.

DB: What happened?

XF: Ha, ha, ha, ha.

McP: Don't ask me, I...there was Six Pistol Pete, he was packer there, and I was assistant ranger in Prichard. And we didn't have nothing to do this Saturday night. So we went over. One armed bandits. They had three of 'em in Sweet's Hotel.

I got to playing. And half of it...it was a nickel machine. Half of it was hickeyes. So you would spend it...they were no good except at...I broke one, and then two; I had both pockets full of nickels. I broke the three of 'em. That fellow there, oh, he was mad. They turned them to the wall. So Six Pistol and I we sorted out all the damn hickeyes we had. And, I took the nickels and turned them into money. And we went out on the town and had a good time. We come back and got out of the hotel and the next morning I tried the machines again and I couldn't get a damn thing.

XM: In the late 30s and the early 40s, my dad used to repair those slot machines.

McP: I don't know about the machine they had there. You give her a jerk like this and, by God, she'd pay every time. And I tell you, it didn't take any time at all before I had \$15 or \$20 in nickels and hickeyes in my pockets.

XF: Mac, did you know Molly B'Damned up here?

McP: No, I didn't. I knew Pissin' Jenny.

DB: Who was Pissin' Jenny? I'm sure that's a loaded question.

McP: I don't know who she was but she was from Deadwood, Colorado. I met her in Spokane when I was a kid. You heard of 'em, in the old western books. Especially Deadwood. She was a great gambler. The most she ever won in one night was \$31,000. The most she ever lost was \$150 some thousand. She didn't come out on top very strong.

XF: Was you here when Wyatt Earp and them was in the area?

McP: No, way before my time. Pissin' Jenny was in that category when I met her.

DB: How did you meet Pissin' Jenny?

McP: I was going out to help her, went out to put in a wheat crib for a friend of my father. They had a homestead out in Spokane. We went out there. So he took me out to the place. And you could ride the train so far, and then we had to walk quite a ways. And there was a blacksmith shop on the road, and Pissin' Jenny was married to this blacksmith. And he got the blacksmith to drive us from his place as far as he could. And that's when I met her.

DB: What was she doing?

McP: She was working. Blacksmith wife. Her heyday was past and gone.

XF: She was an older lady at the time you met her.

DB: Back in Prohibition days, two things, alcohol and prostitution. Alcohol, everybody made home brew, right?

McP: Well, not everybody. Everybody tried to make whiskey. A few made home brew, like dishwater. Oh, you'd get drunk enough if you'd drink it, too.

DB: How many people were successful at making the whiskey?

McP: Most all the tribe made some kind of poison. There was very few made good whiskey. Those that made good whiskey, it cost you.

DB: Back in the old days, how did they run prostitution in Wallace? Did they have houses or...just wide open?

McP: I don't know...had a line there.

DB: Did you say, "Had a line?"

McP: Had a line of cribs, what they call 'em. Rooms here, one, one, one, one, girls in all of them. That's what they called a line. Numbers was up overhanging in front.

XF: The more expensive ones.

DB: What did a crib look like?

McP: It's just, kind of a, like a crib.

DB: Was it frame, just a frame little building?

McP: Sure, that's what it was. Just like that door there. There'd be another one here and another one here, in the same building. Bunch of little rooms. Partitioned off where they done their business.

DB: Were they out on the street, or...?

McP: Mostly back in the alley. Have you been to Wallace?

DB: No, we're going to go tomorrow.

McP; Go this way and you'll pass that GJ Supermarket. Well, it was there, that's where the cribs were. Yeah.

DB: And how far away did people come to use these services?

McP: God only knows, I couldn't tell you.

XF: They had 'em in Wallace, Kellogg, Burke.

McP: Even in Murray.

DB: Did they ever have any floating houses in the rivers?

McP: Well, we didn't have enough water here. Nothing like that on the lake that I know.

XM: Well, they had some there at Enaville. The Snake Pit used to be.

McP: When they was putting that railroad up there. They had 'em. Bonzetti Saloon, that was kind of a wild place.

DB: That was Nellie's Saloon?

McP: Bonzetti.

DB: Do you remember any of the names of some of the madames? Older ones, respectable ones?

McP: Nell, and Grace, and Marie. It's hard to remember the names.

DB: How much could a lumberjack make in a month?

McP: Oh, if he was lucky, he'd make \$60.

DB: And how fast could he spend it in Wallace?

McP: There again. He gets into a card game, it'll go pretty damn fast. Up in the houses, that'd last two or three nights. In the barroom, if he drank Dick Smith's, it might last him for two or three days. If he treated, bought drinks, for the bar, it might not go so far.

DB: What do you mean by "Drank Dick Smith's?"

McP: Drink for yourself alone.

DB: How did they get that term?

McP: Dick Smith is supposed to be a guy who went and bought a bottle of whiskey and set in a room and drank it all by himself.

DB: Around these parts were different ethnic groups looked at differently? Like, were there jobs that only Chinese did?

McP: In this country there were no Chinese. Dutch Jake tried it once. Up in Murray, where there was gold.

DB: When was that?

McP: It was in the 1800s. Anyway, the Chinaman would work for practically nothing and the gold that they had there wasn't payin' so good, so Dutch Jake he goes out and says a bunch of Chinamen are going to work that ground. And they got up to Murray. He walked up, and they made Murray. They come up to Murray. They were all saying "Lottsie Lope, Lottsie Lope, Lottsie Lope." Lot of rope; they was going to hang the whole damn works. And they turned them around and run 'em out. After that they had no deadline down there, no Chinaman or Jap. And Dutch Jake, he had the Coeur d'Alene Hotel in Spokane. He didn't get back up either.

DB: Was he a mine owner?

McP: Well, he was promoter. He was a businessman, really. Back at the Coeur d'Alene Hotel, and of course, if he could do this mining, get the Chinamen to work for nothing, he'd clean up pretty good.

DB: Were there any blacks around these parts?

McP: No. Well, very few. One up in Delta. Old Nigger Jackson. There's a few over there. Old Nigger Jackson, he's the only one who got along with the people around here.

DB: What did he do?

McP: He was what you called retired, just sittin' there.

DB: Is that back when you first moved in here?

McP: Well, it was about 1917 or '19. He was there at Delta. Had a little cabin back off in the place. Little garden where he raised. Getting old.

DB: How about Italians, were there many of those around?

McP: Italians, Finlanders.

DB: What were the loggers?

McP: The loggers that hit this country were mostly from Wisconsin and Minnesota and in that country.

DB: Why did they move out here?

McP: Well, because there was better pay out here. Looking for, I don't know, you might call it adventure.

XF: Land of Golden Opportunity.

McP: Just a single population, had no home. At loose ends. If they didn't like it one place, they could grab and go off, pile off to any place that they'd want to.

DB: Back in the old days, did they ever initiate the new, greenhorn loggers? Did you ever hear any stories about that? Like sending them out for a skyhook or something like that?

XF: That's more in the newer times.

McP: Used to be, there was kind of a rough or tough man in a neighborhood, what they called a Bull of the Woods. He was

like to get out and get roaring drunk and fight and do everything else. There was a lot of them around.

DB: Do you remember any in particular?

McP: Oh, yes, once a man, Sheehey.

DB: What's the man's name again?

McP: Sheehey. Jim Sheehey, great big old guy. We called him Whisperin' Jim. He'd whisper, could just make this house tremble. And his snorin', by God, you could hear it for a mile. But anyway, he come in from the woods, and he'd whipped everyone, everyone knowed that. And a man said, "By God, Jim, there's a man, now, that can trim you." By God, there's no son of a gun like that ever walked." Well, they told him who he was, and where he was, so he got roaring drunk and he finally left there. And this fellow was sittin' out on the veranda, with 10 or 12 steps, like at the Snake Pit, and he was sittin' there. And Jim said, "I stepped up to him and said are you Mister So-and-So." He said, "Yes, I am." And Jim said, "Well you're a dirty damn son of a gun and I come up here to whip you." He said, "I didn't know anything more until I woke up in the hospital three days later." He said, "That fellow jumped up and hit me under the chin and knocked me plumb to the bottom of the damn steps."

DB: Ha. Ha. Ha.

McP: When they were drunk they were that kind of breed of cats. I used to like to hear that man talk. You could hear that man talk for two miles. He wasn't hollerin' either. When he got drunk he liked to get up and stretch and dance. Make those old slats rattle up and down.

DB: You talked about the Snake Pit, where is that?

XF: Enaville. A bar. First they had a tavern there was 1889. Josie's first bar.

McP: Built that when the railroad went to Murray. Over by the railroad bridge. My dad worked on that.

XF: Too bad Grandpa Baker's gone. He used to tell me the most fantastic stories about that place. That area and especially the Snake Pit.

DB: Did you ever hear any stories about any wood bosses?

McP: I wouldn't say that they were stories that were fit to be repeated in public.

DB: Give me one that's respectable.

McP; Well, you've heard of Paul Bunyan. And his blue ox. Well, this is about Paul Boulyan, a frenchman who worked at Rose Lake. And he was one of these guys, well he was the boss of everything. He thought he owned the damned country. I was working over here one day, and here was Paul. In fact, when I brought the dead man down there, I had a little trouble down there, I had to go out, and I had to be out. I was going to leave my horse with the Rose Lake Camp. All I needed was for it to be tied up, take the saddle off of it, water it and feed it. That day and the next day, but I got

back, and the guy didn't do it. Then they got the crust to turn around and send four or five men, eight head of horses in here to keep overnight. I turned 'em down. The next time they came around, I was mad, I was going to send 'em on, but there just happened to be a guy there that I knew. It wasn't their fault that they come, so I let them stay here. The next morning they paid me to get out. "How much do you want?" I said, "\$5 a head for men and horses alike." And they looked at me and they didn't have nothing. They shelled out enough anyway. They figured that's holding them up. They told Paul Boulyan. He said, "That damn Coeur d'Alene Houtlaw, they's all Houtlaw, every damn one of them Houtlaw, and the higher you go up the river, the worse the Houtlaw get, and that damned McPherson is right up at the top." Ha, Ha, Ha, Ha. Well, that's one of the old woods bosses.

DB: Were there ever any superstitions that lumberjacks and about work in the woods?

McP: Not many. Not much.

DB: Did they ever practice shivarees around here? For the ones that got married.

McP: Used to raise hell. Sit on the stove pipe, plug it up. Done everything in the book.

DB: Where did they do that?

McP: This wasn't so much in here. In fact I never knew. A fellow in Spokane did that.

DB: What did they used to do for a shivaree?

McP: Make a lot of wild noise, make 'em come out, and give 'em a treat.

DB: What's their treat?

McP: A drink of whiskey, a candy bar, if you was kids, or whatever it was. Had to come out and give 'em something, like trick or treat for little kids. About the same thing.

DB: Did you ever have...

(END OF TAPE 9; Side 1)