

Idaho Panhandle Oral History Project
October 20, 1979
Murphy/Barton

TAPE 6; Side 2

DB: ...the mill and then deliver them down to the mill?
FM: We picked up logs as far as 65 miles away from here, up in St. Joe River and also in the Coeur d'Alene River. We'd tow 'em...we may work up there a week or 10 days; sometimes two weeks, in the rivers. When we got a whole mess together, then we'd bring them all down the lake in one trip.

DB: This was all by steam boat, back in those days?
FM: Yea, back in those days.

DB: Did you have to wear any special kind of clothing, when you were working on the boats; or special kinds of boots, or anything?
FM: Cork shoes.
DB: Cork shoes?
FM: To work on the logs, you know.
DB: Did you do much actual running around on the logs?
FM: Oh God, yes. In fact, I used to be one of the fastest young fellows there ever was on the logs. I rolled with world champions and everything. Not in competition, but in exhibitions.

DB: What would you be doing, trying to put them into a boom, when you'd get out there on the logs, or...?
FM: Well, you got all these ropes to take care of, you got, from the skippels swing your boom in, you know. And you have to walk across and sometimes...three, four acres of that boom. You walk across there with a line on your shoulder, or a chain, or whatever you needed; tie 'em up then, probably, walk down the other side of the boom, you'd go roll it down so you get two ties on it. That was nice work. I'm...ee didn't have clothes then like we do now. The only thing we had to keep warm was leather and wool. We didn't have any of these thermal things. And, I tell you, I shivered and shaked and that; froze an'...

DB: Well, how did they sort out the logs, if there were a lot of logs coming down the chutes and flumes, into the lake? How would they keep track of the different logs, from different companies?
FM: Well, generally those were logged by a company. If they were logged by a different company, they had a scaler up at the top of the hill. He would scale it. Then when they got them down the lake they'd build a...

DB: Here why don't you draw it on here?
FM: Gimme the same one.
DB: Yea. Same page.
FM: When you want to sort those logs, we'd build a thing like this.

(BREAK IN TAPE)

OK, there'd be your boom of logs. This is a boom you want to sort. Now this, we'd have a pocket going off this way, and another pocket there, and...

DB: What's a pocket?

FM: Well, it confines, ah...well, it will be self-explanatory, in just a minute.

DB: Ok.

FM: Just like that. Now, say you...if you're sorting them by species, the logs would have an end-stamp on 'em, some of them would have a K, some of them would have...oh there's many, many brands.

DB: And, what would the anchor stand for, do you remember?

FM: Well, that was the old Coeur d'Alene Mill stamp. So if that stamp was on the end of the log, like this was the Coeur d'Alene pocket, you put that anchor in here. Now say there was a...

DB: What did the K stand for?

FM: K was the Winton. And then Diamond Joe was oh God...there was export. S I K was St. Maries Mill, and I've got...somewhere over at home I've got a little pamphlet of all those...

DB: Do these things come from those big sledges, with letters on the end?

FM: Yes, yes. They were end stamped. They also had a bark mark. Now, like the Coeur d'Alene Mill bark mark, along with this, the bark mark was chopped in with an axe. And, it was like this. Then the axe bark mark was the same thing only two more here, and then the old Post Falls Mill had a bark mark like this. And, Blackwell's...

DB: What's the difference between a bark mark and a stamp?

FM: Well, they used to put them both on. Because sometimes, especially if they come out of the Coeur d'Alene River...that sediment in there would...awful hard. They used to have to keep brushes on this sorting works here. Because these logs would come through here, and aim for these pockets...

DB: So there would be openings in this...?

FM: Well, this is a deck that men work on. Right here. In here. They they'd have to pull a log over and take a brush and scrub it to see who it belonged to.

DB: So these were all unsorted logs in here, and then they'd sort them out as they're going through?

FM: Yea. As they go through. Then these wind up each into a pocket here. Just like this, only smaller, see.

DB: What were these men's titles, here?

FM: Well, they were sorters.

DB: Sorters?

FM: Now when we used to drive these into a river, I've seen 30 miles of that river just solid with logs. Then it would

come out to the mouth of the river they'd have a big boom that swung over it. And it sheared all these into one pocket, and as it went down they had very many series of these, probably about, 10 to 12 series of these. Because there were so many logs, it might be 3-400 million feet.

DB: This back in the '30s or '20s? Before they had to shut down?

FM: Yea, it was back in the '20s. And '30s.

DB: Were there ever traffic jams in the river, trying to get through?

FM: You couldn't get through.

DB: You couldn't.

FM: Well, the river was plugged. Well, our big steamers and stuff, just plow through 'em, go over them. Kick them out of the way.

DB: What if someone was in front of you with a boat that was taking up room; how would you get around them, or would you just wait?

FM: You mean if he had a tow ahead of you?

DB: Yea.

FM: Well, if he had...these brails like this, when we'd come out, we'd have three, or four, sometimes five tied behind the boat.

DB: How wide would they be?

FM: Ninety to a 100 feet.

DB: So this would be 90 to a 100. And how long would they be?

FM: Ah-h, average, lets see...15...average about 700 feet. And, sometimes we had...well, depends on the year, the season, I had seen as many as a mile of those behind.

DB: But, usually, four to five you would say?

FM: About three.

DB: Three?

FM: That was loose logs. But today they have too many, they send two boats. This extra, what they call the helper boat. To help them around the bends. Of course, the rivers are...and I towed up there, there was farmers on that river, now it's all docks and summer homes, and this and that. They have to be very, very careful.

DB: How much timber could you haul in a good year? Did you measure it by the foot? This is back in the old days, with the steam.

FM: That's a broad question.

DB: Yea.

FM: I'll just give you an example. I had a little 45 foot steamer, which was a good boat, and we were towing from Ramsdale...no, Cherry Creek, which is about a distance...oh, about eight and a half miles up from the mouth of the river...and I and one man, towed four and a half million in one month, down that area.

DB: What time of the year was that?

FM: Well, well, basically Summer and Winter.

DB: Summer and Winter. And then, how were you paid for the timber, were you paid by...?

FM: We didn't buy the timber, we just moved it. And, the companies were paid by the 1,000, for moving it.

DB: How much were you paid, to move it, how's that arranged?

FM: Well, back in the early days I was getting \$.50 an hour.

DB: OK. It was an hourly wage.

FM: Hourly wage.

DB: Did you keep any of the lumber for...the timber...for yourself, for your own use?

FM: No. We were always just like a grocery boy delivering the groceries, belongs to you and that's what you do.

DB: OK. Back in the old days, you said that people started getting cars, right around in the '20s or so. Did you have a car at that time or...?

FM: Let's see. I gotta do some figuring. I think I had my first car in the early '20s.

DB: Before the cars came around, how did the people get around if they wanted to go to Spokane, or something like that?

FM: Well, they had electric trains, going through here. Come right on this dock, right over here, and meet the passenger boats. I've got...I wish...I've got a good picture of that too. The train unloading and the boats loading. And, back in those days.

DB: Speaking of historic photographs, do you have many historic photographs, or old ones? What we are trying to do is...?

FM: Yes, I have...I know...I bought me a camera, when I first started steamboating. And, I took a lot of pictures of the lake. And I will tell you something else, that'll fool you. You heard the remark..."Oh boy I wish I could have seen this lake 50, 60 years ago, before the white man ruined it." The place is 10 times prettier today.

DB: Why is that?

FM: Because that 1910 Fire gone through here, and burned all the trees and everything down. No, the lake is much prettier today, than it was 50, 60 years ago.

DB: So you have photographs from 1920s onward?

FM: Oh, somewhere, somewhere in that...maybe not '20s. But, I'd say from '25 on, I think I have 'em.

DB: Do you know anybody else who has historic photographs, or old photos?

FM: Yes. I've siced three guys on this fellow, and I hate to...

DB: Well, I won't...we won't be...

FM: Brian Dennis, he worked on the passenger boats. I never worked passenger boats, I always worked tug boats. But he worked....in fact, I am the oldest active, continuous skipper on the lake today.

DB: Who is the next oldest? Are there many more around?

FM: Yes. There's a lot of them. But, I started out here...some of the old skippers around yet, but they quit 20, 30 years ago.

DB: Did most people in this area work in the logging and in the milling?
FM: In those days, primarily that was it.
DB: Were there any other mining or anything, in this area?
FM: Well of course, up in Wallace-Kellogg, yes.
DB: Yea. But I mean just around here.
FM: No, no, no mining.
DB: How did the people get information from the outside, did they get mail very often?
FM: Oh yea, we had trains running, freight trains and...in old Coeur d'Alene Mill we'd get logs in on--by train. Right over here it was.
DB: Were there many farmers in this area?
FM: Yea.
DB: What kind of crops were they growing?
FM: Well, just a little bit, in this area here...15 miles away from here...
DB: Which direction?
FM: That would be south, south-west. Back in the Worley, Rockford country. That was all wheat. Now, the little farms up this way, they would be a ranching or cattle.
DB: That would be north-west?
FM: Yea, ya. North or north-west. And even east. But your big, your flatland farming was down in this area. Specialized in wheat and big field crops.
DB: What was considered the best jobs to have around Coeur d'Alene, back in those old days?
FM: Anything you could get.
DB: Anything you could get. Would you say times were pretty good for people or pretty hard?
FM: I'll tell you one thing, when a man was a good man he could almost always find work; and if he was no good he wouldn't find work. It was different than nowadays. The guy goes up to the union hall, they ship him out on the job whether he's any good or not.
DB: Were there ever attempts to unionize men working on the waters here?
FM: Yes.
DB: Did it work out?
FM: I think it did, for a little while. I don't know whether they unionized or not, but I'll tell you one damn thing I'm not.
DB: Did you haul any ore on your boat?
FM: No.
DB: No. Did anyone...?
FM: Not ore, I hauled rocks, well, gravel, sand, and cement.
DB: When you were working on your boat, and something broke down how would you fix it? I mean how would you get replacement parts?
FM: Well, usually we'd fix it before it broke down.

DB: So you kept your engines in pretty good repair? What were some of the things that would go wrong constantly with steam engines, the things to watch for?

FM: Almost nothing. No, I had a follower come loose once, I was up on the St. Joe River.

DB: What's a follower?

FM: Well, you'd call it a piston. It's a cylinder about this big. And it started clacking, you know, so I shut her down...we were half way up the...we were about a fourth of the way up the St. Joe River. God, I'd seen where the thing would just wiggle loose enough on the--you'd call it a crankshaft or connecting rod--and we tried to drive that damn thing on it. And so we thought we'd have to take it out and flag down a section crew when they went by and send to St. Maries and see if we could get a press and see if we could get it back in. And I had a big thing up like this, oh, it weighed about a 100 pounds, maybe a 120 pounds. And, I had it sitting on the rail and I just picked it up like this and dropped it on the rail and moved the end of it. Went back, and put it together and took off.

DB: Ha-ha-ha. That's good. What kind of tools would you keep around, a steam ship all the time...just to keep it in repair?

FM: Oh, pipe wrenches, and back in those days your connecting rod bolts were about that big around, up to this big.

DB: About three to five inches?

FM: Oh yea. From two--and a half to four inches.

DB: OK.

FM: And you generally had a blacksmith make you one with the right kink in it so you could reach in there and do this work.

DB: Was there a special blacksmith to do boat stuff?

FM: Oh, any good blacksmith. I still got some. No, I love steam, it's coming back. You watch and see.

DB: So, you had the pipe wrenches, and what other kinds of things?

FM: Well, any normal...you didn't have much wrench work to do on a steam engine. Ah, other than maybe to repair your pumps, one or two pumps, stuff like that.

DB: Where did you get parts if something did break down?

FM: Made them.

DB: You made them all. Did you stay with steam longer than the other operators?

FM: I stayed with it until it was gone.

DB: So that was in the early '30s?

FM: Yea, I'd say so. Well, I quit steam boat. I got married in '34. And I quit the steam boats in about '35 or '6. 1936. And then I went back in the '40s, to help them out.

DB: How has Coeur d'Alene developed, since you been here? How many people, would you say were here when you were a boy?

FM: About 5-6,000. It's developed too damn much, let me put it that way.

DB: Aha. What do you think has caused that development? What kinds of things have happened?

FM: It's a lovely place to live. And I'll tell you one thing, there is 10 California people right here in this city, to one native. Today. And I don't blame them, I don't blame them one damn bit. My God, I pick up, I take a lot a people on the lake, with me. I'd be loading up a barge, or something on the lake and people drive up. If they seem interested, I'll go up and talk to them. I say "I'm going up the lake for so many hours, you folks are welcome to go along with me, if you want to." Well, I'll break this down to one story. This was some people from Las Vegas. Man, his wife and two little boys. I was loading up a barge of lumber. And they...the kids seemed so interested, and she seemed so interested in it, you know. They'd watch me when I brought a truckload of lumber and dump on it, you know. Between trucks, I went up, and I started talking to 'em. And I told her, I'll be out maybe six or eight hours, and I'll--going up--I'll cook you dinner, and mix you a drink, or something, you know. It rang a bell with her, right now; but he was--oh, he was all dolled up, with a tie and everything. He says, "How much it cost?" Coming from Vegas, I can imagine thinking that way. I said, "Nothing." Then he thought there was a gimmick. Then I told him, "No." I said, "I'm making this run, and I'd be very happy to have you folks go along, and it won't cost you anything." And so, he was still spooky. She reached around, gets ahold of his necktie like that, and she said, "You know something? I and the boys are going. Are you going with us?" He-he-he. So he went. And he turned out to be a hell of a fine guy. Got up there, he...they'd been travelling, she said for five weeks. And you know, you don't get much exercise. Jeez, he pitched in, he helped unload, he helped the crew up there, he...felt like...you know, it felt good for him to move around a little bit. I let the kids, wheel the boat up the lake. And that tickled the hell out of them. And, I cooked dinner for 'em. So we landed that night. And she gets off, and grabs the same necktie, she says, "You know something? We'd been travelling for five weeks, hitting all the high spots, and this was the highlight of our whole trip. And it didn't cost us a dime."

DB: That's good. Speaking of highlights, what did people in the old days do for fun, entertainment, back here in Coeur d'Alene?

FM: Well, they used to dance a lot.

DB: Which dance halls did they use?

FM: Oh. Many of them, most of 'em are all gone now. That's before liquor come in.

DB: Do you remember any of the names of the dance halls and where they were?

FM: Well. Yea. There was the Eagles Hall, KC Hall, Best Land, oh...

DB: Were they in the downtown area here?

FM: Some of 'em. St. Maries is the town that had the dance halls. You could dance five nights a week in that town. That's before Prohibition. Repeal. Oh, we used to love to dance.

DB; Where did people get their alcohol back then, during the Prohibition days? Were there different kinds of moonshiners?

FM: You're damn right. Ha-ha.

DB: He-he-he.

FM: There was one--some of it was lousy. But there is a family come in here, in the Dust Bowl days, well, from Ken..... They come in from Virginias or somewhere in that area. And a whole tribe of 'em come here. And the old couple were just mighty fine people. And they bought a little old farm, a deserted farm, up in the end of the lake there. Two months after they were there, I tell you, if you put out a cigarette butt out in the middle of the field, it would look like a saw log they had it so clean. And they made rye whiskey, which this is. And, so they were kind of spooky, you know. So I landed the...I was in the Pinecat...so I pulled in there one night, thought I'd buy some vegetables, or something. Little fellow took a liking to me, and he said, "Would you like a sip of good whiskey?" Well, he got me a little glass, and it was just like drinking wine. It was the nicest whiskey I ever drank in my life. And I said, "I know you're making whiskey here." But I said, "I don't know if you want to sell me any. I'd like to have some." Well, by that time he'd got me all figured out that I was alright, you know. He said, "I'll tell you one thing." He said, "We charge \$8.00 a gallon, for our whiskey. And you can buy moonshine anywhere for \$5.00." I says, "I don't want moonshine, I want your whiskey." And that was the finest whiskey I ever drank in my life. It's better than any of the stuff they make now. The old couple were fine people. But boy, that tribe they got out, they settled on a few little farms around. And they would have a shooting scrape, shoot up two or three of them, you know.

DB: Well, is there a difference, let's say between imported Canadian booxe and the booze that was made around here? How would you compare the two of those?

FM: Well, you mean this modern whiskey?

DB: No I mean, back then, in the old days.

FM: The moonshine.

DB: Hm-hm.

FM: I never drank Canadian moonshine. I drank a lot...no I didn't drink too much moonshine. I drank homebrew a lot. Not a lot.

DB: Who made that?

FM: Everybody.

DB: Everybody. What about gambling, what did people gamble?

FM: Well, they had these little places up along the St. Joe River, one at St. Joe, couple at St. Maries. There were pool halls. They call 'em tobacco stores then. Well, I'll tell you a story about...I landed at St. Maries one night. ~~I never gambled; I pulled in one night, and I saw...I knew~~ the guy who owned this place. He was a man who never touched a drop of liquor in his life, he was a very honorable person, but he was a very shrewd gambler. He'd sit around and gamble with lumberjacks all night and just take a few dollars off them. So this night I was there and this little guy walked in there. And, oh God...he was dressed in a suit--spotless. And a little fellow, about my size. He was a dandy, I'll tell you. So he sat around, watched the game a few minutes and then he says, "Gentlemen! Would you mind if I joined you?" It was a poker game. And old Harry says, "Well, if you have \$5.00." There's chips. Fellow laid out \$5.00. Got his chips and he sit down and start playing. He was an actor. Never win. Face is getting longer, sad, you know. Heh. Back...this is back in the Depression time, when a dollar is a dollar, see. I stood there and watched, just because I just had kind a hunch of something spooky. So did old Harry.

DB: This is in the old steam boat days?

FM: Yes, yes. And, so finally this guy put in about \$75.00 in this game. And these lumberjacks, you know...Harry knew something was going on, but these lumberjacks, "Oh, we got a patsy here." Pretty quick, the worm turned, just took him a short time to clean them out. Gets up and he said, "Oh, thank you gentlemen." Takes off out the door. Later I said, "Harry, how in the hell did you let that guy do that?" He said, "I knew he was a slicker when he walked in there." He said, he said, "I thought I would find out what made him that way." He says, "You know something, I didn't." Ha-ha-ha.

DB: He-ha-he. Oh boy.

FM: What time is it?

DB: It's getting on.

FM: Well, I'm not hurting too bad.

DB: OK. Good. What about prostitutes, where did people go for prostitutes, back in those days?

FM: Well. On the river at St. Maries it was famous. 'Cause it backed up all the logging country, you know. And those loggers would go out and they'd spend most of the Winter,

and stuff, in the woods and they'd get off maybe once a month sometimes. Well these, these gals lived in float houses all right along the river. Just above the main docks, at St. Maries.

DB: On the east bank...or the north and south bank?

FM: South bank.

DB: South bank?

FM: It would be just...you been to St. Maries?

DB: No.

XM: I have.

~~FM: Well, you know where the bridge is across the river?~~

XM: Hm.

FM: Well, as you cross going from here, it had been just up river a little ways. All along that bank up to the St. Maries River. And, I used to bring those tows down past there, you know. O course, I was a kid then. And they had one up there, she was a real famous old gal. I'll tell you, those lumberjacks'd come in, and they'd give her all their money. They'd say, "Gimme \$2.00, \$10.00. I'm going uptown to have a good time," or something. Then they'd come back and she'd give 'em the money back. She was a famous prostitute.

DB: So she was a banker? She'd take care of the money?

FM: Well, but she was very...I think she was very...I know, she was a very honorable person. Because, I'd be riding a boom of logs down by her boat house. And the currents were on, we'd slide right alongside her boathouse, you know. She'd say: "Sonny, you look awful dry." She'd say: "Come in." She'd give me a bottle of homebrew, or something like that, you know.

DB: Remember her name, by any chance?

FM: Yes. Her name was Nellie, she was al....

(END OF TAPE 6; Side 2)