

Idaho Panhandle Oral History Project
Interview with Fred Murphy
October 20, 1979
Coeur d'Alene Marina
Interviewed by David Barton
Questionnaire Information

FM = Fred Murphy
DB = David Barton

Tape 7; Side 1

FM: ...one of her customers or something, you know. Well, well, she was a very honorable person.

DB: You say she'd take \$2 or \$10 from the loggers and then...?

FM: Well, she'd take their whole payroll, and then give them what they want to go uptown and spend. And then, when they got off from the drunk--come back, she'd give it to 'em. What they had left.

DB: Is that a common practice; was that a common practice?

FM: Ah, I don't think it was, 'cause up in the early days in St. Joe--now, this is just before my time--they had Farrell up there, and that was a wild town.

DB: That was a logging town, right?

FM: They'd get a lumberjack in there, and roll him and shove him out the back door, into the river. Happened many time.

DB: When you were a young man, up there, how many prostitutes do you think there were in those float boats?

FM: Oh, I really don't know. Actually, Nellie is the only one I ever know. I knew there were a lot more there. She was kind of an old grandma to me at that time, you know.

DB: When did they start petering out; I mean when did they...?

FM: Well, she lasted for a long time. Believe it or not I saw her on the street not only 10--15 years ago.

DB: I see.

FM: She was an old lady when I used to..

DB: How about down in Wallace and Kellogg and that area?

FM: I have no connection with that.

DB: Yea. I was just wondering. It used to be legal down there, wasn't it?

FM: Well, let's say it wasn't illegal.

DB: It wasn't illegal. Why is that? I've heard a few stories.

FM: I don't know. I don't know. I tell you, it brought more damn money into that town.

DB: You talking about St. Maries?

FM: Yes. Those lumberjacks, up there in the mountains, you know, come into town having a little fun--if they didn't have those gals there they'd head for Spokane or something.

DB: It's just been recently that they have done some kind of legislation, to make it illegal, isn't it?

FM: Oh, I don't know.

DB: We are also interested in different kind of ethnic groups and how people viewed ethnic groups. Were there any Chinese that lived around here?

FM: Very, very, few. Very few, and when I was a kid, going to school in this town there was only one black family in town. He was a janitor for the school.

DB: What did they Chinese used to do; the ones that were here?

FM: Well there one, he was cook for the man who owned the Coeur d'Alene Mill. He scared me to death when I was a little kid about...I used to bring him down butter and buttermilk. And Jeez, the first time I come down and walk in that kitchen and saw that guy and there he has a big old butcher knife in his...he had a queue too. I'd never seen a Chinese. But he was a hell of a nice guy.

DB: Were there many Italians in this area?

FM: Lots of them.

DB: Was there any difference in the kinds of work that different ethnic groups did; like would Italians do one kind of work, Swedes do another?

FM: Well I'll tell you, Swedes are sawmill people. They like to pile boards, and work in the mills.

DB: How about Norwegians?

FM: Well they're the same thing.

DB: Now how about Italians; do they do anything special?

FM: Well, they wave their arms a lot when they talk. He-he.

DB: I see.

FM: But, oh, I don't know you find a little of everything, I think you find lot of Italians in restaurant work and railroad work, and...

DB: Why were there never any blacks up around these parts.

FM: I don't know. We have very few now. Even now we have very few. The ones we do have are people from foreign countries of Africa. But they're coming in more and more. There's, so far, or, we've learned how to live with them.

DB: Was there any kind of initiation; a kind of an in-house type of initiation they used to do to boatmen; the young boatmen getting in? Things like send the boatman off to, send a young one off to get a skyhook, or something like that?

FM: Oh, there's always little jokes and stuff, but no. There's always a lot of that stuff.

DB: Was it considered to be a dangerous line of work, working on the boats?

FM: No.

DB: No. But...

FM: We lost very few people, and hurt very few people.

DB: But it was hard work, I take it?

FM: Well, back in the earlier days, it was tough work. I tell you, you take in the cold seasons--and March was the worst--you'd be wet, you know. You'd be back in those

booms, wet above your knees, and just a pair of cork shoes, or something on you know. And we'd have wool pants and stuff like that, and wool jackets. And you can keep warm in wool. Now, nobody'd do that anymore.

DB: Would people complain very much, on working on the boats? Or would they just long-suffer.

FM: They all loved it.

DB: They loved it.

FM: You betcha'. You would always fill your work crew. I tell you why, because in my business there's no two days alike.

No two days alike. Every day is something different. Different adventure, different. And on Monday I gotta' go over and pull dead heads off a 600, 700 foot water line. So I can drive piling along side of it, so they can bring a dredge in there, and dredged it without tearing the water line up too much. And things like that. It's an interesting work.

(BREAK IN TAPE)

DB: Sixteen to One Bay, you were saying.

FM: Yea, yea. It's just up on the south end of the lake. And all the gay ladies up in Harrison, you know. They'd had a good season or somethin', they wanted to have a vacation. There were 16 of them up in Harrison at that time. So, they gets a big fishing boat to take them down to this little bay there which wasn't named at that time. So, they hired one guy to go along and cut wood and build fires and do the camp chores and stuff. So that's how it got its name. Sixteen to One. He-he.

DB: Ha-ha-ha. That's great. That's great. When was that, back in the '20s?

FM: At least that far back. Maybe '30s.

(END OF TAPE 7; SIDE 1)