

W. T. CARTER CATON
Interview 005a
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Marge Shepherd, Interviewer
Patsy Colbert, Transcriber

ABSTRACT: In this interview with Marge Shepherd, W.T. Carter Caton reminisces about growing up in Camden and working for the Carter Lumber Company until 1970 (with a short stint in Oregon during the late 1920's). He remembers helping the logging railroad convert from narrow gauge to standard gauge and refinishing some furniture for one of the Carter daughters.

Marge Shepherd (hereafter MS): Tell us about purchasing the first mill.

Carter Caton (hereafter CC): The first sawmill Mr. Carter owned was a portable mill that his father owned. Mr. Carter had a horse and he auctioned the horse off for \$35 and he bought his father's sawmill for \$35. Then he would move the mill to any place anybody wanted any lumber. It would be cheaper to move the mill than it was to have the timber brought to the mill. Then he would sell the lumber for whatever he could get, potatoes, corn or anything the people would offer him.

MS: Okay and then tell me about the time they were going to make the roads. When they were going to cut the right-of-way for the roads, you said they went out to cut the roads from Bonham to where?

CC: After a few years Mr. Carter and his brother, Ernest, Mr. W.T. and his brother Ernest, and my father bladed the roads from Pennington down to Bonham Texas. They got lost on the road and Mr. W. T. Carter asked his brother Ernest, says "where in the hell are we?" He said, "we are lost by God."

MS: Okay.

CC: Then on this trip, the wild pigeons were so thick during that time that it was black in the sky.

MS: It would be like night then wouldn't it when the pigeons flew over My goodness! Did they kill them at any time? Did they ever kill any of them?

CC: I don't imagine. I remember when there were wild pigeons.

MS: You can remember that too?

CC: Yea.

MS: My goodness, okay.

CC: They had to cut the timber before they could build a house.

MS: Well that was a good reason. That is a good reason, all right. Now would you tell me when you were born Mr. Carter Caton? Where were you born?

CC: Where was I born? I was born in Memphis, Texas in Hall County, 1892. Mr. W. T. Carter, the man who owned the mill named me Carter himself.

MS: So that is how you got the name Carter?

CC: Yes.

MS: And how old were you when you came to Camden?

CC: Five years old.

MS: Five years old, okay. And then you stayed there how many years?

CC: I stayed there until 1970, then that Champion bought Mr. Carter out and he had everybody to move. 1970 was the deadline so they sold all the houses. During the time people were moving, somebody stole every bathtub, every window and door out of the houses. Nobody never tried to catch them. They stole all the bells off the locomotives; they had ten of them. And they stole all the bells and everything they could knock off.

MS: How terrible. Well would you tell me something about when you first started going to work? What did you do when you first started, when you were old enough to go to work, what did you do? What kind of work did you do?

CC: When they first started they had narrow gauge roads, you see, for the logging department. They bought the first [unintelligible] for standard gauge in 1905 from a concern named Porter. And my brother and I helped make the railroad a standard gauge for them. We just had to move one rail. And as they pulled the spikes, we'd pick them up and put them on the end of the ties, so when they shoved the rails over the men wouldn't have to dig around and find them. They would have the spikes right there. That was some of my first work. I was quite young and we got fifty cents a day. Then when I first started to work in the logging department, I pulled the drum on the skidder. They had a full line skidder. And then from that I started to run an engine. I been with the railroad for a good many years until after my daddy retired, I was timekeeper in the logging department until about 1922. Then I worked in the office as a timekeeper until 1923 or 24. Then I went to Oregon and worked for the [unintelligible] timber company until the depression. That was about five years. I came back to Texas in 1931 and I never would go back. But I have a son, a daughter, and an ex-wife in Oregon. They wanted to go back but I didn't, so I stayed. I stayed [unintelligible] in Camden for 35 years. Then I did some painting and sheetrock work and laid tile for a good many years. Then I started working on furniture. Mrs. Carol, that is one of the Carter girls, she had a beautiful old

home. It burned in 1958 and they salvaged quite a bit of furniture and she wanted me to refinish everything that was saved. I worked on it many a year and I made \$7,000. And she didn't want anybody to do that work; she wanted me. If she had papering to do, I was the one that did her papering. Anything she had to do around the home, well she wanted me.

MS: Well you probably did it so well, that is why she wanted you to do it.

CC: Some of the family wanted her to move all this furniture to Houston and have it fixed there, but she said she had a man to do the job and she didn't care how much money he made. So I bid on the job four times because it was insurance, you see. Every time I bid, she said I wasn't high enough. So I put the price on it.

MS: But you finally got it all finished for her.

CC: I got it all finished and she was tickled to death.

MS: Well great. Well then did she build the house back?

CC: No, they built a house but not like the one that burned. I had her picture but I've given everything away to everybody.

MS: Well let's stop now and see how our time is.

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MS: Mr. Caton would you give me the name of your father and mother?

CC: My father's name was Augustus Brunette Caton, born in Alabama. And my mother was Bonnie Shipp [unintelligible] Shelby, raised in Mt. Vernon, Texas.

MS: Okay and you had how many sisters and brothers, now? Four brothers?

CC: I had three sisters.

MS: Three sisters and how many brothers?

CC: Four brothers.

MS: Four brothers, and in your immediate family, you have how many sons and daughters?

CC: I had one son named Hugon Caton. He is in Hillsboro Oregon, works for a bank. I have a daughter that's named Mary Patricia Caton and her name is Mrs. W.J. Appley now. They live on Mt. Hood, Mt. Hood, Oregon, that is right near there. Rhododendron, Oregon. Four years ago when the snow was melting so fast in the mountains, they were

living right about ten minutes drive from Mt. Hood and the water got to rushing down those mountains, and bringing the rocks, big boulders and everything, and my daughter... my son-in-law worked as an electrician on Mt. Hood and he's from Switzerland. He told her they had better get out, and she didn't want to go, but finally loaded a few things in the car and left. They went back about 2 hours to see how things were and there wasn't a thing left, not even the foundation. So they lost everything they had. But the manager at the lodge on Mt. Hood where they do the skiing told them to move into the lodge for one year and everything would be free. And he gave them a home to stay until they could build a new house.

END OF INTERVIEW