

JAMES KAY HENSON

Interview 135a

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Self-Interview

Dorothy Farley, Transcriber

Retyped by Courtney Lawrence

ABSTRACT: In this self-interview upon his retirement from Temple-Eastex, Kay Henson reminisces about his job over the years. He worked 40 years, beginning as a brush cutter on a survey crew. He eventually moved up to survey crew chief, Special Inspector, Chief Inspector, Assistant Manager of the Land Department, and finally, Manager of the Land Department. Mr. Henson also discussed the changes in survey technology throughout his career.

Kay Henson is relating his work experience upon retiring from Temple-Inland, May 1, 1991.

My name is James Kay Henson. I went to work for Houston Oil Company in April of 1951. This period of time also happened to be during the Korean conflict. Several of us were sweating a recall to active duty, which did not happen.

I went to work as a brush cutter in a survey crew. I did that for six months, I suppose. That is probably the only period of time when I worked for the company during the last 40 years that some mornings I dreaded getting up and going to work. Because going to work in April that carried us on through the hot months of summer, and brush cutting in a survey crew is probably the hardest job that the company has, physically. Because for one thing, they are still brushing out survey lines exactly like they did 150 years ago. They do it with a machete, an axe, and the only relief they have is the chain saw to assist them in cutting the bigger trees. But then you have to carry the thing, so the good is partially outweighed by the bad. Back when I first went to work, we used an old crosscut saw and carried it along with us. We took the handle off one end of the thing so you could drag it through the woods without hanging it on the trees. Consequently, when you got ready to use it, somebody had to use the end without a handle on it. That was a job that was probably dreaded by most of those guys in the crew.

After about six months, I transferred over to what we called an inspection crew and went to work over in Newton for Harold Smith. We were doing cruising of land lines and developing history on the company's land through interviews with people in the community. It was very interesting work and I guess that was the beginning of the time I really began to enjoy working for the company. Since that time, I don't remember a morning that I got up dreading to come to work. I have always enjoyed the job I was doing and the people I was associated with.

At this time the surveying profession was working with the type of equipment that was in use probably in the late 1800's--1870, 1880 or 1890--that was a big old compass and a chain and this chain is a steel measuring tape. The original chain that the land was surveyed with was a link chain. It was made up of wire links that were two-tenths of a

vara long—each link was. These old gunther chains, they call them, would wear where the two joints come together creating a little slack in each one of the joints. When you multiply that by the times two-tenths vara would go into a mile, then you have a chain that stretched an inch or so for each time you stick it in the ground. The work was trying to follow in the steps of the original surveyor and using the compasses and the chains was the most efficient way of trying to do it at that time.

As some of these old corners were located, we needed a more accurate method of surveying, so Houston Oil Company was one of the first major companies in this area to adopt the use of transit and steel tape in their surveying capabilities. It increased the accuracy of our work tremendously over the old compass and chain type of work.

As we come on down through the years, we started using the theodolite in the place of the transit because it was much more accurate. But we were still using the old chain method of surveying. That was the next area of our work that needed to be upgraded. We did that with electronic distance meters that we attached to the top of the theodolite surveying instruments. This is an electronic measuring device that is absolutely accurate. The only chance for human error is when you transfer the distances from the meter into the field book. It improved our accuracy tremendously. We have now evolved to the point where we are using a total station that is a built-in theodolite and electronic distance meter to measure the distances and it improved our accuracy even more.

As technology advanced, we have got now a situation or a system that is called a Global Positioning System whereby we bounce radio waves off satellites that are hung out 2700 miles in space. They are bounced back to Earth to two different locations to establish a distance between those two stations. As an example, when we were doing the old compass surveying when I first went to work for the company, if we had an error of closure of one in one thousand – that is for each thousand varas of line that you would survey, you would have a one vara error. We were pretty happy with it. Then as we moved along in the transit surveying, we began to get one in 3,000 and one in 4,000 which was better--much better at that time.

When we moved into the theodolite with the EDM attached to it, we increased our accuracy to one in 10,000 and one in 15,000, which we are awfully proud of. As we moved into the total station unit, our accuracy improved to one in 75,000 and one in 100,000. This was almost unheard of in the past. But with the new Global Positioning System, it is not unusual to have one in a million and that is just almost perfect surveying. Of course, there never will be perfect surveying due to the curvature of the Earth. Heat and humidity are other factors that affect the measurement of land. That kinda covers the surveying end of the job that I have had.

Move back now to the 1950's – early 50's. I was working for the Houston Oil Company, which was our predecessor in title to Eastex, which is the portion of the Temple-Eastex merger in 1974. Houston Oil Company was formed by John Henry Kirby to develop the mineral interests in East Texas. At that time they had a cutting contract for timber on the Eastex lands or Houston Oil Company lands with Kirby Lumber Company and the Houston Oil Company or their later created Southwestern Settlement and Development Corporation. We did not have any use for the surface estate due to the fact that we were not marketing timber. They had no reason to want to develop or make the lands more productive as far as timber was concerned. At one time in the early 1900's Houston Oil Company tried to give their surface estate on their nearly million acres of

land back to the state of Texas and retain the minerals themselves--just an outright gift. The state of Texas refused to accept it without the minerals. So that deal fell through and we wound up owning the surface estate and the mineral estate. As I said before, Houston Oil Company organized a company known as Southwestern Settlement and Development Corporation for the sole purpose of trying to sell off the surface estate. They carried on a very aggressive sales program, advertising in the eastern and northern papers to try to get people to come to East Texas to settle in the land of opportunity. They would sell you a piece of land almost anywhere you wanted it and almost any shape you wanted it. Their ultimate desire was to try to sell it all, which they did not do. They sold some 300 to 350 thousand acres in 5, 10, 15, 20 acres at a time to anybody that came down the pike that wanted to buy some. They financed it themselves and were very liberal with people who got behind in their notes or whatever. This program, of course did not produce the sales that they anticipated so they wound up with about 650 thousand acres of land that they needed to do something with.

In the early 1950's Houston Oil Company started negotiating with TIME, Inc., to effect a merger whereby the company that was formed from this merger would be East Texas Pulp and Paper. They were going to build a paper mill at Evadale, which they did and it went on stream in 1953, I believe. At that time the contract with Kirby Lumber Company had run out and our lands were free of any encumbrances as far as timber growing was concerned. They put on an aggressive program to get the lands back in production to produce pine timber for the paper mill at Evadale.

They began to hire graduate foresters, Dick Townsend being one of the first ones. He set up a program to make our lands much more productive, which was very successful in later years.

From a personal standpoint my evolution with the company began in a survey crew cutting brush, and it didn't take me long to realize that wasn't what I wanted to do the rest of my life. I needed to do something to better my chances of trying to move up the ladder with the company and get to the point where I had enough responsibility to make the job interesting and financially rewarding.

I, at that time, envisioned myself in the future as being a party chief in a survey crew. Which, of course, I did in 1953, become a party chief in a survey crew, which was stationed in Silsbee. I worked in that position for a couple of years and in 1955, moved back to our headquarters building in Jasper and went to work in our engineering department as Special Inspector doing drafting work and making decisions about the location of boundary lines. I was doing a little inspection work and beginning working with attorneys in preparing maps and historical data for litigation. At that time, we had a lot of people who were still of the opinion that they could go out and homestead on company land and take away 80 or 160 acres from the company. They have been able to do this in the past due to the lack of interest in preserving the surface estate. The Kirby Lumber Company did the same thing and they were another major landowner in our area. I guess they did not feel like it was worth the effort to have people on salary strictly looking after their land. They could afford to lost 80 or 160 acres occasionally when the land was worth 2 or 3 dollars an acre.

I worked in the Jasper office until 1957 and then went over into the Newton district as a District Inspector. At that time, I became more involved in litigation and historical evaluation of company lands.

In 1962 I moved back to Jasper due to the fact that they had closed the Newton office because of some political problems that we had over there. I continued to work in the Jasper office as a Special Inspector, doing any kind of projects that came down the pike that they needed somebody to do. This involved surveying, land litigation, historical data, public relations – most anything they felt like I could handle I had the opportunity to do and I enjoyed every day of it.

In 1970 I was made Chief Inspector over four other inspectors in the area at that time and still the major portion of the job being public relations, litigation, preserving historical data, maintaining contact with the public in light of tenants, timber depredations, land claims, etc.

In 1974 at the time of our merger with Temple Industries to form Temple-Eastex, I was Chief Inspector and retained that position through the merger.

In 1975 or possibly early 1976, Mr. W. A. Eddy who was manager of the land department at the time, retired and his job was taken by Mr. R. P. Hicks who was assistant manager of the land department. At that time, I was promoted to the assistant manager of the land department in charge of all the inspectors and surveying crews at that time, including the Temple crews that were acquired at the merger.

In 1982 or possibly '83, Mr. R. P. Hicks retired and I was made manager of the land department in charge of the 1,350,000 acres of land and four survey crews. I remained in this position until I retired on May 1, 1991 after 40 years and 28 days of service for the company that I enjoyed being associated with. I liked all the people I ever worked with and worked for. I don't recall that I had any major problems with any body or any company policies. I woke up every morning excited and raring to go to work. I see this company today only from the eyes of a person who has been involved in land problems and not associated with the production of timber. But from my position, I see this as a very viable, exciting company to be associated with. Through the leadership we have today, I am convinced that this company will grow and prosper, making life better for the people who work for it. I suppose if you could say I had any regrets, it would be that I did not or was not able to continue my employment with the company.

END OF INTERVIEW