

Arthur C. “Pat” Beale
Interview 052a
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Sheila Billingsley, Interviewer
Retyped by Elaine Lawrence

Abstract: In this interview with Sheila Billingsley, former firebrick salesman Arthur C. “Pat” Beale remembers his time as a salesman calling on the forest products industry in East Texas. Mr. Beale sold firebricks, primarily for kilns, to Kurth mills and to the Temple mills in Diboll. He explains the use of firebricks and kilns and details the process of manufacturing lumber, from raw tree to finished product.

Sheila Billingsley (hereafter SB): Pat, when were you born?

Arthur C. “Pat” Beale (hereafter PB): I was born in Dallas on May 15, 1911.

SB: I understand that you spent some time in East Texas, when was that?

PB: In later years, beginning in 1938, I started selling firebricks – more specifically known as refractories. Firebrick, of course, are those clay products – ceramic products – that are required to control heat or fire. There are very few things that are made today that somewhere along the preparation or the manufacture of the product – from the raw product to the finished – heat is not required. Sometimes it’s only in the form of steam power but, in every case, the heat has to be controlled. Some of that heat may be as low as four or five hundred degrees up to three thousand degrees, but it’s controlled generally by refractories and there are a lot of different types.

I sold primarily the standard or fundamental type of fire brick and in East Texas, particularly what we’re interested in today, the primary industries there that used it were the wood industries – in other words, the ones that made the lumber from the standing tree on to the finished “one-by-four,” “two-by-four” or whatever sized lumber you wanted.

Also in the oil industry, the smaller refineries over there – and the bigger ones – used a lot of heat and it has to be controlled in those refineries. In the early days of the oil industry, the refineries were not too big and were not complicated. They were simple. I can think of no other big use. There were a lot of cotton gins at the time, run by steam, but they used very few refractories.

The beginning industry in East Texas was the sawmill industry or the lumber industry. You have several big concerns today that are still operating. One – the big Kurth Industry – one of their big mills is up above Woodville, Texas and I think they have one in Lufkin, itself. Down at Diboll, you have the Temple Industry, which is owned by *Time* at this time. There are other fairly large mills in Texas. Some of them have gone down because their timber has gone – they don’t have the timber available to them.

Also a big industry in East Texas – Lufkin, for instance – you have the paper mill where they use the pulpwood or the small pine to make the pulp and from that they make the finished paper products. Of course, your biggest one, I would think, would be the one here in Houston – Champion Paper Company. They still buy their pulpwood though up in the middle of East Texas, all over East Texas, and bring it in by rail car.

Sawmills use the firebrick...or the heat was used in their boilers and from that, they used the steam to operate the machinery and they also used it to dry the lumber before it was finished.

In a sawmill...you take a tall tree out of the forest and they would haul it to the mill and when it came time to cut it into boards, they cut what was commonly known as “rough lumber”. This could be, for instance...a two inch thick lumber, finished lumber, would be about one and five eighths or one and three quarter inches thick. The rough lumber might be two and a quarter.

How they get that to that size is the fact they'll take a big log and they'll haul it up by chain up onto the floor of the sawmill and then push it onto what is called a carriage and it really is a carriage. It's a six or eight wheel carriage running on a railroad track – these are very small wheels – and it is clamped place in such a way that they can run it by a big saw. Now these can be circular saws or they can be a flat band saw. The circular saws were anywhere from three, four feet up to six or eight foot in diameter. Nearly every mill that used circular saws – they had quite a few of them – they had one man that did nothing but sharpen them. And the same thing is true of the band saw. Now band saws themselves, the saw itself, could be, oh, thirty foot in circumference on up to fifty. I've known one or two that were sixty feet in circumference. These were tremendous saws.

Now, when they ran this log on this carriage by that saw, they would cut, usually they would cut, one inch boards or two inch boards out of it, the width of the log. This would mean that when this saw would saw this the full length of that tree, this piece of lumber would fall off onto another chain and be carried down to the trimmer. Now the reason it had to be trimmed, of course, was that on each side of that piece of lumber was still part of the bark. And they trimmed this bark off to the finest; they took the least off as they could to get as wide a piece of board as they could.

SB: Did they use saws for that?

PB: Yes. Now they used small circular saws for that. This board then would go on through to a sorting shed – the sorting spot – and then taken into the dry kiln. In some of the old, old mills, they air dried them. That means they would take them out in the yard and stand them up on end and just let them stay there for a month or two until they dried out. 'Course with the lot of rain you had in East Texas, sometimes it took longer. They learned that they could use steam and make kilns out of them and run the steam through pipes in these kilns and put the heat into them and dry out the – well, I don't how long it would take them, but they could cut the time down to less than a week, I'd say.

SB: When you were there, were they doing both types? Were they doing the dry kiln and letting it air dry?

PB: No, usually they didn't do the air-drying because if they had a dry kiln and were using the steam heat to dry it, it was much faster and they didn't have to have the area or the workmen to do it. You didn't need that many workmen.

SB: So when you were there – in the mid 40's – they were not doing the air-drying at that time?

PB: Yeah, they were doing it at some of the smaller mills – what is commonly known as a “pecker” mill – “peckerwood” mill. I don't know where the term came from, but if you said a man had a peckerwood mill, it meant that he had a real small operation. They still produced lumber. It wasn't the quality – the dried, finished product wasn't as good as the bigger mills could produce because of – in a lot of cases it was because of the air-drying. It wasn't dried properly.

SB: Peckerwood?

PB: Don't ask me where it came from, I don't know.

SB: Maybe from Woodpecker?

PB: I don't know. I don't know.

SB: Were you used to hearing people called peckerwoods back then?

PB: No, it was used only to mills.

SB: Was there any judgment used as far as how they were going to cut the wood?

PB: Yes, now when that log went up and they put it on that carriage, they had what they call a...oh, I forgot what they call that man, but he was really a floor boss and he was the one – he had levers up there where he could manipulate that log. He would look at it and through experience he would know whether they could cut a one-inch board or a two-inch board out of it. In doing this – his control of this – meant that he could push the clamp and when it went into the saw he could adjust that cut to how thick that board would be. He was the sawyer – sawyer was primarily his name – that's what they usually call him. The sawyer was paid more than nearly everybody else because he had to have more experience and he had to know what he could get out of a log. In other words, if he could get one more board out of a log than someone that wasn't very good at it, why he was worth a lot of money.

SB: And he did the clamping on it...or he had someone else to...?

PB: It's a mechanical operation – usually air mechanics. I mean by that, it wasn't clamped manually, it was clamped by an air-operated clamp or dogs – usually they had things like claws and they had three or four of them and the log would set up against them and these clamps would come down and hold the log in place while it was going through the saw.

SB: So, when you were coming from the carriage, this sawyer would be there, who else was there?

PB: Well, he had men across on the other side from the sawyer – on the side that the cut board would fall off – when the board was cut off the log, then it would fall over into a conveyor and they had men there to pull it into shape and be sure it hit – usually two men.

SB: You said then it went on to be trimmed – to trim the bark off. Did they do anything with that bark, or do you know?

PB: Well, through the years, like every industry in the United States, they have learned to use more and more of that tree, which means they are using more and more of that bark. Now, in a lot of instances today, instead of sawing that bark off, they run that bark through a machine that takes the bark off the log before they saw it. And they save that bark. A lot of time it's used – for years and years all this trimming was used to fire the boilers. They didn't use any gas or coal or anything else – they just used the wood they got off of these logs.

Now I understand and at Champions, they save that bark down there and you can go down and buy it. Buy a truckload of it for practically nothing. They like you to buy it and haul it off and they use this around those big buildings in their bushes and shrubbery and things of this nature. It's real good for that now a planing mill is a different operation altogether. A planing mill takes that rough cut lumber, after it's dried, and they run it through and they cut it down to the final size – the finished product. In other words, if it's a "One by four" – a "One by four" I believe is five eighths by three and five eighths – the actual size of a "One by four". A "one by six" is also smaller. Then you have "Two by" and you can usually let them know ahead of time and they'll cut "Four by four" or they'll cut "Six by six".

Years and years ago, I saw in Louisiana – I saw timbers in some of the old sugar mills over there that had been there for a couple of hundred years and they were "Twenty-four by twenty-four". They were used for the beams to hold the upright posts and everything. These were usually hand hewn – they were not cut. In later years, the tremendous logs – when you see these big logs on the west coast that go through there at six foot in diameter, they're usually done on a big tremendous carriage when they're cut. Now, in Louisiana, they had those big cypress trees that they used to cut down and they cut them on big ones.

Now, I've never seen a pine tree – personally I've never seen a pine tree – that I would think was over two and a half feet in diameter. There may have been. I'm not an expert on it, but generally speaking, your pine are not that big. Now the old, what they call natural pine, longleaf pine, which was the original wood that was in this country before people got here – I don't think there's any of it left. No longleaf pine left.

SB: Was there longleaf pine when you were calling on?

PB: Yes, they had one or two places in East Texas, particularly right north of Beaumont, around Newton and back down in there. Also in Louisiana, there was a beautiful stand of longleaf pine that had never been cut. It's been cut now. It was between Winfield and Natchitoches.

SB: Do you know if they were cutting any longleaf pine when you were there?

PB: Yeah, when I was over in East Texas, they were cutting it down below – that mill is cut out and gone – I can't think of that little town, but it's north of Beaumont and it's right close to the river.

SB: How about oak? Any oak at the time?

PB: Well, oak is cut now. Then and now too. All the different trees are cut. A lot of your gum, your sweet gum, goes into another product of the forest and that is the plywood. They cut those things usually into six-foot long logs and debark them. Then they put them down into a steam bath – into water – submerge them; that softens them. Then they take them off there and put them on a lathe and they have a blade the whole six-foot long. That shaves it – the log turns into that blade fairly fast and shaves the wood off in roughly one eighth inch thicknesses and they run those raw sheets of wood and let them dry and then they make plywood. They'll put one sheet with the grain running one way and the other sheet with the grain running another way.

SB: Were they doing that in East Texas when you were there, too?

PB: I don't know. They were making the veneer – they call those sheets veneer – in one or two spots, and they probably were making plywood at one of the Kurth mills. I'm not sure about that. I don't remember seeing any plywood but that doesn't mean they weren't making it.

SB: I remember you talking about gang saws...

PB: Now the gang saws – if any of you have been through a bakery of today, then you'll see them cutting bread. What they have there are saw blades with teeth on them that are about – oh, I guess, they may be eighteen inches long and you may have – how many slices in a long loaf of bread? Let's say, twenty-five. Well they'd have twenty-five saws and they'd run the whole bread through it and these blades go up and down.

SB: Like a circular saw?

PB: No, not like a circular saw. They're just flat blades and they just go up and down and as the bread hits it, it cuts it. They're not circular blades. Now, in the sawmills, they'll have those blades about three foot long and they're so spaced that if they want to cut one inch, they'll anchor the top and bottom of those blades where they're just far enough apart where they'll cut one inch boards. They run that log down through those blades and when it comes out the other end, you have six or eight boards out of one lumber. You can do it all at one time that you run them through there – pushing that log through there.

SB: What about the people that were working in the mills? Was there any stereotype of person that worked in the mill? What were they like?

PB: Well, the mills – in all of the mills that I was around and in, in the bigger mills you had the bosses – the managers – there. They were big business men. I would say they would be the middle – not the presidents and the vice-presidents and the people who would usually in the real big mills have offices not at the mill, but they'd have it in Houston or someplace else.

The people in the mill, itself, the foremen were usually men who had been there a long time and learned the thing by learning all the jobs – by experience. In some cases, some of them not only had the experience of how to make lumber, but they also gained quite a bit of experience out of handling men. The general run of employee of those things – the harder the work – usually it was the colored people, the black, who usually had the jobs. For instance, the stokers – the people who kept the steam up in the boilers – were usually always black. The sawyer was usually white. I don't ever remember seeing a black sawyer. He was, of course, of a little more intelligence, maybe. I don't like to use that word, but actually that's what he had to have – a little bit more sense. And the men over on the other side of the carriage, that handled the log as the things were cut were usually black men or they were white.

They were not necessarily young, but the black young worked there a lot. Generally speaking, the white young – real young, say sixteen or eighteen years old – didn't work around sawmills. They had their fill of it, I guess, and went to town. Particularly in East Texas, when the oil hit, well they all got into the oil fields rather than work inside a sawmill. I think they made more money at it, to tell you the truth – quite a bit more money.

SB: When you went there, did you stay in the towns or did you generally drive back? Do you remember any places in Diboll or Woodville?

PB: I went into the Temple Lumber Company – called on the Temple people there. I'd go back and talk to the superintendent of the mills – chief engineers, generally. Generally, the superintendent of the mill – he was the man that actually ran the mill part

of making the lumber. He had his office out in the mill – not up in the main office where the bookkeepers, the managers, the presidents and owners kept their offices.

SB: So he was the one who had the buying authority?

PB: Well, it depended on the place. Mostly yes. He would say, “This is what I want.” And they would say, “Okay”. You might get the order for your goods up in the office, but he was the one that filled out the quantities and everything that he wanted.

SB: Did you ever meet any of the Temples or know any of the Temples?

PB: I met Arthur Temple one time.

SB: About when did you meet him?

PB: Oh, God, I don’t know.

SB: There’s a number of Arthur’s, I’m trying to figure out.

PB: Yeah, I know there are. I think this was the oldest one. I’m sure it was because when I met him, he was very white-headed and at that time I thought he was nearly seventy. Now, I’m not sure about that age business, but this would have been in the late forties.

SB: Where did you meet him?

PB: At Diboll.

SB: Did you do business with him or just meet him?

PB: No, we didn’t do too much business with them. We did with the Kurth operation.

SB: What was Diboll like then...to travel into?

PB: I spent the night there one time and I do remember – the reason I spent the night there was that there was a firebrick contractor or bricklayer that I did a lot of business with. I had a job there to build a furnace for them – a boiler furnace. I wanted to see him, so I stopped in and I knew I didn’t want to bother him during the day, so I just spent the night there in a little motel there. All the furniture was real rough-cut. It was very attractive – had Indian blankets on the bed and was very comfortable. Nothing wrong with it, it was just an old rough cut, old timey bedstead.

SB: What about stands of lumber? At that time, around Diboll or around Kurth, were you able to see them or was it pretty much cut out by then?

PB: Well, there was nothing in Diboll, itself. I would say that there were still a lot of trees around it, but they were getting their lumber a good ways away from there. As I

understand, they own timberland all over East Texas, and also there's been some squawk about some of the sawmills buying some of the lumber in the forest – the National forest. I don't know anything about that – just what I read in the paper. All those mills, for years, have had to have a lot of land. They owned the land or they also contracted with farmers and bought their lumber, maybe two or three years ahead of time. I know of one case in Arkansas. I traveled with a fellow who told me that, when he was a boy, his dad had twenty-five acres of timber and that he made more money off the timber through the years that he owned the thing than he did off farming the place. He'd cut – what they call "Select cut" – he'd go in there and say, "These are the trees I want you to cut." They'd cut those and carry them off and the next year – or maybe two years – they'd have some more trees. That way they'd have a crop coming all the time.

I was told at a big paper mill in Pensacola – They were going to build it and I went in and talked to the chief engineer about a lot of things – and while I was there I asked him, "Well, where are you going to get your pulp wood?" He said, "Well, we've got twenty-five years – we've already either bought the timber off of it – maybe not the land, but we've bought all the timber." I said, "Well, what do you do after that?" He said, "Oh, if we've got twenty-five years, we can grow all we need to take care of this mill." In other words, he said it would take them about twenty years for them to grow a crop – and they look on it as a crop, just like you would cotton or anything else.

SB: In other words, he had a twenty-five year inventory, so to speak, that he could harvest.

PB: Yeah, and as they'd take off this part here, well they'd plant it and, in twenty years, it's be back up there, but he still had five years edge in there if something went haywire.

SB: How about the grading of lumber? Did you ever see them grade lumber?

PB: Oh yeah, they'd grade lumber as it comes off the planing mill – as it comes through the machinery in the planing mill, they grade it.

SB: So, this is after it's been dried?

PB: It's after it's been sawed from the log and then taken through the dryer and then to the planing mill. And then they grade it as it comes through the planing mill.

SB: I remember seeing movies about them transporting logs and doing log rolling, floating them over – did you ever see that done?

PB: Well, in this country they don't float the logs. They don't have the rivers to do it. It's done by truck. In the early days it was done by oxen – done by railroads and oxen. In other words, they would run a rail line down through a tremendous tract of land that they owned – or they owned the timber on it. They would cut it and haul it to the railroad and load it on the rail cars. Then they'd take it into town where the mill was and unload it

and, there again, by oxen or by chain conveyor, they'd haul the log to where they wanted it.

Now, in some of those big mills, they did have ponds out there. A lot of them had that and they did that for one reason. They'd dump the logs – as they got them into the mill, they'd dump these logs – into the pond and that was to wash them more than anything else. And, in fact, a lot of those mills – I can remember, when they'd take that log, if they didn't have a pond or even if they did, when they took up with the chain to take it up to the carriage, they'd have strong jets of water sprayed on that log – just like a carwash – and go through – real strong jets of water – and that was to get the loose bark off of it and any sand or dirt because sand and dirt dull the saws so fast

SB: But they were not floating it for any other reason?

PB: No...yes, in some of the places they claimed – they said – what happened was, it was easy to handle. They had a big chain that went in down under the water and then went up to the mill floor – up to the conveyor on the mill floor – and that's on the second story, the cutting floor was. It was easier to maneuver those logs onto the conveyor when it's in the water than it is when it's just on dry land. But not everybody – there wasn't too many places that had those big ponds.

SB: Do you remember seeing oxen pulling lumber there?

PB: No, I've seen mules pulling some of it, but not too much.

SB: Do you know if they had any small contractors that were harvesting their own pine?

PB: Well, you know, I don't remember talking to any of them, but if I remember – it seems I heard conversations to the fact –that certain people had a business of cutting. The man would say, "Look, I've got so many board feet of lumber out here." The man would say, "Well, I'll buy it from you." The owner would say, "You cut it and take it to the mill – How much would you charge me for doing that?" The mill would give him more for it there than they would if they had to go get it themselves. 'Cause there's a cost in there of taking it off the land from the standing tree to get it to the mill and just like everything else, there's some people who did that for a living.

SB: Was the lumber business a business for smart men?

PB: No, not particularly. It was people that had good common sense and would work hard. Those people didn't know what an eight-hour day was or a five-day week. That didn't mean anything to them.

SB: What kind of town was Diboll? I haven't spent much time in East Texas so I don't know. Was it a pretty little town?

PB: What, Diboll? No, I don't think it's pretty today. It's prettier today than it was twenty years ago. They used to have a good restaurant there on the highway, but it's gone now. I stopped the other day trying to find it, but I didn't.

SB: Any big old homes?

PB: Nah. If there are, they were back away from the main part of town and I didn't see them.

SB: Not a place one would choose to visit.

PB: Not particularly. If you're looking for history – historic places, no. Well, you're staying with Diboll. There's a lot more to East Texas than Diboll.

SB: About what percentage of the people that were working in the mills were black?

PB: Going through all the mills. The smaller the mill, the more blacks I think were in it. I would have to say that more than likely 60% at least were black – particularly in the smaller mills. You're talking about one big mill there and we talked about another one over at Kountze – the Kurth operation – but for every one of those, there's ten small mills around there – or there used to be. I don't know what the condition is today. There's this one over at Corrigan it's been there for years and years – I don't know who owns it and I never did go in there. It wasn't in my territory and I didn't worry about it.

SB: Why would they have a larger percentage of blacks in a small mill?

PB: They didn't pay them as much, probably.

SB: It would seem that a big mill would need the same lower labor that they were providing.

PB: Well, in a way, yeah, but they just – usually they had more white people. You could get better homes around Diboll. Of course, the Company houses are all the same. This song that Ernie what's-his-name sings – The Company Store...

SB: Oh, Ernie Ford.

PB: That existed. I can remember – oh, west of Lufkin – what's that little town's name. I built six furnaces there one day – they had a Company store there and I talked to some of those boys that were there working with me – building those furnaces – they were all black and they said they bought nearly everything at the Company store. I didn't press them, but from what they were saying, I got the impression that they were really owned by the Company store. Now this is – we're talking about the early 1940's.

SB: What's the highest job that you remember a black having back then?

PB: Probably sorting lumber off the planing mill – during the grading of the lumber. I remember one or two mills – I was on so many I can't remember all the details of them, but I do remember that one of them had a black sawyer – he was pretty good.

SB: But that would have been very unusual?

PB: It wouldn't have been the usual thing.

SB: Do you remember black men and white men working next to each other on the same job?

PB: Oh yeah. I don't remember whether it was the same job or not, but they were working side by side.

SB: What about the safety conditions in the mill? Was it a dangerous place to be?

PB: There was tremendous danger in those days. Now I don't know if they've improved it any or not. But you take the sawyer. The sawyer sits in sort of a cage there is nothing on earth to protect him, particularly if there's a band saw. If that band saw goes, the best thing he can do is sit perfectly still – everybody does. If you run, it will hit you – It whips like a snake 'cause it's going at pretty good speed, see, around these two wheels sawing this lumber. Now when it breaks – that big saw and all that thirty foot up to fifty foot in circumference or more, that's gonna go some where. Some of those saws were six inches on up to ten or twelve inches in width and you take a big piece of metal with teeth on it shipping around that way, it will cut you to pieces if it hits you.

SB: Were you ever there when one of them broke?

PB: No.

SB: Do you remember a high incidence of no thumbs, no arms..?

PB: Yeah, there was a lot of that.

SB: Were you more likely to see someone who was an amputee there than you were...?

PB: No, I don't remember many amputees, but I remember lots of them with no hands or thumbs gone or things like this.

I was at a small place up around Marshall – North of Marshall – I wasn't even up to Jefferson, this side of Jefferson. I was standing at the office and there was a pretty good wind blowing – blowing from the southeast and the planing mill caught fire on the southeast end and practically before we could get out the north end, the whole thing burned down.

SB: Was that frequent?

PB: Oh, yes, they had fire drills – some of the places did, but a great many of the mills always kept a lot of fire hose around. They had a lot of fire hydrants. The insurance companies made them. If they wanted insurance, they had to. They had to have insurance for the men. They couldn't get by without it.

SB: So it wasn't real unusual to go to a mill one year and find out the next year it had burned down?

PB: Or you'd find out they'd had a fire.

Up in Dirks, Arkansas – you were asking what they did with the bark. In Dirks, Arkansas at the Dirks Lumber Company, I went up there one day and they were saving off of their timber – they were saving pieces that were a foot long and an inch square. They had a tremendous shed – an open shed with no walls on them. They had sheds in there and they had small bins and they would take these pieces and sort them to whatever size they was into a bin. People throughout the Company that made wood things – I'm not talking necessarily furniture – whatever they make – they knew that Kirks had all these sizes. And they'd write them and say, "I need these pieces" or "I'd like to have so much lumber that I can get such and such size out of. So they'd go down there and say, "Well, I have half of what you want here and half of what you want there." They'd have these small pieces. I don't know how they sold them, but they claim that that was one of the main things that they were able to make money – really see profit on – because they kept all this, even though it took some manpower to sort it out.

SB: Where does the wood pulp come from that they use for paper?

PB: From wood that's ground up and then put into a caustic bath. I don't know all the factors in making paper, but primarily paper's made through a chemical process.

SB: Would it be scrap pieces that they would use?

PB: No, sir. Pulpwood is pine trees that are usually three or four inches in diameter and about five feet long.

SB: So, paper companies would harvest thier own timber, rather than buying it from a place like Temple?

PB: That's right. I don't think – I don't remember a combination sawmill and paper mill. Now, I saw a lot of paper mills – they were strictly paper.

SB: You were saying that the cutting room was up on the second floor. Why?

PB: In nearly all the mills. Well, for instances if you had a band saw, well the lower wheel that that turned on would be below the floor. It was just easier to work on the

machinery. Nearly all of the sawmills I ever saw, the cutting floor where they cut the logs was on the second floor.

SB: What was on the first floor?

PB: Just open ground underneath.

SB: Would they store lumber or...?

PB: No, not necessarily. They'd store junk and lumber and another thing they used to keep under there a lot would be the saw sharpening shop. The man that did all the saw sharpening would have his shop underneath.

SB: How did he sharpen them?

PB: There's equipment or machinery they use for that.

SB: So they weren't stone sharpened?

PB: Yeah, they're stone sharpened, but they're a power-driven stone. The only time I'd see them sharpen by hand it would be the crosscut saws that they'd furnish the men out in the woods.

SB: Did you ever go out and watch them cut down the trees?

PB: No, that's not interesting to me.

SB: I assume they're doing it with chain saws?

PB: They're doing it with chain saws now more than they used to – when I first started in the forties there was a whole lot of hand crosscut sawing.

SB: Crosscut is with two people?

PB: With a big tree, it would be two people.

SB: What about turpentine?

PB: Turpentine? Turpentine – a lot of it that I saw – the only really naval stores company that I remember going into – there was two of them. One of them was at Colombia, Mississippi. It was a big one.

SB: Are you saying naval stores?

PB: They call them naval stores.

SB: Why?

PB: Because that's where the product – that's where they used the rosin. I don't know why, but that was the name that was given to them earlier. Down in Picayune, Mississippi, there was a big naval stores plant in there. They did other things, beside. What they'd do – they'd go into cut over land where they'd cut an awful lot of pine trees and dug up the stumps because they were rich, rich with the raw rosins and pine tar that they were after. They ran that through vats and baked it, I guess, or cooked it out of the roots.

SB: I know at some time they were tapping the trees in East Texas.

PB: Yes, yes. They might still be doing it. I don't know any big operations in East Texas – there may be, but I don't know of any big operations that are making turpentine.

SB: I wondered if there was a smell to the area.

PB: Yeah, you'd go into Colombia with the damndest cold you ever had and you'd stay there half a day and you wouldn't have a cold.

SB: But what about the lumber mills, did they have a smell?

PB: Oh, they were wonderful smells to them, to me – nothing obnoxious to me at all. In fact, I was down in boiler rooms over so many, many hours watching the furnaces and rebuilding furnaces and I loved the smell of saw dust.

SB: How do the kilns work?

PB: What are you talking about?

SB: You said the wood would go into a dry kiln, what's the theory?

PB: You've seen steam radiators in a room in a house. All right. In effect, they use steam radiators, but they do it with pipes. They'll have these pipes – I don't remember now whether they had them on the floor – they'd run them down through the room with a lot of steam in them and they'd just use a great big long room and they'd run so much lumber in there.

Usually, what they did is like what the ceramic industry did. They would run light weight railroad tracks down through there. They might have two or three sets of them – side by side and they'd load the lumber on these carts – not railroad cars, they were different. It seem to me they were about twenty feet long and maybe three or four feet wide. Well, they didn't just stack the lumber one right on the other. They'd put a layer of lumber down and leave a little crack between and then they'd put a board across – a screed.

SB: A what?

PB: What they call a screed.

SB: I don't know what that means.

PB: S-C-R-E-E-D. Look it up!

And then they'd lay another on. In other words you'd have spaces all around – so the heat could all go through it. They'd run those cars – some of them you could run five or six cars on the track – maybe some of them you could just run three.

SB: How high would the lumber be?

PB: Oh, I've seen those things where it looked to me like it was twelve to fifteen feet high on there – lot of lumber on them. And they'd push them in and then shut the doors on each end and turn the heat on and leave them in a certain length of time.

SB: 'Bout how long?

PB: I think a lot of it depended on how much moisture was in there.

SB: Was there any problem with the stacking of lumber – with it falling down?

PB: You're going to have human error on anything that's done where you use that much human and I don't know how they handle it today, but it was principally the same way – they stacked the dried and planed lumber just like they do in any lumber yard here. In some instances, they may stack it out in the open, but most of them don't want to do that because if it got rained on it would make it look bad. I don't know whether it'd hurt it too much, but usually it was stacked in sheds. A great many of them, today – you'll see these trucks coming into town with that stuff on there where it's banded with metal bands. They'll probably set those things up.

Now if they're all "Two by fours" – I don't remember now where it is, but there's one mill that wouldn't cut anything but "Two by fours" – they didn't have anything else, they wouldn't cut anything else. So, what they did, they knew that there was a certain grade that was house grade – that the residential contractors used – so they would put those things into so many lumber feet in a bundle and they'd have them there and when somebody ordered so many bundles of it, well they'd have fork trucks go out and pick them up and put it on a truck and haul it into town – as simple as that.

There's another thing about the lumber industry. There's a place – I believe it's Franklin, Louisiana – that cut a lot of cypress. For a long time – I don't know whether they're still doing it or not, but for a long time they'd find that some of those Cajuns over there would go out in the swamps and find big cypress logs that had been cut maybe fifty years or sixty years ago and then they'd sink for some reason or another or they didn't get them in. Well, they'd find them by poking their sticks on them in their pirogues and then when

they'd find one, they'd go in and get a rope or something around it and haul it in. The lumber companies would buy those things from them and they'd set them out there and let them dry out and the lumber in them is just as good as when they cut it sixty years ago.

Now that's strictly cypress and their milling operation is probably a little different in some ways. In North Arkansas, I went to a place up there to look for walnut and this operation looked like he was cutting – to me, it was crude. I don't see how he cut any wood out of it at all, but he said he could sell all he could cut. That's probably true of Walnut.

SB: But in East Texas, it was mostly pine.

PB: It was pine and oak and gum. Lot of gum cut in East Texas.

SB: Are they still cutting sweet gum?

PB: It's a sorry lumber – I don't think it makes good lumber. They make veneer out of it – a lot of it – the basic raw plywoods or other veneers. Also cottonwood. I guess there's some ash in there. I'm not up on the type of lumber that they use.

SB: What's a longleaf pine look like?

PB: It looks like the rest only it's generally a little bigger because it's been there longer – and taller they're flowered – pine trees have flowers on them. Most people don't realize that, but actually what it is, each year at the end of the limb, there's a beautiful round spray of needles that come out. Right in the middle of it, there's a little – kind of a – looks a little bit like a cone in it's infancy. It's a beautiful little thing. If you cut that off, it actually looks like a big flower. The leaves are all the needles. Big long, green – very green needles.

SB: What, twice as long as the..?

PB: Standard, yeah.

SB: What about the cones?

PB: I've gotten some that were this big – over a foot long, over a foot high. The ones I got were from longleaf about 1941, -42, -3. It would be forty years ago.

SB: Do you think you've talked about all the lumber you ever want to talk about?

PB: Oh, I could talk about the lumber business for hours. There's an awful lot to it. It was fascinating to go into those mills and watch the men work. They have a language, too. Another thing, Sheila, they have a language of their own. There's so much noise, see. You could go right up to a saw mill and, after you watch a while, you realize that they're

moving their hands every once in a while – you know what I’m talking about – and then someone will start laughing. After a period of two or three years, I learned a lot of that language.

SB: Do you remember any part of it?

PB: Somebody asked me that the other day and I told them I couldn’t remember a damn thing about it.

SB: What sort of thing could you convey by it?

PB: I’m trying to think of what there was for “Boss” – I’ve forgotten now what it was, but there was one sign that you knew what it was the minute you saw it and it meant “The Boss”. If I didn’t find him in his office, I’d go up on the floor and the sawyer would look at me, after a while he knew who I was and who I worked for, and I’d make the sign for the boss man and two or three of them would sit there and tell me...it was interesting to watch them. Now, they didn’t have a language. I’m talking about other than “Board feet” or things of this nature that the whole industry used or had to use. It was a very formal language. They didn’t have any special language like you have in some industries. There are special words or names of things in a lot of industries but I never did find it there – found a lot of sign language, but none of those special names.

SB: I’m just trying to figure out what they could convey by sign language.

PB: You could convey anything by signs. Principally, “when are you going to eat lunch?” or “Where’s the boss?” or “I’ve got to go to the bathroom.” Or something else. I don’t know – there’s just a lot of things of their daily life during their job – you can’t hear yourself yell.

SB: How noisy is it?

PB: Oh, it’s real noisy. When a log hits that saw, it screams. And then, when they run down through the trimmer and trim those boards – in a lot of places they had what they call a “hog”. The hog to me was dangerous – I didn’t like to get around the damn hog. What they did was take those trimmings and run them on down through that hog and that hog had real sharp – a lot of knives – and it was spinning at real high speed. It had a whine to it, it was so high. When those boards would hit it, they would just chew it into nothing and then it’d go right on down to the conveyor and then over to the fire house and that’s what they’d use for fuel in the boilers.

SB: Was it better or more efficient to use the ground up wood than it would to use the board?

PB: Sure. See, the furnace on most of those – they had what they call a “beehive” furnace – we call them a “Dutch oven”. Usually the boilers were what we call “H.R.T.” boilers – that means horizontal return tube boilers. Now, they weren’t as efficient as what

we call “water tube” boilers. These were the main ones they used in a lot of them. Their things were usually seven or eight feet in diameter and they were twenty or twenty-five feet long. Coming out in front of them, about eight feet, and just about as high as the underside of the belt in the front of it, they put an arch in here. When they put an arch in there, we called that a Dutch oven. They had grates inside it. You had a small door in front, but it would be easier – you couldn’t hardly stand in front and throw wood in that small door. But you put a hole in top of this arch – which is made out of fire brick or refractories – that was what I was working on all the time – when you put a hole in there, well this ground stuff, you see, you could just drop onto the grates from the top. You fed it from the top. Now our company designed furnaces and we became known throughout the world for the design of furnaces. We designed furnaces for burning any waste fuel and this was a waste fuel.

SB: What was the name of the company that you were working for?

PB: Well, Acme Brick Company was at that time, but our furnace department was Apco Furnaces.

The sawmill industry to me is interesting. I haven’t been in one in years. I don’t know how they work – what kind of machinery they have today. I assume they have some different machinery than they used to be.

SB: I wonder if they’re still doing it with steam boilers or if they’re using electricity now.

PB: You may have a point there. Seemed to me like there was a mill – where in the hell was that mill? Urania? I don’t think it was Urania. May have been Urania, Louisiana, that was all electric, but it may have been one in Mississippi.

SB: I bet they can use their scrap lumber for other things now.

PB: They’re using more. Nearly all mills today retain more, use more – make it available for use – more of their timber than they used to. There was one mill that was electrified, but I can’t tell you where it was – whether it was in Arkansas or whether it was in Mississippi.

SB: What year did you stop working for Acme?

PB: 1948. I worked from 1938 to 1948.

END OF INTERVIEW