

CHARLIE HARBER

Interview 157b

May 26, 2000

Jonathan Gerland, Interviewer

Susan Schinke, Transcriber

Abstract: In this second recorded visit between Charlie Harber and Jonathan Gerland, Harber tells of logging, cattle ranching, and deer hunting on Southern Pine Lumber Company lands along the Neches River in Angelina, Trinity, and Houston counties during the 1920s and 1930s. Most of the recording occurs while riding through Boggy Slough and Eason Lake hunting clubs, with frequent tape stops and disconnected dialogue. Places mentioned include Black Cat Lake, Johnson Hill, Rayville, Alcedo, and Walkerton. Personalities mentioned include Bonnie Brown, Clyde Thompson, and log train engineer Henry Titus Mooney.

Jonathan Gerland: [Riding in Gerland's pick-up truck]. It is May 26, 2000, and I am going to pick up Charlie Harber. We are going to the Boggy Slough area, in Trinity and Houston counties.

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Charlie Harber: Ritchie Wells had taken, he come out there to the woods with a new horse. He had bought him a horse, and that foreman under him, he asked Ritchie, said, "How old is that horse? Did you look at his mouth?" He talked fast. He said, "Hell, no, I didn't look in his mouth, I can tell just as much if I looked under his tail." Ritchie was quite a character.

JG: That fellow you were telling me about, Edgar McAdams, he lived at Rayville and was responsible for keeping the mules.

CH: Yeh. He fed 'em and harnessed 'em and taken 'em to the woods.

JG: That was along what time period?

CH: '37. See, they had the camp there, and they only had...he lived there, and all the remainders of the crew, they'd come out there on the work truck. The truck drivers and the teamsters and all that crew, they...

JG: So, they were actually using some trucks then, in the thirties.

CH: Oh, yeh. They was using trucks, puttin' them logs out on the railroad track there. They had logs for two miles up and down that track, and they taken the loader and stacked 'em just as high as they could stack 'em and left 'em out there until they got ready to...

JG: So, this was all during the time that Fastrill, many miles north, was going on.

CH: Well, no. They left there and went back to Fastrill. See, they went back to Fastrill in 1937. Now, I don't know when they left there. I never did know, but they brought that camp back in the thirties I don't know just what year they come back to it, Rayville there. But, they started cuttin'. That's when they first started cuttin' in Boggy Slough was 1937, and that was the first of this select harvesting that they'd done for years, you know, that they just cut a certain amount instead of clearcuttin'. So, they...that's where they started, right there around that Rayville, marking that timber.

JG: They didn't do any cutting in that area before?

CH: No. That was the first cuttin' that I knew anything about. See, when they moved that camp, I don't know what year. You know that, what year they moved it? You have the history of it. Over at...

JG: Fastrill started, I think, in '22.

CH: Well, in '28 they left out here at this camp in Eason Lake. That's when the last ones moved out of there. (JG: '28.) CH:; Yeh, 1928. That's when we left out of Boggy Slough on the north end.

JG: I imagine the case was that they didn't just stop one camp all of a sudden and start up another one. They probably overlapped a few years.

CH: They'd built a railroad track from this old Alcedo camp and went down and crossed the river at another place in there.

JG: You were telling me about that, south of the main line.

CH: Down the river, south of there. There's some of the old pilings still sticking up in the river there where they crossed. That's the way they logged Trinity County. See, they...

JG: They logged Trinity out of the Alcedo area.

CH: Yeh, out of the Alcedo area, see, that part of it. Now, the first camp, you see, was that old camp over there at Iris.

JG: I think they called that one "Camp No. 2". (CH: Yeh.) But, Camp No. 1 was supposedly pretty close to where Rayville is now, what they called "Camp No. 1", (CH: Yeh.) and that's why I thought they had done some...

CH: Well, they probably logged over there earlier, but they didn't log up in that country 'til in the thirties. My father said old Titus Mooney, he come to Diboll as a bull puncher. He drove an ox team. Well, when there was a camp in 1913, when it was at up there at Walkerton, they put him on an engine. That's where he started. Well, my father told this story, said old Titus Mooney's wife (JG: Sudie, I think, was her name.) Well, they wanted him to work on Sunday, and she didn't want him to work. So, my father said that when he

got on that train and pulled out, she got up in the middle of the track, and he said old Titus blew at her just like he would an animal. When she went off the track, he'd taken part of her dress with him (laughter) and he never did even look back. He said he never looked back.

JG: (laughing) Left her in the smoke along the track. Good-bye, so long.

CH: But, he was quite a character. And he batted his eyes. There was something wrong with him. He batted his eyes continuously. He had no control over his eyes.

JG: I've wondered about him because his obituary that was written up in the Lufkin newspaper said he was a native of Cherokee County. So, he was born up there. And, the other day, Nanny Breazeale, you know Ernest and Nannie, she was telling me that she thought he was driving log trains out of, when they were logging out of Lindsey Springs, which was before 1913, but if you said your father remembered him in 1913...

CH: He remembered him. He was working up there then. Now, he may have worked somewhere else before. But, he remembered him there at Walkerton.

JG: I don't think Nannie would have actually remembered him during that time. That was before she was born. See how high the river is (driving over Hwy. 94 bridge into Trinity County). Look's pretty good, huh.

CH: Yeh. Well, he didn't look back for nothin'. But, one man, fella by the name of Lee Springs, he had a bunch of goats. There was a deep cut in there on that railroad track, and he had a big herd of goats. And he run through them goats one morning and killed forty something odd head of them. But, I know I was at my sister's house one time, had a big gray horse, and I remembered it just, I was about eight or nine years old, and that horse was strowed up and down that railroad track, pieces of him, for a half a mile. He never did even slow up. Here's...

JG: Passed it up (entrance into South Boggy Slough).

CH: Now, right up yonder is where the GL&N come in and hit the TSE.

JG: Yes, Vair, is that what it was called?

CH: Yeh. There. They run together there 'til they got over there at...well, he run plumb on into Lufkin. On the TSE.

JG: From Groveton.

CH: It was still running in the thirties. I remember when that train used to come through here. It had an old, screaming whistle on that train that come through.

JG: How far is Vair off the highway?

CH: It's just right there, just off of Highway 94 where it comes in there...

JG: Is there anything there today that you can see where the tracks were?

CH: There might be something that would...See, this highway was built, I believe, in 1936, and the old highway is over here where the keeper of Boggy Slough lives now.

JG: Don Dietz?

CH: Yeh, where Don Dietz lives here.

JG: That's what Elaine Lockhart was telling me about, where the old highway was, was further north because they used to live...I think her family lived on it, and then they moved off. Something like that.

CH: Well, she kinda wanted to go with us, and I didn't know whether you would take her.

JG: Oh, yeh. That would have been fine. We'll go another time, maybe.

CH: Well, yeh. She'd like to come back in here, she told me the other day.

JG: Has this always been the main entrance into this area?

CH: No. See, this goes across this lake here.

JG: Is this what they call "Black Cat?"

CH: Yeh, this is Black Cat Lake.

JG: Is this a natural low area?

CH: It was what they used to call "Bluff Prairie." They didn't have to dam a place up fifty feet wide where the outlet was over here at Arthur Temple's clubhouse. Man, there's some bass and crappie in that thing. I come through here one time, and Clyde Thompson was settin' right up here fishing, and he had two poles out, and I had to sit here an hour and take fish off the hook for him. He didn't have nobody with him, and he was catching them fish just as fast as he could catch 'em. It is full of fish, and years ago there was more bullfrogs right here than any place, back in the fifties, of anyplace I've ever seen in my life. Me and a game warden and another fella, we got in a boat one night, and we caught right at a hundred frogs out there. It...some large, it taken two men to carry them in a sack. I don't know whether they still got any.

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JG: So, Dave Kenley and Judge Minton were the only two that they let build in the early days. That was in the twenties.

CH: Yes. They were the only two people that built clubhouses in here. They built the main clubhouse then for everybody to use. That's where they had all their parties and everything.

JG: About how far away was the main clubhouse from where we are now?

CH: The first one was, I guess, a couple of miles up Boggy Slough. There's nothing there now. I don't know whether you want to drive in there and look at that or not.

JG: There's no remains or anything whatsoever?

CH: No remains there or nothing. I can show you the road that goes to it.

JG: There's some big pines every so often back in here.

CH: I'll tell you, you talk about timber. They've got it in this place here.

STOPPED TAPE

JG: Tell me about catching deer in Boggy Slough and taking them to Scrappin' Valley.

CH: We had this net, and I don't know whether you've seen one of 'em or not, but it's a big net. You set it up with five poles, one on each corner, and then, you've got a pole in the center. Each one of them poles has a dynamite cap on it with a wire that goes to a battery. We'd wait 'till those deer got under there, and we'd throw it...Now, this goes to the old Boggy Slough clubhouse, right on the banks of the slough. But, we'd throw that thing, and then we'd have to take those deer out of there. We threw it right there at Arthur Temple's clubhouse one time. We had eight deer under there, including a big, eight-point buck. I'll tell you, it taken us for thirty or forty minutes to ever untangle his horns out of that net. We figured he was going to fight when he got out of there, but he didn't. All he done when he got out, I want you to know, he was ready to leave there. We taken those deer...we'd load 'em in trailers and hauled them to Scrappin' Valley and turn 'em a loose. Me and a fella by the name of J.D. Brock who's a rider here in Eason Lake, I mean Boggy Slough.

JG: What did they do through there to the right?

CH: They've got a feed plot there or something. This must be that road that goes down to the old Boggy Slough clubhouse. This is it, right here. (JG: That's the one.) That's the one, right there. Over to the right, you'd go to the old...where the old Boggy Slough clubhouse that...there's another dam on Boggy Slough up there.

STOPPED TAPE

CH: So, I was born just outside of the pasture up there; outside of this pasture. Go on up Cochino Creek in there further. We was farming on the place in there then.

STOPPED TAPE

CH: This was the old Johnson...called "Johnson Hill."

JG: Johnson Hill, where the clubhouse was built?

CH: Yeh. I don't know where this will take us out at here.

JG: You want me to turn around? Let's turn around and go back.

STOPPED TAPE

CH: ...About the time it jumped, that thing went off, and, I want you to know, that old man run fifty yards. Go this way. (JG: We're going this way?) No, back this way. (JG: OK. I got turned around.) He liked to have fired me, and he liked to have whupped Ed's ass.

JG: That was old Dave Kenley?

CH: Yeh. But, like I say, he'd come out here and stay to the last minute. He never would get to that office on time.

JG: Now, so he was living all the way out here, then he had to go in to Diboll everyday?

CH: He'd come spend the night out here. That was his home up there on...right there across the street from the police department now. I spent a many a night in that house. That big brick house there. They got an office building in it now. They were goin' tear it down, and they decided to save it. Right here, about here, was where them big water towers was at. Well, they were boilers actually, the two big boilers that they had.

JG: Tell me again, how many cattle were out here, that J.J. Ray was running?

CH: Oh, they was running over three thousand head.

JG: Three thousand. (CH: Yeh.) That was from the teens through the early thirties?

CH: I don't know just...the teens. I don't know just what year this thing started.

JG: But, at least in the twenties, through the twenties, when you were a boy.

CH: Yeh. Through the twenties. Then, about '31...last time we moved in here, we moved in over here and lived right over here in this country. Now, I don't know where you can get through this road right here. There used to be that you could go all the way, go up that old railroad track and go to Neff this a way. But, let's go this a way. There'll be a road turn left here.

STOPPED TAPE

CH: I guess, right after I was born, we moved in here, but I guess he [Mr. Harber's father] was already working in here. He had fenced all of this. There was cross-fences. There must have been a thousand of cross-fences in here. All this pasture right here.

JG: All this was pasture land?

CH: Oh, yeh.

JG: None of these pines were here?

CH: These pines was here.

JG: Oh. but, they just ran cattle.

CH: Run cattle through it.

JG: But, there wasn't all this undergrowth. (CH: No.) There was just pasture land and pines. (CH: Uh, huh.) Did the grass grow pretty good?

CH: Oh, yeh. There was lots of grass in here, but they...back in them days, you know, they didn't know what fertilizer was. They didn't fertilize. Now, this is another hill, I'll tell you, this was something else when it rained. See, they've had to rock it now. They had all these pastures named. This one right here was "Dark Hollow". I don't know how they ever...

JG: Your father was pasture rider for...

CH: No, he just farmed in here.

JG: I guess he didn't stay put long enough to have squatters' rights?

CH: No. And this was...right in here, now this was all burnt off when that boy burned it that time. He started right in here, and it went almost to Cochino Creek.

JG: "Thompson". Is that Clyde Thompson?

CH: I imagine that was Clyde's stand. They still left them old names on there.

JG: Just called them that.

STOPPED TAPE

CH: I don't know if you've read that book, that backwoodsman, that old boy wrote.

JG: Thad Sitton?

CH: Yeh, Thad Sitton. There's a lot of stuff in there that is not true about this company, I don't think. This fellow, Frank Ashby, I don't know where he got part of it...or if you've read or not, (JG: I don't think so.) but he tells about that they taken these people's hogs, and they taken their cattle and everything else. I don't know of anything that they offered to take. Now, when we left out of here, they let us run cattle in here. We'll go to the left here. (JG: OK.) And we had, I imagine my father had a hundred head of hogs. They bought our hog mark. They let him run cattle. He had a hundred head of cattle in here when we moved out in 1913.

JG: Another big deer ran through there. I'm sorry, go ahead.

CH: I think they pretty well treated people fair. Of course, ...

JG: You're saying Southern Pine bought your father's hog brand? (CH: Yeh.) Basically, just saying, "We're buying everything you've got here"?

CH: Yeh. See, that's the way they done these other people when they bought their place, and everybody had hogs and cattle. Had a hog mark. This hog mark here, I still remember the company mark, I put so many marks on them hogs. It's a crop split.

JG: There's some more deer. Did you see them?

CH: Just got a glimpse of 'em. Oh, they got lot's of deer in here. When you've got between twenty-five and thirty thousand acres under...(JG: Protection.) protect...under high fence. (JG: There goes another baby one.) Yep There went a fawn.

JG: My little boy would like to see those.

CH: Well, I'll show you around on these roads. Maybe you can remember 'em. Maybe you can come back, and that's "Lem". I don't know who that one...

STOPPED TAPE

CH: ...twice in my life. And, you don't know whether that man's gonna kill you or not.

JG: These are poachers or...?

CH: Yeh. Poachers. A fella's got to think danger if you're a smart person, you'll back up. People say, "Well, I wouldn't have backed up." But, you don't know what...

JG: They can't pay you enough to put your life on the line like this.

CH: Now, when you're looking down, and one of those old boys had done that to me, there goes a fox squirrel, (JG: He's a high jumper.) and, I caught him when he come out of the pasture. I filed on him, and the county attorney...

JG: Is that a railroad?

CH: That may be the railroad right there. Yeh, that's the railroad. We're going right down the old railroad track now. See, they didn't ...

STOPPED TAPE

JG: We just took a couple of pictures of the general area called "Lewisville". Who was that named after?

CH: I don't know who that...

STOPPED TAPE

JG: We just left Rayville, at the twelve mile board. So, we're probably what, about thirteen mile, fourteen mile board here?

CH: Yeh, we's fourteen there at Rayville. We're about

JG: At Neff, it's seventeen-six or eighteen.

CH: We're somewhere around fifteen mile board.

STOPPED TAPE

JG: Say, when you were riding your horse through here, quiet and still, and the log train was coming along, how far off would you hear it? You could probably hear them a good ways away?

CH: Oh, you could hear 'em two miles away.

JG: I think there's some cross-ties up there.

CH: Yeh. You see that crosses the old railroad track there.

JG: I think I see some cross-ties still left over in that area.

CH: I imagine there are.

JG: I am going to get out and take a few pictures. I will be right back.

STOPPED TAPE

JG: You were saying that Bonnie Brown and Dred Devereaux rebuilt which bridges?

CH: The Long Slough Bridge and Cochino Creek Bottom and the long creek bridge across Cochino Creek.

JG: That was in the...

CH: In the forties; that's when they rebuilt those.

JG: We know quite a bit about Dred Devereaux and his personality. What kind of personality did Bonnie Brown have?

CH: Oh, Bonnie was a nice fella, but he was a fella that wanted to be boss. In fact,...

JG: Do you think he got that from being around Dred?

CH: Well, I don't know.

JG: Did he want to be like Dred?

CH: If he didn't have but one man working on that crew, he would not turn a hand to try to help him. He'd stand right there over him, and that's the type of person he was. He wanted to be boss. He was boss, and he was section foreman, and he let everybody know he was section foreman. That's the way Bonnie Brown was. Otherwise, he was a good person, but he just...what he done, he just didn't help his men at all. Now, they had an old man by the name of B. Conner that lived up there at Kenleyville. He kept up this railroad track from Kenleyville to almost to Neff. Well, I think it was down there to what they called the Bisby Crossing.

JG: Now that's B. Conner. The "B" the initial? Conner. (CH: B. Conner). And he's the same Conner bunch as that Conner Creek up there?

CH: Oh, yeh. That's where he come from. (JG: Houston County.) Yeh. But, that old man is a good man. If it didn't look like his men got enough work done, he'd get out there and drive spikes, help 'em. But, Bonnie Brown was just a different character. He didn't help 'em in no way.

JG: What about Dred? Did he do work?

CH: I never did see him doing no work. He just told them how to do it.

JG: And let them know if they weren't doing it right.

CH: That's right. That's the way he done it.

STOPPED TAPE

CH: In that slough bridge, them old pilings had rotted off up at the top. You know how they'll...they cut them pilings off, they was good under the ground, and they taken and cut them pilings off at the top of the ground, put a 12x12 on top of that, and then they taken and cut off a piling the length of there up to the railroad track and put under it. That way they had a good solid foundation.

JG: Are those pilings treated? (CH: Yeh.) What were they? Creosoted? (CH: Yeh.) See, in '50 or '51, the company started that creosoting plant there in Diboll. Do you remember that?

CH: Oh, yeh. They had it on up in to the '60's. I don't know what year that they done away with that creosoting plant.

JG: I don't know either. I don't know when they stopped that.

CH: I know, I worked Ryan's Lake down there, I was at Ryan's Lake Hunting Club in '61 and...in '62 and '63. Stayed there a couple of years 'till I went to Eason Lake, and I hung around there, but one of the directors was named Claude Welch, and he was the one that, I don't know exactly who was over that creosoting plant then, but he was the one that kept it running. I didn't know then...them pressure hoses going in to them pressure tanks would freeze up in cold weather. They'd have to take somebody and put them there. All night they'd be there with a cuttin' torch heatin' them lines to keep them from freezing up. Where that pressure was going in, them air lines, putting that pressure treatment on it, they'd keep the heat on 'em to keep 'em from freezing up.

JG: I didn't even think to notice, but, I guess, on all these cabins and things that we looked at, did they have electricity or not?

CH: Yeh, As far as...the electricity use to come up to the old clubhouse. Yeh, that's right, because that old house there had electricity to it there at...

JG: Like the one at Joe Denman's house, and those others, did they have electricity? (CH: Yeh.) I remember seeing one that had an electric water pump.

CH: Yeh. Up there on the pipeline, there at...old Spencer Knutsen's, he had power there.

STOPPED TAPE

JG: We are now at the Eason Lake Hunting Club. I guess this would be one of the clubhouses now. Chuck Crowson is one of the people who owned it. And, Charlie Harber was telling me that Matt Harris lived in it, then Bonnie Brown, as a section foreman's house, and it's right here on the railroad tracks. You were telling me that on this side of the railroad tracks, right across the tracks from the house was what?

CH: A little old depot. The depot was right there where that skinning shed's at now.

JG: What happened to the depot? When?

CH: I don't know when that thing disappeared from here after they done away with that old camp.

JG: Right there where that skinning shed is was about where the depot was. Here with these oak shade trees. We didn't go down this one. Where was that water tower?

CH: It was right here just behind this house right here, set right there. There's part of it still right in there where he pushed it off.

STOPPED TAPE

JG: Mr. Harber said he never cared much for hunting. He liked to fish, but he didn't care much for hunting. He was born and raised and lived most of his life in the woods and loved being in the woods and everything connected with it but never cared much for hunting. He said that hunters today aren't really sportsmen, they're "just killers." And he said that he'd only killed one deer in his life and just never had much use for hunting.

END OF TAPE ONE, SIDE ONE
END OF INTERVIEW