

ROBERT WEEKS

Interview 104a

August 11, 1954, Robert Weeks home in Lufkin, Texas

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ABSTRACT: In this 1954 interview with Clyde Thompson, Robert Weeks recalls working for Southern Pine Lumber Company from 1894 to 1944. He worked in many capacities, from digging the first millpond, rolling logs off the skidway to working in the Diboll planer mill to running the Pineland planing mill. As an employee from the beginning, Mr. Weeks offers a unique perspective on some of the technical changes in the mills.

Clyde Thompson (hereafter CT): This is an interview with Mr. Robert Weeks at his home in Lufkin, Texas, at 501 Homer on August 11, 1954. Mr. Weeks we'll go right ahead with his talk now.

Robert Weeks (hereafter RW): The first work I don't, I worked for Frank and Dick Warner. They had the contract to dig that first pond, and I drove the scraper team for Frank and Dick Warner. That was in the early part of 1894. I would say about May or June. The next work I done for Southern Pine Lumber Company, I worked on the skidway for the fellow that had the contract for running the mill. His name was Herrington, I believe. I rolled logs off the skidway on to a transfer truck that carried them up to the mill. I worked there a while; then I went to the woods. I worked in the woods; Manny Atwood was woods foreman. I worked with the loading crew that operated west of town. I worked there till the first day of January 1895. I quit and went to Mishella and worked at Mishella till the first day of September 1896. I came back to Diboll the first day of September 1896. I went to work in the woods for Dick Warner; he was woods foreman there then. I was driving a log truck. They paid a loan on a logging company and bought out the logging contract they had. I worked for them on the logging company till 1898. In 1898 the first day of May, I went to work in the planer. Then, they had a little planer down at the old molding shed there. I worked there till the first day of February in the planer. They had some short-lived timber over across the river that they had to get in, and they got me to carry five teams over there and log in that timber. I was over there from the first of February, 1901, till the twentieth of June, 1902. I got through over there and moved the teams back out. Then I went back to the planing mill; that was in 1902. I stayed at the planing mill. I was feeding the sizer at the planing mill and helping the planer foreman, Mr. W. M. Ashford. They decided to rebuild the mill and was building a new planer.

After they decided to build the new planing mill, that took up all of Mr. Ashford's time on the construction of that; and I operated the old planing mill while they was building the new one. We moved into the new planing mill October 1903. During the

time, Mr. Ashford had the measles; and he was out off of the job for quite a while. I operated the new planing mill while he was off.

CT: This is all the time that you were at Diboll. You were working for the Company?

RW: Yes. In 1905, they sent me to Lufkin Land. Mr. Temple owned an interest in that company, and they sent me to Lufkin Land to operate the planing mill up there at night for a month. When I came back to Diboll, Mr. Ashford told me that they were intending to put him superintendent and was going to give me the planing mill. So I took the planing mill in 1906, and operated there as planer foreman till 1932. In 1932, they sent me to Hemphill, and I stayed at Hemphill in the capacity of planer foreman until the mill burned. After we cleaned up the yard at the planing mill, the first day of July 1937, I transferred up to Pineland. I was at Pineland till the first day of January 1944; and I went on the retired list.

CT: How come you to go to work for the lumber industry? You were just a young man in those days, and you were just looking around for a job?

RW: Yes.

CT: What was your pay back in those days? What did you get, say, for digging the pond?

RW: I got \$1.25 a day.

CT: \$1.25 a day. Did that compare pretty favorably with the other things around?

RW: Yes.

CT: They were making about that out in the woods at that time?

RW: There wasn't no woods then. The mill never had gotten ?

CT: Oh, yes.

RW: They were just making preparations for the mill.

CT: What did Diboll look like in those days? Just a siding on the road, wasn't it?

RW: Yes. Just a thicket.

CT: Mrs. Chandler that lives in Diboll tells me that when she got off the train there were five white houses, and they got off a year after the mill started. Five houses for white people that were living there at that time.

Could you tell me maybe something about the way that Mr. Tom Temple operated and Mr. Gilbert?

RW: I could go through all the operation because I was out there in amongst it.

CT: Could you tell us just how the mill operated and how everything went on? I'd like to hear it; we've never had a recording of that. What time did they go to work in the mill?

RW: Six o'clock.

CT: Six o'clock. And what time did they quit?

RW: Quit at six.

CT: Quit at six. An hour off for lunch?

RW: Yes.

CT: That makes eleven hours a day.

Would you just go right ahead and tell us about the operations around the mill, maybe something about how you operated in the woods?

RW: Well, the operations at the mill, the dry kilns was old Arkansas kilns, the first ones. Lots of times about the time they would get a kiln pretty dry, it would catch afire. Generally it was lost when it did; they never saved much of it.

CT: In the woods, you say you used to drive a four-mule team out there?

RW: Yes.

CT: How many logs would that four-mule team---

RW: That was oxen. There wasn't no mules then.

CT: Oxen. How many logs could they haul?

RW: Well, ordinarily, they'd haul from 750 to 1,000 feet of logs.

CT: How many logs would that be, now? One or two?

RW: It would range from three to five.

CT: Your operations in those days in the woods, you cut out pretty clean, didn't you? Or did you just cut out the best logs?

RW: We just cut the best logs.

CT: Just the best logs.

RW: They didn't cut no red heart at all. If a tree had a pump knot on it they skipped it.

CT: What's a pump knot?

RW: That shows that it's dopey.

CT: I suppose you were at Diboll when they began putting on these motor jitneys instead of mules, weren't you?

RW: Yes.

CT: When you were logging the planer there, how many mules did you have before you put in the motor jitneys?

RW: I don't recollect. They didn't have very many, though. They logged the planing mill by hand a long time. They shoved the lumber in from the yard by hand.

CT: By pushing the carts along on the dollyway?

RW: Yes.

CT: How many motor jitneys did you put on at first?

RW: They first put on one to try it out, and later on they put on a second one. I think about two jitneys logged the mill.

CT: Logged the planer?

RW: Yes. One pulled the lumber off from the sawmill. It took all that lumber to the yard.

CT: Your operations were mostly with the planer mill?

RW: Yes, sir.

CT: You must have taken Mr. Purdy's place in the Pineland mill.

RW: They had swapped Purdy from Pineland to Diboll, and Lee Munsen was at Pineland.

He lived at Texarkana, Mr. Temple did; but he spent lots of time around the mill. He would go all over the planer and look through the operation of everything. He knew what was going on when he was down there.

Mr. Gilbert was bookkeeper there at Diboll a right smart while, and they transferred him from there to Texarkana. He was bookkeeper up there in the head office. After Mr. Temple got kind of where he didn't stay active, they put him superintendent of the operations.

END OF INTERVIEW