

Crowder, Dr. David L. Oral History Project

# Charles T. Pluid - Logging

By Charles T. Pluid

November 30, 1975

## Box 2 Folder 27

Oral Interview conducted by Debbie Pluid

Transcribed by Kurt Hunsaker & Jamie Wright      January 2005

Brigham Young University- Idaho

This is oral history. I am Debbie Pluid and today is November 30, 1975. I am going to interview Charles T. Pluid, my grandfather. The general topic will be centered around his life from 1911 to 1975, particularly in the logging industry.

DP: Grampa Charlie, where were you born?

CP: I was born in Eureka, Montana.

DP: Where were your parents born and who are they?

CP: My father was born in Muskegon, Michigan; and my mother was born at Spirit Lake, Iowa.

DP: What were their names?

CP: My father's name was Percy E. Pluid and my mother's name was Ethel Daisy Price Pluid.

DP: What was your occupation?

CP: My occupation has been mostly logging. I have did a little farming, but mostly in the logging industry.

DP: Can you tell me about your occupation, particularly when you started out and the changes that you've seen?

CP: I started working in the woods at the age of eleven years old in 1922. My father had a logging job at Jennings, Montana for the Bonners Ferry Lumber Company, and my mother was teaching us kids in school cause there was no school available for us to go to. He was short a man at one time, and so he give me the job of working with them. I started out driving team, and my rate of pay was forty dollars a month. That was top wages for a teamster at the time that included board and room. We worked there on that job until it was finished in the spring of the year, and the logging was all shut down, and then we moved back to the farm, and I finished my education and through the eighth grade. In the meantime why, I would work with my dad, at times, to fill in or if he needed help. When I finished the eight grade, I went to work in different various places wherever I could find a job. I always drew top pay as a teamster, and I worked more or less at that all the time until after I married at the age of tw3enty. Then my occupation, I thought I had to make a little more money, and sawyers drew better money than teamsters did, so I took up sawing with a crosscut saw. There would be two of us. I followed that through the years then until, oh, it was about 1940 I think. I had been working for the Diamond Match out of Cusick, Washington. I got a chance to buy a piece of timber of my own, and I started logging on my own then with just a team of horses. I hired my logs hauled, and we trucked them into Spokane. At that time I got eleven dollars a thousand delivered in Spokane for these logs. I had to pay a dollar a thousand stumpage for the timber, and I received eleven dollars for the timber delivered in Spokane. My trucker got four dollars for hauling forty-five miles, and the balance of it was mine. I worked at that for a few years, and after the war started it was harder to get men. I bought a truck, and I came to Bonners Ferry and started hauling logs by the thousand. I hauled the first long logs that was delivered to the mill in Bonners Ferry in 1944. I worked for

the Thompson Lumber Company logging for them. Finally, I sold my truck to the Thompson Lumber Company, and they wanted me to stay on driving it, which I did for a year. I wasn't too satisfied with working for wages after working by myself, why I wanted to get back at it. So, I quit that job and bought a team of horses, and I started logging by myself again for this same company. I felled that up until I think it was in 19, yes it was 1949. Our oldest boy had just graduated from the eighth grade, and he wanted a job, and so we went in together, and we bought a truck and took a job for Pack River Lumber Company. We did that for several years. After Bob got older he went with us, and that was our crew until along '55, I think it was. We started putting out more production, and we bought a new cat to skid with. We did away with the horses and bought a new cat to skid with. Hired three or four men. We started logging bigger, and we kept getting bigger then until about '60, '61. All this time we was logging for Pack River. In 1961, why we broke our partnership and Buster, the oldest boy, went on his own with his own logging job, and Bob and I continued by ourselves. We worked exclusively for Pack River through all these years. I've put in twenty-five years working for just, just for Pack River. We did all our own road building and took the job right from the sale to the, delivered to the mill. Our price was varied according to the price of lumber. As the years rolled by, the price kept raising because the cost of manufacturing these logs and putting them into the mill kept raising all the time. In 1973, I sold my share of the outfit to Bob, and I retired, but I still work in the woods some by myself or help the boys out. If they are short a man why I go run cat for them ro do whatever I can. That's more or less my experience in my life of logging. There has been a tremendous change in the methods of logging from horse logging to all mechanized logging. For one example, when I first started working I the woods, we had camps, and we all stayed in camps. These camps would consist of a bunkhouse, a cook house, and an office building plus the barns for the horses. The bunkhouses that we stayed in, they'd be a real large building designed mostly to fit the size crew that whatever they planned on working. I have lived in bunkhouses where on hundred and forty men would stay in one building, sleeping in it. It would be, I imagine, one hundred, on hundred and twenty feet long, usually built out of logs. It would have a heating plant right in the middle of it, usually a barrel stove burn wood. There'd be bunks on both sides of the building, full length of it. Just room for a man to stand up between them, and they'd be double tiered bunks, one top and one lower bunk, they used to get purty terrible, with that many men staying in there and coming in with wet clothes. There'd be clothes hanging out from wires or lines around this heating plant, hung up there to dry. There was...the sanitary condition were very poor. For bathing why you used a number two wash tub for bathing. Washing facilities was the old scrub board and no ironing, so they'd get purty rank sometimes. Then in later years, the last camp I stayed in was when I worked for the Diamond Match in 1940; and at that time they had eight-man bunkhouses. There'd be eight men to a bunkhouse. The cookhouse, or dining room, would be a large building. Usually at that camp there was one hundred and forty men there and as I recall there was two dining tables. Real long one, probably sixty feet long with benches on each side and each man had his own place at the table. If a new man came in, he would stand by the door until everybody else was seated and then he'd take his place from then on as long as he was at that camp. There would be a head cook in this camp, and three what they call second cooks. The head cook he would do all the baking and usually cook the meat; but the second cook, it would be up to them for the potatoes and vegetables and what not and they also had to wash the dishes and wait on the tables. But a good logging camp, they fed the best. No man ever had the kind of food at home that they had in those logging camps. There was just anything and everything that you wanted to eat. In later years, when they had

refrigeration, why even the fruits that would be in season at that time would be served to you. It was just the best food that a person could possibly want. But now there are very few camps. In fact, I don't know of any camps now that are run for the men. Most of them they have busses to haul them in or the men drive back and forth. They drive as far as fifty, sixty miles sometimes to work each and every day. Our work week used to consist of six days, ten hour days, and now it's a five day week with a eight hour day. So there has been a terrific change in that respect. After the horses were gone, after we quit logging with horses, the trucks and caterpillars, bulldozers and loaders come into being, the season changed purty much from what it had been in years before where we always worked wintertime before because that was the only method of hauling that we had was on sleighs. Now, with the trucks and different machinery, why they do the biggest percentage of their logging is done on bare ground in the summer and fall. Although in the last few years since they've had snow removal equipment, a lot of logging is done during the wintertime up high, usually six, seven, eight feet of snow that they log in. Debbie, that's more or less the history of my life in the woods and the changes that have taken place.

DP: During the depression, was it hard for you in our occupation to make a living for your family?

CP: Not rally. I was quite fortunate. I was purty versatile. I didn't have any trouble finding jobs as a rule. If there was a job going why, I could always find work. We didn't have much money, we didn't make much money. If you made a dollar, tow dollars a day you were lucky. Our prices that we had to pay for stuff were a lot, well, they were in pace with the money that we could earn at that time. We could buy a dozen eggs for a nickel and a pound of butter for nickel. We could buy a shirt for forty-nine cents or thirty-nine cents, depending on the quality. You could buy a pair of overalls for probably seventy-nine cents. A pair of shoes for four dollars. I remember one year that I helped dig potatoes in the fall of the year. I dug potatoes for a sack a day. I got a sack a day in pay for digging these potatoes and at that time potatoes were selling for twenty-five cents a sack. One year of work had been pretty scarce, and we was buying milk. I had two children at that time and we was buying milk and I can't recall, I think we got something like eighteen quarts of milk for a dollar at that time. I owed a purty good sized milk bill. I had a pile of wood there bigger than an ordinary house would be. But I surely appreciated being able to work it out, because it give me something to do and also let me pay up my bill when there was no work to be had.

DP: What kind of food did you eat during the depression?

CP: We ate mostly home grown stuff and we had no refrigeration, but we always had a cellar. No matter where we lived, if there wasn't a cellar there I'd dig one. More or less stuff that we could raise. In the fall, when my wife would can, and we would buy fruit, and she would can that. Often times if we got meat, we used to kill deer out of season, and she would can that up cause that was the only way we had to keep it. Or if we butchered a pig why, that was soldered or smoked. If we were fortunate enough to be able to butcher a beef, which most of us didn't get to because if we had a beef we'd have to sell it to buy maybe a sack of flour or something. Why, it would be canned or home cured. We always had baked stuff. Our wives, I don't think there was probably a woman with a family then that wasn't a real good baker. We ate good! We

didn't have all the fresh fruits that we have now-a-days anytime of the year because they couldn't keep it. But, we never went hungry.

DP: Do you feel like life back then deprived you a lot more than life does now?

CP: No, I don't think so. In fact, I believe that we enjoyed our families and our neighbors much more than we do now because we had time. We didn't have television to watch. Very few of us even had radios. So consequently we would enjoy each other. We'd go visit the neighbors or we'd have card parties or often times why, there'd be a country dance. A group would get together and there's always some musicians and violins and what not, and accordions would furnish the music, and we would dance. When we went to dances then we didn't go at nine o'clock and quit at one, we usually went at eight o'clock and danced till daylight. You'd get it purty well out of your system by that time. But, we really enjoyed ourselves. Like I say, we had time to know our neighbors. I wouldn't mind going back to that sort of living again today. It was good.

DP: So those years were really good for you then. Probably taught you a lot more than maybe people now-a-days have been taught?

CP: I think I would be safe in saying that generally speaking the morals of the people in general were a lot better than they are today. Children didn't seem to get into so much trouble. There wasn't as near the thieving and the vandalism that goes on today. I think it's mostly because they didn't get around as much, and they were kept busier. In them days why, pert near all kids had chores to do and responsibilities to live up to. They just seemed to be better that way.

DP: You had at least one child born during the height of the depression, was it particularly hard?

CP: My first child was born in 1933 right in the heart of the depression. He was born at my grandmother's house. At that time, a woman would stay in the hospital after childbirth for ten days, and the hospitals charged twenty-five dollars. My first child was born at my grandmother's house. She was a midwife and, of course, it didn't cost me anything for the hospital. But, my wife had, he was a real large baby. My grandmother had cautioned her to watch her eating during her pregnancy, but she loves to eat, and we had a cow and lots of cream, and she liked cream, and she'd consequently eat a lot of it. The baby was real fat; he was fatter than a little pig when he was born. We had an old doctor, he was real old, he was in his eighties, and he played out. So, I had to assist my grandmother in there in the birth. He was an instrument baby; we had to use instruments to get him. So I had the opportunity to see a child being born and the miracles of birth. It's been one of the greatest moments of my life, going through this. She showed me, even after the birth, she showed me how to cut the cord and explained to me all about it, how to do it. She said, "Leave plenty of space so that if you don't get a tight tie on it that you'll have room to tie it over again." That experience stood me in good stead in later years. I had the privilege of delivering a baby for a neighbor woman in the logging camp one night. It was really great.

DP: Been quite an experience then, having to live in a time where you had to do most everything for yourself and not depend on outside help then?

CP: Right, right. You just learned to tackle jobs that you didn't think that you would be able to do. It's been a real good life. I think it's been much more rewarding than a lot of people have had. I've pretty well made the best of it.

DP: In those days, how was it for health wise? Were the men in these logging camps, and so forth, were they quite healthy with all these conditions of living close?

CP: They were really healthy, and I think myself, that a lot of it was because they didn't get around as much. If something was going around the country, why now-a-days, why everybody gets it because well they're just thrown together so much. But it used to be that you'd go into a logging camp in the fall of the year and very seldom would you go out until spring. So there'd be this group of men or whatever it was there in there, all by themselves and nobody coming in from the outside. Once in a while a man would get a cold or something and he'd lay on a bunk for a day or two, but I can't ever recall of anybody, in my experience of the logging camps, of getting sick and having to go to the hospital. They just didn't seem to be. Of course, they was a real hearty class of men. They'd eat well, and they was out in the fresh air all the time. They were just a bunch of tough boys, that's all. But in the spring of the year when the camps shut down, look out, cause things would change then. They'd go to town and they'd really whoop it up.

DP: There's a pretty high accident factor in the woods today, in the logging today. How was it back then?

CP: It's much greater today than it was at that time. In all of my life in the woods, I had one accident. I had four ribs broke. I have never seen or been in a camp or a crew where a man has been killed in the woods and very seldom really hurt or anything. Often times maybe they'd cut themselves a little bit or something and have to go to the hospital. In fact, when I was just a kid still going to school, my dad had a job hauling ties on sleighs. So I begged him to let me, he needed another sleigh to keep up with the job, and so I talked him into letting me work with him. That was when I was in the eight grade. We was cutting out some roadway one day with axes, chopping little trees, and there was about two feet of snow on the ground, and I was working away there, of course, our axes were always razor sharp, and I was working away there and all at once I noticed the snow around me was getting all red. I picked up my foot and here I had split my big toe full length of it. I started back down the snow and kept on working and purty quick dad come back where I was working and he said, "What happened?" I stuck my toe up and oh, he give me a chewing out, clumsy enough to split my foot. Well, anyway we went home. I drove my team home four miles. Went in the house, and mother saw it. The worst part of it was, I had a brand new pair of boots on and I split one of them and that's what hurt me the worst. She jerked that thing off my foot and put a pan of water on the stove, and I think it was boiling when she took it off and stuck my foot down in there. But, I went to work the next day and I never did see a doctor. I still have the scar on that big toe, split full length of it. At that time we didn't go for doctors as much as people do now. We just didn't, that was all. It was hard to get into them and there was more home remedies used at that time that there is today. But today, the logging like everything else, has been speeded up so much, and then with everything mechanical, the noise factor, I think, has raised the accident rate, and then the excessive speed where everybody's

in a hurry, they get careless and consequently our accident rate is raised a lot more that it used to be.

DP: You say that your father is a logger, this is Percy, right?

CP: Yes, he was a logger. He started out I think, as I remember he told me, when he was real young. From the time he left home, he worked in a livery stable back in Michigan. Then he had an uncle that came to Montana and homesteaded there. That was so many years ago I don't recall just when that was. But I know that dad has told about his uncle packing his supplies in from Fort Missoula, which would be well over a hundred miles by pack train. He'd go out once a year and pack in supplies enough to last him for a year. So dad, he got the pioneer spirit, and he came to Montana. I believe it was in 1898. He homesteaded at Whitefish, and he worked there at Whitefish for a good many years. After the railroad came through to Eureka, why he moved to Eureka, and he and his brothers started logging as Pluid Brothers. They logged there for many, many years. There was six boys in his family, and every one of them was loggers, and that's all they ever did was work in the woods.

DP: SO you come from a long line of loggers then?

CP: Yes. There was two girls in the family, and one of them, my oldest aunt, she stayed back in Michigan, and I really don't know what her husband, what his occupation was. I believe he was a carpenter, but I'm not sure. But anyway the other sister, she came to Montana too, and she married a logger. So it was pretty much a logging family.

DP: Grandpa Charlie, you've told me before that was it your father that had the opportunity to buy Whitefish, Montana?

CP: Yes. He had the opportunity to buy the town site where Whitefish, Montana stands today for two hundred and fifty dollars. He didn't have ht money to buy it right then. Two years later the railroad come through and the town of Whitefish started. But he did haul, he was working at Columbia Falls, just out of Whitefish about fifteen miles at the time, and he hauled the lumber by team and wagon for the first tent bottom that laid at Whitefish, Montana before the railroad came through.

DP: I've seen pictures and heard stories and things of river logging. Did you participate in this?

CP: I didn't myself, no, but I can remember it very clearly. I can still see the old "river-pigs" as they called them, lumberjacks that would follow the drive down in the spring. They would have a camp established somewhere on the river and they'd have to go up and keep these logs a coming. Sometimes the logs would hang up in the brush or on a gravel bar, and they would have to work them loose, out into water where they would float. More or less, follow them downstream. Well, they'd always have to walk if they went upstream, but a good river-pig never walked coming down, he always rode a log and I can still see them. They'd usually pick a little log that would be just big enough to float them. They wore cork boots and they'd jump on one of them little bitty logs. They'd be in water and the log would sink probably six to eight inches, maybe a foot, but they were small enough to where they could hold it with their feet in turbulent

water so, that's why they picked a small log. If they got a big one, they'd get to spinning and purty soon they'd dunk them. But, they never walked, when they come back down the river, it was really something to see them guys work. Then on the finish, what they call "bringing up the rear", they'd have horses and the teamsters, he'd be riding one of his horses and his team, and they'd be out there. A lot of times them horses would be swimming. They'd hook on to a log on a gravel bar or something to pull it off and take it out in deep water and sometime s they'd get in water so deep that the horses would have to swim. That's what they called "bringing up the rear."

DP: The laws that they have now-a-days promote a lot of preserving the environment and things like this. Was there much waste then?

CP: There was a lot of waste, particularly during the depression years. In the area where I worked, around over there in Montana, most of the logging was done and cut into ties. There'd be portable sawmills go out into the woods and this timber'd be fell and you'd skid it to the tie mill with horses. There it'd be sawed into ties and a lot of it was real big timber, four or five feet in diameter. These guys, they was interested in tie production. They wasn't interested in preserving timber. I've seen eight foot slabs come off of some of them logs that I couldn't pick up the end of. They'd be so thick and so big. It would be the best of timber. Most of it would be select, off the back cuts of these big logs, not a knot in it. That was hauled out away from the mill and burned. So there was millions of feet of timber that was wasted, at that time through that, because they didn't fool around cutting any side lumber. There was no market for it and they just didn't fool around with it. That purty well covers the conservation of our timber. But as far as pollution, I've heard a lot of them say that the old log drives and using the river for transportation for these logs created too much pollution of the river. I have to disagree with them there because I don't think it did. These logs floated purty much free and there was very little undermining of the banks or anything like that. I can't agree with them on pollution. I don't think it was any greater then, than it is today. In fact, I think probably our motorboats today and our skiing and stuff like that creates just as much pollution as we ever had in them days.

DP: Is there any other experience that you can think of that you've had in the logging industry that you'd like to share?

CP: I don't just quite get what you mean, Deb.

DP: OK. Is there any experiences that you've had that you'd like to share?

CP: Well, there's been lots of experiences. One of the things that I've told several young people especially, about a saying that my dad used to say. He was a kind of a man of very few words. A lot of people thought he was mad all the time, but he wasn't. Of course, I was like most young people when they get about that age that I thought I knew just about everything that a person could know. Dad used to tell me, he'd say, "Kid, as long as you're able to learn something there's some hope for you, but the time that you get so smart that nobody can show you anything," he said, "you're" done for then." And I think that that is one thought that makes a lot of sense. Because I have found that there's never been a time, never been a time in my life, that I couldn't learn something from somebody and often times it would be an apprentice that would



show it to me. There'd be just some little way that he had of doing things that would probably be better than the way that I had. I think that that's been one of the successes of my life is that I have been able to learn from other people. A lot of guys I don't agree with their methods of it, but we don't all look at things the same way. I think that that would be my advice to anybody is to be able to still keep a learning from somebody no matter how old you get or how decrepit you get, you can still learn from them.

DP: Well, if there's not anything else you want to add can you think of anything else you might want to add?

CP: I can't think of anything right off hand Deb, unless there's some particular thing that you'd want.

DP: I can't think of anything else now either. I think that we've covered everything. So, thank you very much and we'll use this tape in the library at Ricks College for further use by future researchers.

\*On page 1 of this transcript the narrator stated that his father was born in Muskegon, Michigan. I found later that Percy E. Pluid was born in Big Rapids, Michigan.