

An Interview with
Andrew McDowell

at his home in
Doniphan, Missouri

02 December 1963

interviewed by Bill Royce



Oral History Program
The State Historical Society of Missouri

Collection C3966

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PREFACE

Andrew McDowell was born February 11, 1882, in Ripley County, Missouri. McDowell began his career working at Grandin Mill, which was once considered the largest sawmill in the world. While working at the mill, McDowell learned how to drive horse and mule teams and cut and haul lumber. Later in life McDowell would make the transition from lumber yard worker to farmer.

Throughout his adolescence, McDowell witnessed many changes in industry and agriculture. He discusses the virgin timbers of his childhood, the naming of Panther Spring, his memories of the big snow of 1917, and the devastating effects of the tornado of 1927. McDowell gives detailed insight into what it was like growing up in Ripley County, Missouri, and at the turn of twentieth century. Emphasizing a change in the land of his youth from wide open spaces to more developed sites, McDowell shares memories of his life experiences. Living through a time of great innovation, McDowell shares his recollections on the evolution of the lawn mower, the development of cars, and Ripley County's shift to a more advanced road system.

[The following material represents a transcript of an interview between Andrew McDowell -- who was the grandfather of Ron Steen (see C3966, a.c. 31) - - and Bill Royce. The interview was recorded on December 2, 1963, in Doniphan, Missouri]

[Begin Side One; tape meter, 000]

BR: Mr. McDowell is eighty-one years old and was born February 11, 1882, in Ripley County, Missouri. Mr. McDowell is married to Hattie McDowell, and they have three children. Mr. McDowell has lived in and around Doniphan, Missouri, for most of his life. And we're now talking with Mr. McDowell at his home in Doniphan. Mr. McDowell, could you tell us please, just how far back does your memory go? If you would think back to your earliest memories, how far back does that take you?

AM: Well, about five years old.

BR: Could you tell us something about that time?

AM: I can remember mighty well when my half brother was borned. I'm just a little over five years older than him, and I can remember that mighty well.

BR: Could you tell us something about the circumstances at that time?

AM: Well, we lived over on the Current River, over there by ?Al Shockley's?, on the old Hooper place. I know when my brother was borned, we went up to my father's sister's [home] and stayed all night, and they come up the next morning and told me I [was a] big brother.

BR: This farm where you were living at that time, what is that close to today?

AM: It stands about a half mile of Panther Spring

BR: That's in...?

AM: In Carter County.

BR: I know this question is a little bit broad, but at the same time, it could prove interesting. Could you tell us, what important changes in your opinion have taken place around here in the past fifty, sixty years?

AM: How do you mean on that?

BR: We'll let you decide.

AM: Well, you mean in the way of the timber? And the way other things stand out?

BR: Just what important changes. Anything at all.

AM: Well, just a whole lot of them. It's nothing like it... It used to be fine, virgin timber. When I was in there at that time there was no timber ever cut out. And no ?work?. Nothing for people to work at. Only farming around.

BR: The trees, you mean; the woods were all virgin timber at that time.

AM: It was all virgin timber.

BR: What time was this? What years are you speaking of?

AM: Well, it was in April when my brother was borned there; the 20th of April. And my father farmed there on that place (his brother-in-law's place.)

BR: That was about 1887.

AM: Something like that. 1887; something like that.

BR: In your memory, when was the first sawmill in this area?

AM: Well, I couldn't hardly tell you. I couldn't tell you that. But I know that T.L.'s [Thomas Lyon Wright, Jr.'s] dad had a mill up here by Macedony,¹ when that big hurricane came

¹ Mr. McDowell was possibly referring to Macedonia Methodist Church, which was situated on the south prong of the Little Black River about eight miles south of Grandin in Ripley County. The McKinney family of Alabama had settled here prior to the Civil War, and it was they who deeded acreage for this church, its cemetery and school.

through and blowed all the timber down, and my dad's place up there... Because I saw lots of them old root wads...² Just blowed it down. It was a straight wind. And he bought the timber. They made it up there, just worked it up there in the old sawdust piles on the creek there, at George Arch McKinney's; Dad's old place there now.³

BR: You say a hurricane (or a tornado), could that possibly be the same one that wrecked Harry Grubbs' boat?

AM: No, no, that wasn't the one.⁴ That was before I arrived. I reckon before I was ever borned in there. But I had remember the old trees, root wads, and where they cut the timber.

[tape meter, 050]

And when they cut it off, the stump would fly back up, and leave maybe a six or eight foot stump, sticking up.

BR: You know, you say that tornado that wrecked Harry Grubb's boat before you were born. Harry's about your same age.

AM: No, it wasn't then, because I remember that mighty well. I was on the Bedell place up there, down in the field, when that tornado come that blowed Harry Grubbs and them away. I watched the one go through by the Kansas City Clubhouse, and I heard the other

² Throughout the interview Mr. McDowell pronounces the word "saw" as "seed." It has been altered in the transcript to aid the reader with interpretation of meaning.

³ He might also have meant "They made it up there, just worked it up there in the old sawdust piles on the creek there, at George Arch McKinney's dad's old place there now." A slight pause in phrasing makes this unclear.

⁴ Throughout the interview Mr. McDowell pronounces the word "one" as "un." It has been altered in the transcript to aid the reader with interpretation of meaning.

one down there that blowed Harry Grubbs away.⁵ I was a foreman there on the Bedell place at the time.⁶

BR: Were there two of them that same day?

AM: Had two of them. They was just about a half an hour apart.

BR: What does a tornado look like?

AM: Well, it's just a big, rolling black cloud; just like black smoke a-rolling. I watched the one going through by the Kansas City Clubhouse. I was down in the field. And I heard the other one back south of me there. I heard it go through. It blowed Harry and them away, with the boat.

BR: We'll be back in a moment.

[Sound of recorder being turned off and on.]

BR: Mr. McDowell, could you tell us please, what other changes have taken place in the past, say, fifty [or] sixty years?

AM: Well, we didn't have much roads. And about the first car I saw was Mr. Bedell's car, excepting ?Joe Dell? Lawrence's, the one that he bought here. I saw it.

BR: You know Pete Harrison up at Fairdealing?

AM: No, I don't know him.

BR: Pete told us one time the first car he ever saw liked to scared him to death. Said he ran and hid behind the barn.

AM: (Laughs) Well, it didn't scare me when I saw the first one! (Laughs)

⁵ Throughout the interview Mr. McDowell pronounces the word "heard" as "heerd." It has been altered in the transcript to aid the reader with interpretation of meaning.

BR: What did you think about that thing?

AM: I don't know what I did think. I just figured it was a car. I reckon that was all. (Laughs)

And I didn't know as I was ever going to own one or ride in one. (Laughs)

BR: They tell me that back during the days of the virgin timber, the grass was really tall in the valleys around here. That you could get down mow it. I believe it was Judge ?Flore?, said that he mowed the grass in the valleys. He drove a team and wagon through the forest in those days.

AM: I saw it. I saw that done. Right up there in Carter County, right up by the Bear Camp School, Old Man Huggins went up there, and he had his mowing machine up there in the woods and the hollow, and his hay rake and everything.⁷ He cut hay and saved his hay up there in the woods.

BR: There's a great deal of difference between then and now, isn't there?

AM: Yes. It's all post oak brush and things grewed up now, and then it was open. You could see for quarter of a mile or half a mile right through the timber, and nothing but just grass; fine grass. A deer could get out and run off. You could see him for half a mile a-running.

BR: Speaking of deer, we've just finished with the deer season here in this area. Could you tell us please your memory as far as hunting goes? Is the hunting better today than it used to be, or was it better then?

⁶ This sentence was a little indistinct. Mr. McDowell might also have said, "I was a-farming there on the Bedell place at the time."

⁷ Throughout the interview Mr. McDowell pronounces the word "hollow" as "holler." It has been altered in the transcript to aid the reader with interpretation of meaning.

AM: Well, I don't know but what is... Maybe there are lots more deer. Since *I* got old enough to hunt, there's quite a few more deer than there was when I was about twelve or fourteen.

BR: You mean there's more deer now than there used to be?

AM: Yeah. Yeah, there's more deer than there used to be. But the people killed them. There wasn't no closed season on them or nothing at the time. They just killed them when they got ready to kill them.

BR: Do you think that's the reason why?

AM: Well, I don't know. I've heard it said that if they got too thickly populated, why, they'd take disease and die. And it was better to keep them kind of killed down, some of them.

BR: What about other game, Mr. McDowell?

AM: Well, there was all kinds of turkeys and things. Yeah, lots of turkeys.

[tape meter, 100]

Until about forty-five years ago, there was plenty. I could stand in my yard and hear a [turkey] call, every morning, a gobbler in the spring. That's been about forty-five years ago. It was when Raymond was a baby, that spring before he was born. No, it was forty-six! I killed three that spring. And that big snow come. It was just axle-deep to the road wagon. And they froze to death and starved to death. There never has been lots of turkeys since.

BR: How long was that snow on the ground?

AM: Well, it was on there for about two months or more, but I don't just remember... It commenced in January and it never went off 'til in March, I think.

BR: Must have been rough getting around on the trails and roads at that time.

AM: It *was* rough. You just couldn't hardly go. I had a wagon and team, and I brought my wife down to her mother's to stay a week. The roads wasn't broke; and the mules, in a mile and a half or two miles clip, they was a-lathering with sweat. And it was cold, too. I left them down there until I got on top of a big hill there at the "crossroads," they call that -- they had signboards -- the roads was broke, and then they come on pretty well. I stayed down there [at] home, and went back home Sunday evening and took care of the stock and things. Of course, I didn't do nothing but just build the fires and feed.

BR: How many lives were lost at that time, during that snow, or would you know of any?

AM: I wouldn't know of *any*, myself. If there was, I don't know it.

BR: Do you recall what year that was?

AM: It was in '17.

BR: We'll be back in a moment.

[Sound of recorder being turned off and on.]

BR: Mr. McDowell, you were talking about Panther Spring up there. I saw that during the recent deer season, and that intrigued me; the cave and all that. Could you tell us something about that? Maybe how it got its name?

AM: Well, yes. They told me that there was a fellow by the name Reeves that went back in there and killed a panther. And that's what they called it; come to call it "Panther Spring."

BR: Could you tell us about what time Mr. Reeves killed this panther? What year?

AM: No, I couldn't, but it's been probably a hundred year ago.

BR: Do you recall any panther in this area?

AM: Well, yes. I think I do.

BR: Did you ever see one?

AM: Not in the woods...close. But I heard one.

BR: What did it sound like?

AM: Well, it just sounded like a coarse-voiced woman hollering, screaming.

BR: They say it's a very frightening sound. Was it?

AM: Yes. And it was right up here where the Macedony [Macedonia] Tower is, is where I heard it. I heard it holler four or five times.

BR: What year was that?

AM: Well, it's been about fifty-three years ago.

BR: I've heard of an Indian that went in this Panther Spring Cave up there. Is that the name of it?

AM: Yeah.

BR: I have heard that there's another opening to that cave. Do you know anything about that?

AM: Yes. There's an upper stairs in it, that you can walk in there on a ladder, up in there. It's a bigger place.

BR: Have you ever been in there?

AM: I've been in the cave, but I never was up in that upper part, in the upper story.

[tape meter, 150]

BR: Do you know anyone who was?

AM: No, not in particular. Not in particular, but they used to have a ladder there that somebody had made, and put it up there. Had it in there for that purpose.

BR: How did the Indian figure in this?

AM: I don't know about that. I suppose he thought there was something in there, or *knew* there was something in there. And they watched him. Someone watched him, went down there, and saw him go in. They were around in that community there. He went in there and he didn't come out. But when they got home, why, *he* was at home.

BR: The Indian?

AM: Yeah. He was back to the place.

BR: You mean this Indian worked for someone?

AM: No, he was just in there looking around. Just a-scouting around, I guess to see what *might* be in there. Probably he figured there was something hidden; treasure of some kind hidden in there or something.

BR: We hear tell of the Indians quite often, and of course we see it on television and everything today. Did you ever see any Indians?

AM: Yes, I've seen Indians.

BR: What did they look like?

AM: Well, just like these pictures does. I've seen them out in Colorado and out in there. I saw them Indians out there.

BR: What year was this?

AM: Oh, it's been about ten year ago; I was there at Royal Gorge. That big swinging bridge is there. I was there, and I saw those Indians there. Me and my wife, my daughter and her husband was out there.

BR: I was thinking maybe you may have seen some Indians around here when you were a young boy.

AM: No, I cannot... I don't remember of any, myself.

BR: We'll be back in a moment.

[Sound of recorder being turned off and on.]

BR: Mr. McDowell, what kind of work did you do most of your lifetime?

AM: Well, I mostly worked in the timber until after I was married, then I went to farming. I hauled logs and cut logs. I worked at the Grandin Mill on the lumber yards, a lot.

BR: Talking about this Grandin Mill up there -- that large mill pond -- and that's supposed to have been the largest sawmill in the *world*. Is this true?

AM: Well, I think so. It was a hundred capacity, the big mill; and the little mill was a eighty thousand capacity.

BR: Explain that please, a hundred thousand.

AM: Hundred thousand capacity: Cut a 100,000 feet a day. The little mill was eighty capacity.

BR: That little mill wasn't so small then, was it?

AM: No, it wasn't so small. It was pretty good-sized. It would be a big mill today, around here.

BR: About what year was that?

AM: Well, it was about 1905, '04 -- before and after, all along there. I was working there when me and my wife was married.

BR: What did you do at the mill?

AM: Well, I didn't work at the mill. I worked on the yards and sorted lumber at first, and then I went to driving a team there. I drove a team and hauled lumber off of the yard to the planer.

[tape meter, 200]

Big old Machine One, which is down here right there at old man Brown's place, now, I guess.

BR: The piece of machinery is there?

AM: Old Number One. It took two men just as fast as they could punch it in there -- two inch stuff -- to keep lumber _____.

BR: You're talking about the planer?

AM: Yeah. That was the planer. But the mill, I didn't work at the mill part. I worked on the yard and sorted lumber, and then from there to driving a team.

[Sound of recorder being turned off and on.]

BR: I've heard tell of a method of sawing that's called "shotgun." Do you know anything about that? Is there any truth in that statement?

AM: Yes, there is. But they put that on in that big mill. That [log] carriage -- it just went like it was shot out of a gun. They buckled him on the carriage. They fastened him on to keep it from throwing him off.

BR: Buckled who on?

AM: The block setter.

BR: You mean a man?

AM: Yeah, the man that set blocks. They buckled him on, belted him on with big leather belts.

BR: I'll bet that was quite an experience to ride one of those things.

AM: Well, it was just like that. [Gestures to illustrate] They went that a-way.

BR: You mean back and forth real quick like that?

AM: Yeah. When they stopped, they stopped; and when they started, they was back!

(Much laughter)

BR: Why did they have to have a man on there?

AM: Set blocks to cut that lumber.

BR: I'm afraid that I don't understand. "Set blocks." Could you maybe explain that for us?

Let's put a log on the carriage, now. We put the log on the carriage, and we're going to run it through the saw. And we put a man on there...

AM: And he sets the blocks. He sets the block.

BR: What's the block?⁸

AM: The carriage has got a block on it, and a dog to catch it and hold it so as that log don't roll off.⁹

BR: And he [the block setter] keeps the log from rolling off.

AM: Yeah. That's [the block or log] all unfastened. And when that saw is there, he just moves the block, moves the lever [or dog or cant hook].

BR: Oh, then what he's doing is every time the saw takes off a slab then he moves it [the cant hook]...

AM: Moves it again.

⁸ The block is the squared timber being cut.

⁹ In logging terminology, a "dog" is a type of cant hook used to aid in lifting and hauling of squared timbers.

BR: ...and that pushes the log over again.

AM: Yes, for another inch board.¹⁰

BR: He's got to be pretty fast, then.

AM: Yes, he's got to be pretty fast. (Laughs)

BR: I know it's a silly question, but did it make those guys dizzy?

AM: Well, no, but didn't all of them stand up under it too long. It jerked them in two, pretty near. Hurt them.

BR: How long would a man usually work at that job?

AM: Well, some of them more or longer than others.

BR: Eight hours a day?

AM: Eleven.

BR: Eleven?!

AM: They worked eleven hours a day!

BR: Rode that thing for eleven hours?

AM: Eleven hours, from six 'til six that night. Went to work at six of a morning, then they [worked] 'til twelve o'clock. And from one o'clock 'til six again. Eleven hours a day. That's what they got.

BR: What was the pay scale in those days?

AM: I guess they got about \$1.45 or \$1.50 a day.

BR: Eleven hours for \$1.45 a day.

¹⁰ In short, a man (the "block setter") is situated on the timber carriage using a cant hook (or "dog" or "lever") to reposition (or "set") the log (or "the block") as slabs or boards are being removed by the saw blade.

AM: Yeah, or a \$1.50. Something like that.

[Sound of tape recorder being turned on and off.]

BR: You know, that's only about 12 ½ cents an hour, then.

[tape meter, 250]

AM: Yeah, that's right. I know a lot of them out on the yard, sorting the lumber and things like that, we only got \$1.35 a day.

BR: Could a man feed his family on those wages, then?

AM: Well, they did do it! (Laughs) They didn't have to give but about 8 1/3 cents a pound for butter, and I think about 15 cents a pound for coffee. And 45 cents for a twenty-five pound sack of flour.

BR: Well, I don't mean according to today's standards, Mr. McDowell, but I mean, was life relatively comfortable on those wages?

AM: Well, yes. They seemed to do very well.

BR: We'll be back in a moment.

[Sound of recorder being turned off and on.]

BR: How does [the] Grandin [of] today compare with the Grandin of 1904?

AM: Well, there's nothing a-doing much in Grandin; no business of any kind. Only just a few little stores and the bank, is about all there is. There's no work, nothing like that.

BR: How was it in 1904 as far as people and businesses are concerned? During its peak.

AM: 1904. It was plenty work, but they didn't get much for it. There was lots of people there too. They had a big store there. It stayed open 'til eight o'clock at night. When eight o'clock came, they closed the doors. If you were in there, why, you could stay 'til you

done your trading. And if you wasn't in there, you didn't get in there 'til the next morning. (Laughs)

BR: How many people lived around Grandin in those days?

AM: Oh, I suppose there was 500 or 600 right there in town, or maybe more.

BR: [Aside, to another person in the room.] T., how many people live in Grandin now, approximately?¹¹

T.: I think the population is around 400 or 500 now, Bill. According to what Mike said, Grandin used to be larger than Doniphan.

AM: That's *working men*. That's working men that I was a-meaning.

BR: You mean 500 working men?

AM: Yeah, 500 *working men*.

BR: That wasn't including their families.

AM: No, not their families at all.

BR: Well then, you could more than double that, including family.

AM: Probably yes; triple. More than that.

BR: Did you ever hear of a place called "Midco?"¹²

AM: Yes, I have heard of it.

BR: I have heard tell that there was 8,000 people that lived up there back during the days of

¹¹ Although not positively identified in this interview, "T." may be Thomas Lyons Wright, Jr. (1912-1974), whose family was long involved in a number of businesses in the Doniphan area. Mr. Wright's friends often referred to him by his first initial in conversations.

¹² The town of Midco was the center of operations for an iron furnace and a chemical plant. They were owned by the Mid-Continent Iron Company. The town was located two miles north of Fremont, Missouri, in Carter County. Please see the information sheet on collection R306 at the Western Historical Manuscript Collection-Rolla for a bit more information on Midco.

World War One when that iron smelter was going strong.

AM: I don't doubt that, either. Because I had a nephew that worked there at the time, when that flu [Spanish influenza] was always a-going. So many of them died there of it.

[tape meter, 300]

BR: What kind of work did you like to do most?

AM: Well, I don't know; I liked to cut logs pretty well, but it was a mighty hard job. I liked to saw.

BR: In the timber?

AM: Yeah. I liked to cut logs.

BR: Why?

AM: Well, it was just a nice, clean job. It was hard work, but it was fine, big, yellow pine, and it was nice to work in.

BR: That pine and rosin smells good, doesn't it?

AM: That's right, that's right. But you had to *work* when you worked at it. You had to cut around with a crosscut saw... Two men had to cut around 10,000 feet a day to hold his job, then get \$1.50.

BR: How big were some of those pines?

AM: Oh, some of them was three feet or better, or two, in diameter, and some of them was smaller.

BR: How tall?

AM: Oh, you got about five and six logs out of them; some of them, twelve [foot logs]. And you never cut nothing shorter than a twelve. That ?and? the sixteens. You'd get about

five and six logs out of a tree; say about twelve and fourteen feet, and sixteen out of them.

BR: Some of those were over 150 high, then.

AM: Yes, they was. And not too many of them growing. There was just a bunch up kind of in the top. They was nice, tall, trim pine.

BR: Do you think we'll ever have trees like those again?

AM: Well, not nobody around here won't see it!

BR: Well, maybe if we're careful and we do it right, maybe our grandchildren will.

AM: I doubt it. Not like that old virgin pine was; and the white oak, and the black oak. Because that was fine. I expect that our great-great-grandchildren will hardly then ever see it grow back like that virgin pine was.

BR: I guess those trees must have been 200 years old to begin with.

AM: Yes, and maybe more!

BR: If I might mention here, for your information, there's a place up in Warren County called Wagner Woods. An old gentleman up there has forty acres of virgin timber that's never had anything cut out of it except trees that were knocked down by lightning. And this is supposed to be the last forty acres of virgin timber that exists in Missouri. Some of those trees are almost as big around as half of this room!

AM: Well, I've never seen nothing like that.

BR: They think there's no pine up there.¹³

¹³ This sentence was spoken over Mr. McDowell's comments, and so was indistinct. The interpretation of it could be incorrect.

AM: I have cut one log that had a little over a thousand feet in it -- sixteen foot log -- and that was at Bragg City, Arkansas.¹⁴

[End Side One; tape meter, 356]

[Begin Side Two; tape meter, 000]

BR: Could you tell us, please, why did your parents settle in this area?

AM: Well, I don't know why. They come from Alabama, my grandmother did, when my dad was a boy about four year old. I guess they were just hunting for new homes. They come here to homestead.

BR: I bet they saw some Indians.

AM: Yes, they saw plenty of them, I suppose.

BR: Did you ever hear them talk about it?

AM: Not too much.

BR: What did you hear them say?

AM: Well, they just talked about the Indian time, how they done here, hunted and such, and things.

BR: Would you rather go hunting today, or would you -- if you had your choice -- rather go hunting like you used to years ago?

AM: Well, I'd rather go today! (Laughs)

BR: Could you tell us why?

AM: Because I think there's more deer. And they've got better guns to kill them with.

BR: What about fishing?

¹⁴ Bragg City is a rural crossroads in Ouachita County, Arkansas.

AM: I'd rather went a-fishing like I used to did, where there was lots of fish. I used to do lots of it. It wasn't nothing for me to go out 'til midnight and kill forty [or] fifty pounds of fish with a gig.

BR: Those days are gone, though, aren't they?

AM: Yes, I think they're gone, so I haven't seen any of them for a good while. (Laughs)

BR: Mr. McDowell, could you tell us was or, say, is the most important invention that ever happened in your lifetime; let's say in the way of progress.

AM: Well, I don't hardly know. I've had a whole lot of ups and downs of all my life.

BR: I mean inventions. What impressed you the most?

AM: Well, I don't know. You mean in what kind of work I done and all?

BR: No, I mean inventions as far as progress is concerned: Television, radio, airplanes, cars, telephones -- all of these things. Which one impressed you the most when it happened and you learned of it?

AM: Well, I guess the automobile did, because they was about the first to come on. And then the airplane.

BR: The automobile kind of prepared you for the rest of it.

AM: I reckon so. That's about right. (Laughs)

BR: What kind was the first car you ever saw?

AM: An old Ford. (Laughs)

BR: Where did you see it?

AM: Well, it was up here by Macedony [Macedonia.] Come up the road. (Laughs)

BR: Who had it?

AM: ?Joe Dell? Lawrence down here, that used to run in there where Roberts... He had his jewelry shop right there where Roberts Jewelry Store is now.

BR: Do you remember what year that was?

AM: No, I don't. It's been about fifty-five year ago, though.

BR: I've heard it said that in those days those cars scared the horses. Is that true?

AM: Yes sir, it is. My father-in-law had one, I guess, that had died. If she had lived to see one, she'd have died! (Laughs) If she could hear a train, he had to stop before he got too close or she would have run away. She just went wild.

BR: You know, I've noticed -- as I drive through the country down here looking at these beautiful scenes and looking for historical places -- a lot of these old tram roadbeds... It seems to me like there were quite a few railroads back through these woods.

AM: There was. There was a lot of them through, tram roads. The Grandin Company had several of them, that come through in here what they call Barton Branch in here, down in there, by the old Uncle Ed Sullivan's place, up here by Little Black. And then one went through down what they call Colvin through the Hell's Half Acre and crossed the river there at Hell's Half Acre (they called it), and went up Barren, and Buffalo, in that blue hole. They call that the Bee Rock, up through there.¹⁵

[tape meter, 050]

BR: Why did they have all these railroads around through the woods?

¹⁵Bee Rock is "a pool of water in Little Barren Creek in Pine Township. It was the site of an old logging camp the Ozark Land and Lumber Company abandoned about 1902. It was known as a watering place for wild bees." Source: [History and Families - Ripley County, Missouri](#), Ripley County Historical Society. Turner Publishing Company, Paducah, KY, 2002, page 58.

AM: To take logs into Grandin to the mills. They hauled them from over in there to the Grandin Mill and put them in the pond, sawed them up.

BR: And how did they get the lumber out of Grandin?

AM: Shipped it out on a train. There was a railroad come into Grandin there, and they shipped it out.

BR: About how many trainloads a week went out of Grandin? Do you remember?

AM: Well, I don't remember how many there was, but there was a lot of them because they was a-loading lumber every day from the planer. They didn't ship too much rough lumber, I don't think; more planed lumber. They had them down to, I think, eight machines -- from one to eight, run them in there, that done that planing. They worked an *awful lot* of men there at that planer fixing them things up.

BR: These engines that pulled these cars on these tram railroads, were they big engines?

AM: Some of them was, some of them wasn't. Some of them was small, and some of them was large.

BR: I guess it depended on the number of cars that was necessary?

AM: Well, yes. They had one little old Shay engine that they brought it up here [to] Doniphan and took it to Tucker Bay up here. They built that road in there. They took it up on a barge from Doniphan here.

BR: That's a railroad engine on a barge, up the [Current] River?

AM: Yes, sir, that's what they done.

BR: How'd they get it up there? I mean, what kind of power did they use?

AM: Used a windlass on the barge. Tie a rope to a tree, and then put it on a drum and run it, then they see-sawed back and forth across the river; and took it up there and put it on the track.

BR: How long did it take them to do that from Doniphan to Tucker Bay?

AM: Well, I don't know just how long it took them, but I saw them a-doing it! (Laughs)

BR: You don't know how long; maybe give us an idea.

AM: Well, I expect it took them a week or more to take it up there because that see-saw...

They'd tie one place to that bank, then they'd take it and pull it up to there, then they'd go across the other one and see-saw across and go across to the other way.

BR: How'd they get around the shoals?

AM: Well, I guess _____ slip right up over them. Over the shoals. Had that old Shay engine on there. They just had to float.

BR: Can you tell us why they would do that? Why didn't they just put it on the rails and take it to Grandin and run it on out on the rail to Tucker Bay?

AM: Well, I couldn't tell you that! But they didn't. It might have been [if] they'd have got on these main lines that thing couldn't have run fast enough to stayed out of the way of the other trains!

(Much laughter)

BR: What'd those engines burn? Coal or wood?

AM: Well, they burnt wood, and coal, too. Some of them burnt coal, and some burnt wood.

Unidentified voice: What about Old Number Seven?

AM: Yes, I remember that one pretty well, after I had to go when it was a-blowing and a-snowing and a-raining a lot of times to put her back up on the track. (Laughs)

BR: What happened with Number Seven? Why was she...?

AM: Well, when they'd get two loads of logs behind it and they'd get to pulling and running pretty fast, it'd ride up and leave the track! (Laughter) And then we'd have to go and put it on. It tended to always happen right in a bad, rainy, snowy time; when I was a-working on the section up there.

BR: Old Number Seven had bad habits, then.

AM: Yes, it had bad habits. And old John Kidd, he didn't care for the _____ in the _____ . He'd run it just the same.

BR: Who was John Kidd?

AM: He was the engineer.

BR: You mean the hind wheels would run up under the front wheels?

AM: Yeah, the front ones would rise up, that was pulling. They'd rise up and leave the track. The trailer wheels wouldn't stay on the track. It was too heavy behind! (Laughs)

BR: And this always happened in the snowstorm?

[tape meter, 100]

AM: It seemed like it did, or a big rain, one. (Laughing) And it was right cold and you'd freeze to death out there trying to build up track and everything to get it back on it.

BR: Did you ever get mad at the engineer for carrying on that way?

AM: No, he wasn't ever there, hardly ever, when we was building the track. (Laughs)

BR: Where'd he go?

AM: He went home! (Laughing) I suppose.

BR: I kind of wonder if he had that mind.

We'll be back in a moment.

[Sound of recorder being turned off and on.]

BR: Well, Mr. McDowell, talking about the trains and the horses being scared of the trains and automobiles -- did you work with teams very much?

AM: Yes, I did. I used to haul lots of logs. Drove teams. I drove for the Grandin Company. I hauled logs with the company teams. Drove them, and I hauled _____ and for others.

BR: Talking about the company teams -- the company owned the teams.

AM: Yeah. The company owned the teams, right up here on [Highway] 21. It was where _____ Store is, the old team camp; ?old? _____ camp is where the company teams was.

BR: Are any of the remains around there now where the teams used to be?

AM: No, I reckon not, that's in a farm there. And it's all in there, so I don't think you could see anything to show up for the barns or anything like that. There's a mighty good well there. I know I used to have to pump lots of water out of it for them company teams, when I had to _____, and my brother. We pumped water for them company teams.

BR: How many horses did they have?

AM: Well, I couldn't tell you how many they did have, but it seemed to me like it was an awful bunch of them when you had to pump water for them all. (Laughter) And we were just little boys.

BR: Logging teams were hard to get, weren't they? I mean, they had to be teams that would pull together, and they had to be good, strong teams.

AM: Yes, they was always good, strong teams. They had good big mules all the time. They didn't use horses there, the company didn't. They had riding horses and things like that there in the log woods, but they did have horses there at the mills, at the lumberyard, on that.

BR: Why did they have horses at the mill and mules in the woods?

AM: Well, the mules could just take it better than them horses. They're just tougher. They'd stand it better. But the horses, they used them on them wagons hauling lumber to the planer and things.

BR: Did you work with mules or horses or both?

AM: Well, part of the time I worked with mules, and then part of the time with horses. When I worked with the mules I was on the dock hauling big timbers, anything from ten by twelves to twelve by twelves and fourteen by fourteens, and so on, and putting them in them open boxcars down there. When they'd come down the slide, why, we'd load them on a log wagon, and drop them down there and roll them into that boxcar out there, open top car.

BR: They tell me that when a man works with horses in his lifetime, that there's always one horse that stands out, that he never forgets. Is that true with you?

AM: Well, yes. I reckon so.

BR: What about that horse?

AM: What you mean is the _____ and how you like them?

BR: I mean that men who have worked with horses just say that there's one horse that impressed them. Whether it was a good horse or a bad horse, I don't suppose really matters, but it was a horse that impressed them, and that they would remember above all horses, for whatever reason.

[tape meter, 150]

AM: Well, I think that was old Fingertail that I had to remember mighty well. (Laughs)

BR: Fingertail? How in the world did he get a name like that?

AM: He was a fingertail horse. He didn't have no hair on his tail, hardly. (Laughs)

BR: Well, was he always like that?

AM: Yeah, he was always that a-way. Never did have no hair on his tail, much.

BR: I'll bet when he swatted flies, he almost beat himself to death.

AM: Well, no, he didn't hurt his self, I (laughing) don't think. He was too mean! (Laughs) An old man down here, Mr. Coggins' daddy, he liked to killed him. You couldn't work him. Wasn't everybody could ride him, could work him unless they drove him, and they didn't want to do that. And they put me to driving him.

BR: What was the matter with this horse?

AM: Oh, he was just a high-brained fool. (Laughter) He wanted to be in the lead all the time.

And if he didn't get in the lead, why, you had to ride some. (Laughs)

BR: Was he a team horse or a saddle horse?

AM: Well, he was about a 1,600 pounder. He was a big horse.

BR: For a team.

AM: Yeah. He's the one that I always drove to old Machine One down here. Old man Coggins' dad, he liked to killed him. And the Old Man Lacy, he was teamed up and he wasn't neither working. I told him, "I guess I'll ?work? him if you'll take that steel saddle off of that back band. But I won't if you don't." Well, I had it off and they put me onto him, then. (Laughs)

BR: You were riding him, you mean?

AM: Yes, I rode him. (Laughs) But everything got out of his way, though!

(Much laughter)

BR: Did he ever run away with you?

AM: Yes, he ran away! (Laughter) You couldn't hold him when he took a notion to go.

BR: You couldn't?

AM: One day I was there at the planer and I had every wagon loaded. I'd backed in there and I'd put him in the shares and had him hooked up. I thought I'd _____ there just before twelve. I had the wagon just about unloaded and I looked at my watch and I saw that it was just one minute to twelve. And I run and went to snatching chains and doing up blinds, and about the time I headed back the whistle blowed! (Laughter) Then I had to ride!

(Much laughter)

BR: Where'd you go?

AM: I lit off for a ditch 'til I ran into a lot of other horses. They blocked the road for me to keep him from going in the ditch with me, because they couldn't hold him. (Laughs) If I could get always get in the lead and get to the creek up there where they was supposed to

not cross 'til the whistle blowed, well, I could handle him pretty well; but they wouldn't let me come in ahead of any of them. Because that was the rules, not to cross that creek 'til the whistle blowed. And I was _____ run to get in the front, to keep _____ to ride!

(Much laughter)

BR: Did he ever buck you off?

AM: No, he never did buck me off. But I had to ride!

(Much laughter)

Oh, he always... When you come out of the barn ?lane? there, you had get on him [while he was] a-bucking and a-kicking. You had to get on him, then let him get there. Then the horses all had to scatter out from the water trough, too, because he'd make them scatter.

BR: He was just an ornery horse.

AM: He was mean. When they left Grandin they took him to West Eminence and they put him on the wood haul, him and another horse, with a fellow by the name of Terry Wadlow.

[tape meter, 200]

He ran away with him and killed him.

BR: How'd that happen?

AM: Well, he was just mean, and he just run away with Terry and throwed him out of the wagon and killed him. Busted his brains out.

BR: You mean the man fell out of the wagon.

AM: Yeah. When they run away, they throwed him out. Busted his brains out.

BR: We'll be back in a moment.

[Sound of recorder being turned off and on.]

BR: What color was this fingertail horse?

AM: Bay. He was a big bay horse.

BR: Solid color?

AM: Yeah. Big bay. Dark bay.

BR: Whatever happened to him after he went to West Eminence?

AM: I don't know what they ever done with him after that. ?I was glad? I wasn't up there, then.

BR: Did you care?

AM: I didn't much care. But when I let him go, when I quit Grandin and quit driving him, anybody could have handled him pretty well for a while, I guess. I had him brought under.

BR: How'd you do that?

AM: I used a big, heavy hame string with a buckle end.¹⁶ (Laughs) That's what I used on him!

BR: You mean the first thing you have to do is attract their attention, huh?

AM: Yes. I didn't use the other end. I used the buckle end. But I had to keep the Old Man Lacy from knowing it, though.

BR: You mean Ed Lacy?¹⁷

¹⁶ Mr. McDowell is referring to a leather strap or trace which normally would be attached to a hame.

¹⁷ Ed Lacy was the manager of the grocery department at the Grandin Mill Company Store. Source: History and Families - Ripley County, Missouri, Ripley County Historical Society. Turner Publishing Company, Paducah, KY, 2002, page 43.

AM: No, it was Ed Lacy's brother. And if the Old Man Lacy or old Uncle John ?McGedde? would have knowed that I was using that buckle on him, why, they'd fired me. (Laughs)

BR: You don't care if they do know it now, do you?

AM: No, I don't care now. They didn't know anything about it. They won't be able to find it out! (Laughs) But I tamed him down after I'd worked him a while. I had to be rough with him.

BR: You were talking about the river. Did you ever raft logs?

AM: Yes, I rafted about one raft of big logs.

BR: Did you like that?

AM: No, I didn't like it so well, because the water was low and I hung up!

(Much laughter)

And tore the raft up! Me and Charlie Sawyers, we tore it up there at Boyles Slough. Left me a-standing out there in the middle of the river on part of it, and he went on down the river with the other part! (Laughter)

BR: What'd you do then?

AM: Well, I waited 'til he come back, and then we _____ and took and prized [pried] it off and fitted them all together. _____.

BR: You took one raft down.

AM: Yeah. One raft of pine logs.

BR: What about ties?

AM: Well, I've rafted several rafts of ties, me and Ian Rongey and Herman Rongey.

BR: Did you like that?

AM: Yeah, I didn't mind it, bad. I liked the [tie] raft pretty well. It was a long, worrisome trip, there all day if it happened to be cold weather.

BR: Did you raft in the wintertime, too?

AM: Yeah, it was pretty cold weather.

BR: Did you ever fall in the river in the wintertime like that?

AM: I never did while I was rafting. I have fallen in, though. (Laughs)

BR: You know, I bet the rafting out there in the wintertime like this; freezing temperatures and riding those ties and logs down that river, I'll bet that's pretty dangerous out there on that ice.

[tape meter, 250]

AM: Well, it *is* dangerous. It's a tough go to ride that old raft down [with] that wind a-blowing. And the logs get wet and slick, too, and freezing.

[Sound of recorder being turned off and on.]

BR: Talking about the ties and logs being slick and icy in the wintertime, [did] you fellows ever use anything for a lifejacket or anything to kind of make you float in case you fell?

AM: No, nothing; only John ?Hager? used to. When he rafted, he carried a five gallon gas can to ride on when they went under. (Laughs)

BR: When he fell off, he fell off with a gas can.

AM: Well, going ?rapids? a lot of times, and ?rapids? used to be up there, you'd hit square against the bluff. You go in there, maybe you'd stay for two or three hours. And the ties would dive, and then they'd come up on their edge, and you'd have to swim to the tie

right as it come up. He always carried him a five-gallon can to ride out, because he couldn't swim. (Laughs)

BR: I guess anybody would. You mean he just carried it in his hand?

AM: No, he kept it on the raft, stuck it on the raft with him.

BR: I thought maybe he would tie it on his belt or something.

AM: No, you didn't have time to tie it on your belt and pull them oar blades. He had to get them all loose.

BR: Anybody ever get hurt on that river doing that?

AM: Not as I know of.

BR: Fortunate, isn't it?

AM: That's right.

BR: I'll bet it was quite an experience.

AM: Well, it was. I saw one time coming in there... Me and Ian Rongey come down with a raft, and the bow dove and it went under 'til I could just see the end of the oar stem a-sticking up. Old Ian made it back, was coming back to the back end of the raft with me, and the bow got up there and took a notion to come back up. Why, it come up, and it had the _____ blade tore down, and he got back up there and put it up, and then he cleared the bluff with the front end. But he had to hustle! (Laughter)

BR: We'll be back in a moment.

[Sound of recorder being turned off and on.]

BR: I've heard tell of a lot of times when rafts would break up. Since we've been talking with the gentlemen around here. They've lost camping gear and everything else. I guess you could lose a lot in that river, if it was ripe.

AM: I know a fellow that left his pipe in there. (Laughs)

BR: Lost his pipe?

AM: Yeah, lost his pipe in there.

BR: How'd that happen?

AM: Oh, we was a-coming around the bend, and he kept... He was on the back end. He kept telling me how to pull the bow. And I wouldn't 'dip' the blade 'til I caught a little eddy pocket. I popped that in there, and when I put that in, I braced myself against the binder, why, it swung it in there 'til it took his end and took it back around and tried to get ahead of me. Then I had to go to work and fight it to help him straighten it up. He lost his pipe in the round, he got in such a way. (Laughs)

[tape meter, 300]

BR: What kind of pipe was it?

AM: It was an old thin handled hickory pipe, is what it was. (Laughs)

BR: I bet it was well broke in, too.

AM: Yes. It was well broke in, I guess. (Laughs)

Unidentified voice: Did you know Charlie Walls?

AM: Oh, I knowed Charlie Walls well.

Unidentified voice: Was he a good rafter?

AM: Yes, he was a good rafter. He was just about the best there was on the river -- anywheres.

BR: Where did he live?

AM: He lived here at Doniphan. When he come up on the river a-rafting, he always tried to stay at our house. If he could get in reach of our house, why, he always stayed there.

BR: So now you're talking about your home up there near Panther Spring?

AM: Yeah, that's right.

BR: Well, that's not far from Harry Grubbs' home.

AM: Just a mile and a quarter, my old home from Harry Grubbs' home.

BR: Did you ever ride in Harry Grubbs' boat?

AM: Yeah. Yes, I've rode in it lots of times. _____ Smith's.¹⁸ In fact, I had one of my own for about a year. (Laughs)

BR: Did you like that?

AM: Yeah, I liked it very well.

BR: How come you to quit?

AM: Well, the business got so dull there wasn't nothing in it. Then the river got up and washed the tree down. The boat was tied to [it] and [the tree] tore it all to pieces, and I had a good reason to quit! (Laughter)

BR: What'd you do after that?

AM: Well, I didn't do anything, or any more rafting or boating.

BR: What kind of engine did you have on this boat? What happened to that?

AM: Ten horse Gray Engine, one cylinder.

¹⁸ First name unclear. In History and Families - Ripley County, Missouri (Ripley County Historical Society. Turner Publishing Company, Paducah, KY, 2002), scattered references are made to a Mr. J.A. Smith and a Mr. A. J. Smith as running a supply boat on the Current River. Both Mr. McDowell and Harry Grubbs also engaged in this business.

BR: What happened to that?

AM: Well, it tore it all to pieces. It tore it out of the boat and busted the boat all to pieces, when the tree fell on it.

BR: You mean the engine is somewhere in the river now.

AM: Yes. It's right there at the old boat landing there, buried in the gravel about six or eight feet deep now.

BR: Oh, it's still there.

AM: Still there in the river, buried in the gravel bar.

BR: Do you know anything about how a lot of these places got their names on the river?

AM: Well, yes. Some of them.

BR: I'll tell you what. We'll get into that in just a moment.

We'll be back after this message and a brief musical interlude.

[End of recording; tape meter, 352]