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University of Maine Raymond H. Fogler Library Special Collections Department

Transcript of a sound recording in MS 608, WLBZ Radio Station Records, Bangor, Maine, 1931-1973

Title: St. Regis Paper Company Log Drive

Date: May 8, 1957

Recording number: Reel-to-reel Tape 33, part 1

Length of recording: 10:08

[transcript begins]

McPHETERS: ... Byron McPheters, and we don't worry too much about titles, but among other things, I'm called the Logging Superintendent. The log diving on the Machias River dates back to pre-Revolutionary days. We cut now about five million feet annually. That would mean with the size of the logs running between 80 and 90 feet that there would be between 50 and 60,000 pieces in this year's drive. We cut our logs in the winter and we try to cut the valley in our holdings here on a sustained yield basis. I mean by that that we cut only the annual growth so that the valley, the growth in the valley, will perpetuate itself. We have have done our best to get good utilization in later years and hope that the Machias River log drive will continue for many years to come.

MINCHER: What do the log drivers do? And is the work dangerous?

WRIGHT: My name is Bob Wright and the log drivers try to keep the logs moving at all times and probably one of the best ways to do this is to be sure that the river is properly filled with logs in the rears. The centers are properly made on in the middle of the river, and the wings are properly built on, on the sides, in the bad places. And of course, the thing that we have to watch out for is to keep the river from jamming at all times. And when the river jams, or we have quite a bad mess, and it takes quite a lot of time to straighten it out. And after it's gone there's there's a lot of logs left on the sides of the bank that takes quite a bit of time to move along.

MINCHER: We've gotten to the word wing there, Bob. Would you tell what that means?

WRIGHT: Well a wing is a bunch of logs that have pushed in, or jammed in, on the side of the bank. A wing is considered a wing when it's built against the bank and a center is considered such when it's in the middle of the river against an island or some obstruction in the middle of the river.

MINCHER: Now I do know that you leave the wings in place until the main body of the logs have gone by. How about the centers? Do you do that with those, too?

WRIGHT: That's right, unless the center builds on quite a bit, we usually leave the centers and the wings. The fellows that run the river and are on the drive know where to build the wings and where to leave the centers.

MINCHER: And they fend the other logs off as they come down, is that the idea? Why you leave them?

WRIGHT: Well, they don't really stay there and tend them off because if a wing or a center is built right, well, the logs will go along anyway.

MINCHER: That's what I was getting at, yes. Well how about danger? Is it dangerous?

WRIGHT: Well, Bill, it's quite a dangerous job in some respects, but I don't think it's as dangerous in the old days because we don't take as many chances now as the old fellows did when they took off the bateau and some of the equipment they had and go down through the real white water. Nowadays, we have outboard motors and we try to work it from the safety angle as much as possible. But I have a man right here that I think will tell you a little something about a bad spot, and I'll give you Boyd Killton.

KILTON: Well, up in the first lake, I was working out in front of the rolling tier, the rolling tier started and the consequences was the men on the bank, they shouted, and we, just two of us there, we had just room to move from there out by the end the logs and the fellow that was with me cleared, but I couldn't make it. I slipped and was down on one leg and instinct told me to go for the water, so I went for the water. After I got in the water there were some logs that went over me, ten or fifteen, I don't know which, and nobody else. And I was just lucky, the I feel about it, but it was one of those things that happens. It's unavoidable.

MINCHER: What's a rolling tier?

KILTON: It is a bunch of logs that has been hauled in or trucked in with a truck and then piled up on the bank and kind of build up for, on the shore, so that it will can be rolled into the water when we start the drive.

MINCHER: And how big are these logs that that did go over you?

KILTON: Well, they varied from, they was all 16 foot lengths, and they varied from 8 inches to, possibly 2 feet.

MINCHER: Were you hurt at all?

KILTON: I was hurt. I got a log and a hit on the shoulder and on the side of the head, but I was very fortunate. I was just scratched up a little bit and had a little scar on my head.

MINCHER: And how long ago was that? Approximately?

KILTON: Oh that was... I think 3 years ago.

MINCHER: And you're still, you're still working the river. How come?

KILTON: Well that goes with our job, where they want us to go, we, I've worked for the company for five years and when they say they want me to, like to have me go somewhere, I'm very, I like to do it. Because I like to please them. I like to do what they want me to do.

MINCHER: Well, you can you can quit when you want to, but you don't quit, so therefore you don't want to. I guess we can add two and two there. Thank you very much. Here's the boss of the river drive. Would you tell us your name and just what do you have to do as boss on the drive?

HALEY: My name is Francis Haley. I live in Whitneyville. I've drove here, oh, 30 years. I think it's, I don't know, about 32 years, and that. Now driving today and driving 30 years ago is altogether different. You got the men now, to drive with. It's kind of a lost art, anyway.

MINCHER: What sorts of trouble do you try to avoid most? Is there anything besides jams that can really make a mess of things?

HALEY: Oh, there's not very much. If you can keep your logs running, you've got a point to gain and if you can only just keep them logs running, of course you've gotta have your men on the front and know what's going on all the time. Of course, you've got know what's going on the whole length of the river. And you, the logs, well, they will outrun your water. And that's one thing that you have to watch, what's not. And another thing is when you've got your water on and you've got a good head of water and you've got to watch it pretty snug you've gotta be two, from two to two days and a half, ahead of it all the time. What I mean by that, you take it all the places that you have to fill up along the river, with all the back [snarls?] and [local holes?] they fill up full of water. And you have to watch all that stuff. And you take it, there's your dam, keeps shrinking.

MINCHER: You mean the amount of water behind you?

HALEY: Yeah, the amount of water that you have, it keeps shrinking. Why, you have to keep hoisting more gates and keep it up there.

MINCHER: Upstream?

HALEY: Yeah, up in the lakes, you know. You have to keep that up in order to keep the, now we got a little slack of water. I should have hoisted the gates last night, night before last. But we didn't. We let 'em go 'til the morning. We was, we got involved down river there, and we was all busy and everything was going. But I knew, that it was wrong. But we're all right.

MINCHER: There's no there's no danger there, just perhaps slows you down a little bit.

HALEY: Just a little slack of water. I didn't think too much of it anyway because from here to Little Falls it's most all dead water anyway. So I figured that we would get that water by this afternoon or tonight and that would get us over the little pitch of the Wigwams, over Holmes' Falls.

MINCHER: Now, how do you gauge your water, how much you need?

HALEY: Well, we have our, we have our markings, along the river, different places. We would try the best we can to keep it up there.

MINCHER: Once again, we go back to experience.

HALEY: That's right. And we try to keep it up, to have just at even, have your water even. But this is an exceptionally hard year. See, we have had no help from any of these streams along the river. We haven't had no rain and we've had Third Lake and Fourth Lake and Sabao to depend on the water. And you have to, you know, you just have to watch it, that's all, if you want to get along at all.

MINCHER: Okay, thanks. The previous was recorded on May 8 1957 for use in compiling a Monitor feature.

[transcript ends]

For more information about this transcript, audio recording, or other materials in Special Collections at the University of Maine, contact:

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