

Q. Tell us a little bit about what Christmas was like.

A. Christmas was something quite special, particularly for the children in Pine Ridge, because the company always had a ~~xxxxx~~ policy that they get a basket or bag, which always contained an apple or orange; there was a toy and trinket always varied for the boys and the girls and we always give it through the office. They had to come in the front door, bag then go out the back door. Of course, we had to police it very carefully or they would go through two and three times.

Carl: That's sort of like the old days at the British Colonial Hotel in Nassau. When they built it, the workmen would check in the front door and go out the back door and collect their pay at the end of the week.

A. The ladies who came in did not have any babies, but they was pregnant and thought they were entitled to get something anyway. I think the last year we give 'em, we had 600 pkgs. put up just for only the school age kids and we must have gone a third of them, and started to tally the pregnant women coming through the line so see how many we'd have to give the next year.

Q. Leo, wasn't Pine Ridge the largest settlement on Grand Bahama by far?

A. Definitely the largest settlement because on the payroll there was about 1800 people at the peak of the payroll, and that wasn't counting the children -- about 300 kids going to school in that little school house at that time.

Q. Do you recall how the company actually recruited its workers - say from Andros and the other islands?

A. Well, particularly Andros there was one of the men who wanted to be a sub-contractor, so he said "Look, I can go to Andros and get so many men - and he was told "Fine, you go to Andros and you come in and these guys will be working for you and we will pay you so much a fathom for the , and this was how these sub-contractors and each one would have the village located away from Pine Ridge and this particular fellow was just so promptly northwest from the main part, what they called the water hole, which was pretty close to where the chicken farm is today, and it was the same way with the other islands, but we didn't have too many of the laborers from the other islands, other than Andros, nobody from Nassau and very few from the southern part, and it was the same way with the other islands, but we did not have too many from Nassau, but the bulk was from Turks Island.

One of the amusing things was when we began to have movies for them, and you have seen the films where the train looks like it is coming through the film, and they absolutely jumped out of their seats and run right out. Another thing, the first year or two they would sit through a movie, they wouldn't clap, wouldn't holler or anything, but they had to see that movie a second and a third time before they really began to catch on to it. Actually, the movies were quite an education, because they didn't know anything about the outside world whatsoever.

Carl: As far as I know, Grand Bahama and Abaco are the only two parts of the Bahamas that ever had a railroad train, but they didn't know anything about aeroplanes, I suppose, to any extent nor anything of the outside world.

A. No, but you are correct there, for the only thing they knew about planes was the ones flying over, and that's about all. We were having these charter flights from the amphibianplane company, which were landing on the north side and the plane could get in only so close to the dock and then they would have to get the freight off of it and the passengers were landing in Hawksbill Creek when the road was put through to the south side. Of course

the creek was too shallow and close in and the plane would have to land in the middle of Hawksbill Creek. This Eddie Clark, he used to drive the truck to meet the plane and would have to scull a boat and he had never sculled a boat before

and didn't make too much progress sometime. He would take his clothes off and jumped overboard and pushed the dingy boat to the plane and pushed it back to shore.

logging

Tell me, this Leo, was the ~~xxxxxx~~ operation - both the lumber and the pit ~~prop~~ - was that a seven day a week operation ~~xxxxxxx~~ or did they work all they wanted.

Well, actually the logging operation was all on a piece-work on an hourly rate or basis. The only ones that got paid/ a daily rate was the foremen there and the mechanics, of course, worked out of the machine shop. Even the truck driver - he was not paid on an hourly rate ~~xxxxxx~~ ~~xxx~~ but paid on the number of logs he hauled in, and not by the number of trips.

I AM curious as to how you came by the method of measuring these things in fathoms, which is a maritime term.

Well, actually, fathoms is a European term. That's how it's dealt with there. ~~xxx~~ In fact, lumber even with the little we sold lumber to Germany and England was sold by the standard.

Lumber was sold by the standard? What is a standard?

I think a standard, if I remember correctly, ~~xxxxxxx~~ was 1964 ft.

If I am ~~xxx~~ correct, a fathom, Leo, is 6 ft. by 6 ft, ~~xxxx~~ o isn't it, or a fathom is 6 ft. - 216 cu. ft. to a fathom.

Now we are switching to Mrs. Groves.

A friend of ours took Gus Cash who was manager of the store at Pine Ridge, and you know this was a big store to compare with things. This friend took Gus Cash to Miami and the first time Gus had been there then met with the president of Burdines - I forget the name of that president then, who said "Mr. Cash, you mean to tell me you ~~live~~ live so near and have never been to Miami, and Gus said "Well, I have you been to Pine Ridge????"

We lived in either the pink or green house and would come to see the movies in Pine Ridge, so then I was driving a pick-up truck ~~one~~ one night to go back to the pink house, I did not want anybody to ride around with me, so I made the turn as slowly ~~xxxxxxx~~ as ~~xxx~~ I could and thought "Oh, I've made it - nobody's on" and I am halfway to the harbour when a big voice next to me said "I'll ~~get~~ get off here" and you think you are alone!

Carl: Tell us a little bit, Leo - where you worked and everything before you came to Grand Bahama.

Leo: I guess you can call it The Trail of the Lonesome Pine. I ~~was~~ was born and raised in Louisiana in the cypress country; in fact, I didn't even see a pine tree until I was fourteen years old/ I am ~~from~~ from Lutcher, St. James Parish, halfway between Baton Rouge and New Orleans and ~~xxxxxx~~ it was ..... cypress in gum and it just happened that on a Sunday afternoon when I went out with some friends and they were traveling around and they went around Ponchatoula and Hammond and that's when I saw my first pine tree. Well, that company ~~cut~~ cut out in ~~xxxx~~ 1930 and my dad moved to Florida to work for the Wilson Cypress Company.

Was ~~xxxxxx~~ Was that owned by Ed Ball?

No sir, Wilson Cypress Co. was owned strictly by the Wilson family out of Saganaw, Mich. In fact, they were about the only Yankees who were involved in the cypress or the lumber industry in the south other than this one family out of Minneapolis which held the original cutting grant in Abaco

Do you recall the name of that family that formed the Abaco Lumber Co. in 1902, wasn't it?

~~xxxxxxx~~ The cutting rights was signed in 1906 and I had the name on the tip of my tongue. No, the Roberts family bought the cutting rights - see, the original cuttings rights was signed by ~~the~~ this American family - a man and his wife, and they had a mill in Jacksonville but it was too far from the source of the timber, ~~xxxxxx~~ so they

built a lumber mill in Foley, Fla. I can't remember the name of that mill right now.

The name of the family? I may have that in my notes.

Anyway, we followed - my dad followed cypress into ~~ECG~~ Florida and when I grew up, ~~xxxxxx~~ started working for that same company during school vacation. Of course, when I finished school the ~~xxxx~~ depression was on and there wasn't anything ~~placed~~ so I still worked in turpentine, working fire circles around turpentine trees, and then when Roosevelt got in office, well he repealed the Prohibition Act, so then the lumber company immediately went back to work as cypress was needed for vats that they used in making the tank vats, and then when they cut out in Dixiecanna (?) we moved into central Florida where there was pine -- that's how I became really involved in pine, and that company did not cut out; actually, what they done, they lost practically all of their staff ~~and~~ went into the war efforts and they did not have enough man-power to continue operating so they sold the timber reserves to the company at <sup>Luchua</sup> ~~Luchua~~, Fla. and in the following years when Mr. Groves bought out ~~the~~ ~~company~~ the Abaco Lumber Co. which was in March of '46, and it happened that ~~Mr.~~ Mr. Bryan Hanks, who was named the president of the Abaco Lumber Company, was acquainted with the company attorney up in ~~North~~ ~~Fla.~~ through his former connection with Florida Power & ~~Lights~~ ~~Fla.~~ so he called George Wolden (?) and told him he needed some lumbermen, and as a result of that conversation - well, it was 8 of us wound up to come to work over here.

And you have been on Grand Bahama ever since?

Oh, for a period of about a year I was gone. I was here come in June ~~of~~ of '46 and left in September of '49, and was asked to come back the following year.

You have seen Pine Ridge, grow, mature and finally ~~cefc~~ disappear and move on and Freeport grow up in its place and become a great city on an island. Tell us a little bit about that.

When I first arrived on the island there wasn't any roads and no vehicles whatsoever on the island. Logging was done by narrigate railroads. Skidding of the logs was done by steam boiler and a steam engine and this was mounted on skids so that when they got through logging in a certain place, well they would just haul the cable out, hitch it to a pine stump, and pull itself along to another location.

~~xxxx~~ Leo, when you came here in the early days of Pine Ridge ~~xxx~~ did you see any future for the island at all, except in lumbering and that soon the timber would play out?

The only thing I had in my mind - I grew up in lumber ~~enfc~~ and of course at that time pine was still quite plentiful in the states and so we had quite a problem due to the size of the ~~xxxxxx~~ timber. We couldn't compete in the states with them methods because they didn't have the terrain that we had to ??? with, ~~enfc~~ and the size of their timber - the minimum size was twice ~~xxxx~~ larger than we were getting out, so as a result all of our output had to be sold throughout the Caribbean.

Well, you sold your output throughout the Caribbean ~~enfc~~ and pit props in England and as lumber in Europe. Is that not correct?

No, the pine was not sold as lumber. It was strictly for the coal mines both in Germany and in England and also in ~~Br. Belgium~~ <sup>Belgium</sup>. Mr. Groves is the one who developed the idea of trying to go into the props and he made a special trip to England and succeeded in getting a contract for the pit props. At that time there was a company shipping ~~xxxxxx~~ mine props out of Jacksonville but after that, once we had a contract with them ~~enfc~~; well, that played out as they would rather deal with a crown colony than get the props from the states.

Well, of course, Mr. Groves developed the idea ~~enfc~~ of making the pit props from the small end of the tree, if I am not ~~correct~~ <sup>mistaken</sup> that is, if I am not mistaken, but what happened to the small end of

the tree before that came into effect?

Actually, we had the contract that was signed with the Crown Department in England that we could cut down to only ~~down~~ to 6 in. waist high, if I remember correctly, so they cut a ~~xxxx~~ ~~cut~~ a tree down and topped it off at the first limb.

The rest of it was waste? Am I ~~xxxx~~ not correct?

AT that time Yes, the rest of it was waste completely. And then once the contract was signed we could come down to 4 in. so they went back over the area that already had been utilized for lumber ~~confesses~~ and cutting but <sup>nothing</sup> nothing than mine props out of it.

The question that I really wanted to ask you, Leo, ~~was cccexwxjxxx~~ when you were out there as an accountant at Pine Ridge = ~~ccxxx dxxx~~ did you ever dream that a place like Freeport would grow up?

~~zzzzzz~~ I remembered sitting on the front porch one evening and Mr. Groves was visiting at the time - and a beautiful sunset was on and he just come out of the blue and said "You know, this would be a wonderful place to have a free port " and from that dream was the first I ever thought about it, but I would say it was four or five years before he ever began to work on it as far as I know- that is, to get the legislation through that required such a contract to be signed with an individual.

Well, we all know that the accomplishment has been made ~~snfeyc~~ and that Freeport is a reality - and hindsight is a great thing, but for him to have said that at that time when there was nothing here shows that he had great foresight. Leo, tell us a little bit about ~~Pine Ridge~~ what your job was at Pine Ridge.

~~Wkk~~ Well, I took care of the administration part of the operation which entailed the usual things that follow through <sup>and</sup> ~~submit~~ a financial report at the end of each month ~~ycyhc~~ to the directors ....

Did you have any unusual problems - I mean in communications?

I would say that was our biggest problem with the communications <sup>ops.</sup> When we first went there, there was only a wireless station ~~snf~~ and that was all. Opened just a couple of hours ~~in the morn~~ morning, mid-day and the evening and that was it.

Well, you had various ships calling in Freeport, and various ships that had to be - I am sure shipping agents that had to be informed and you had ~~xxxx~~ loads of pit props and lumber, etc.

~~ZZZ~~ In the early days the only ships that called were the vessels out of Nassau when we were loading on the northside/ ~~xxxx~~ Now we did have ships that were coming up from Cuba - one was a full ~~ma~~ Master schooner that had to lay off West End. Now to load that vessel the stevedors would be gone for a period of about ~~two~~ weeks . The stevedors got paid not only on an hourly rate - they got paid so much a thousand - whatever the end worths (P???) called for, they got - I think it was 10 shillings a thousand to stevedor that into the vessel. Now that money ~~ccsdccscscs~~ was then split up among the stevedors. We didn't have to split up anything. That was their business and how many hours they wanted to work, but it was always a round-the-clock affair on ~~xxxxxccc~~ stevedoring the boats, particularly like right into West ~~End~~ End it was quite a trip to voyage out because they had to go around Sandy Cay and then into West End, <sup>at least on the western tip</sup> and it was a good 12 to 18 hour trip for the barge and to load, that it would take about three or four bargeloads of lumber because that vessel carried about 75,000 board feet. Of course, with smaller vessels like the Betty K - well, we could load that one out practically ~~on~~ one barge on each one of those.

That was in New Harbour, after it was dredged?   
 Well, ~~we~~ we see the first harbour that was dredged strictly for prop operation and lumber was only 100 ft. wide and ~~ccyhc-z-ccc~~

I think 300 ft. long . No, that first one was only 50 ft. wide and 300 ft. long, and then they had a slip cut off at one side ~~xxxxxxx~~ that they would slip their empty barges in -

So that a big boat could not get in there

~~xxxx~~ The draft there was only about 8 ft.

The Pillow Natchez (sp?)

How do you spell that, Leo?

We've got some Greeks working down at the Casino, and could probably get them to spell it out for you.

Anyway, when this vessel arrived, it was strictly a tramp steamer

/When was this - about what year?

~~xxxx~~

I think it was in '52 - February. We started cutting props on ~~zzzz~~ '51, and the first vessel to arrive was either in February or March , and as I said, it was strictly a tramp steamer over 40 years of age, completely rusted all over and of course after the first ship was cleared by Customs who at that time was only one person handling numerous duties, and he wanted all sorts of supplies. He wanted live goats, live pigs ~~xxxxxx~~ live cows -

This was the captain?

~~xxx~~ The captain had no purser. He acted as his own purser, paymaster and everything, but from what I can understand ~~xxxxxx~~ the crew seemed to have been quite underfed on their voyage, and continued arguing with the captain , so we made every effort ~~xxx~~ to try and get as much of the food stuff he wanted ~~xxxxxx~~ and in particular before he sailed, we definitely had to get him a number of goats; there were no pigs on the island at that time *but* we did succeed in locating one cow that we was able to purchase and get aboard which was quite a problem as we had to hoist it up with the ship's tackle.

Now what was the purpose of this ship's visit? Was it to pick up pit props?

Strictly to pick up a cargo of pit props destined for England. It took us about two weeks to load the vessel and it was en route to make the voyage from Freeport to *Cardiff* ~~Cartage (?)~~ the first port ~~xxx~~ in England.

Carl: *Cardiff* ~~Cartage~~ is in Wales. I only point that out because ~~xxx~~ the Welshmen don't like to be called Englishmen.

Leo, you say you used to board all the ships that came into Freeport; did any of the people from the ships, the ships' crews- did they ever visit the refinery?

Definitely - we would invite the ships' officers and would have a party for them on the shore and they would reciprocate and if the ships were here more than two weeks, there would be two parties aboard ship. They were always nice and easy to get along with, except that one particular ship caused a bit of trouble when we could not get the launch out to them soon enough and the sailors would take their clothes off, dive overboard and swim ashore.

Carl: Leo, you were going to tell us about the original owners of the Abaco Lumber Company.

Leo: The Brooks family of Minneapolis, Minn., were the original developers of the industry in the Bahamas. They signed a 100 yr. contract with the Crown Lands Department and the home office was in England and of course the Queen had to approve and sign the original contract which was given to the Brooks family. Now this contract entailed the fine timber on Abaco and Grand Bahama islands. They immediately put into effect and started construction of the sawmill that was located what's called Wilson City. It was a modern mill in all aspects at that time; in fact, the first electric plant and the first ice plant in the Bahamas was located at Wilson City.

Carl: The only other place that lumber was headquartered in the

19

Bahamas was in Pine Ridge and Norman's Castle. Were there any other places?

Leo: In Andros - I think at Mastic Point. The mill located there was called the Bahama Lumber Company. Just a minute - let me go back to the beginning. Construction began shortly after the signing of the ~~contract~~<sup>papers</sup> with the Crown Lands and that mill went into operation in 1908, and it operated until 1916. The mill was dismantled and a smaller mill built, which was moved to Cornwall; the balance of the mill was sold as scrap and went into the war efforts - and was shipped to England. The idea of going into a smaller mill was due to the size of the timber. At Wilson City they had reached as far as they could reach, so that was the main reason why they had to close that mill down and go to a smaller operation which was Cornwall, and there was three different Cornwall operations, I think, so that meant they were in each operation about five years, and then they would move to another site. The last Cornwall operation, I think, was on the southern tip of Abaco, near Sandy Point.

Carl: I know Sandy Point.

Leo: Well, I have never been in that area. Well, ~~they~~ then the operation moved to Grand Bahama in 1944.

Carl: By that time I guess the Roberts family had bought the operation?

Leo: That is correct. The Roberts family had bought the operation, and I think that he had partners in this with him. I am not sure who in Nassau was involved with it. When they moved to Grand Bahama, Mr. Roberts had died but his son, J.W., had taken over the management of the operation. In January of '46 there was a boiler explosion. One of the locomotive was parked right in the main part of the community at noon hour. The fireman and the engineer had stepped off ~~and~~ and had gone into their respective homes to have lunch, but somehow or other, something had happened to the safety valve on the switch, which all steam boilers have to have. No one knows what exactly happened, but it didn't pop off at the danger point, so the steam pressure built up and there was this tremendous explosion which killed five people.

Carl: Well, I was told by somebody - I ~~k~~ don't know whether he knows what he was talking about, but he had shut the valve off and had forgotten ~~xx~~ about it.

Leo: I've heard the same story, but you hate to come out and say this was what had happened. There are so many things that can go wrong with a steam boiler/ through my experience that we had the same experience- we had the same type water and you would have a residue build up that was in the water, and if you were not very particular, it would cause these safety valves and not only that, but they have what they call an injector - you had to have this ~~xxxxxx~~<sup>injector</sup> to inject the water into the boiler under such tremendous pressure and if you did not keep this thing very clean you couldn't get water into the boiler, so there are many things like this that can go wrong. Anyway, after the explosion, the company was put up for sale and Mr. Groves bought it in March of '46. I was hired to go to work for the company in April but I did not report for duty until the first of June. In Miami first I had to check with the auditors there and then into Nassau, and I had to undergo a two-week quarantine period because there was a polio epidemic going on in Miami, so the General Manager and the Auditor who were suppose to go with me to Pine Ridge and introduce me - well, they went back to the states and told me to catch the first mail boat out after I got out of the quarantine. I was in Nassau three weeks and arrived at Eight Mile

Rock, I think it was the 30th of June, and I was sea-sick, and had to walk from where we got ashore there-had to walk to Hawksbill Creek up inland to where the dingy boat from Pine Ridge had come to pick me up, and this was Grey Russell and Floyd Lowe who had come over in the dingy boat. It was just about sundown when I got off the mail boat and by the time we got underway, it must have been about nine or ten o'clock. Going through Hawksbill Creek on the north side of town we run aground, and there was a sand bar and we had to wait 'til the tide come up before we could get off of that and by the time we got into Pine Ridge, it was two o'clock in the morning, but I was always an early riser, regardless of the time I went to sleep, woke up in the morning and went out on the front porch and gee whiz alive - I'm back home again. The commissary, the houses were the same dimensions as the various log camps I had worked in, in the states. Of course the operations was the navigation operations that I had been involved in - every type of operation from the mule teams, oxen - even what we call the Fordsom tractors mounted on steel pans (?). We had skid units mounted on barges when we used to pull the timber directly into the water and make rafts (~~2~~) out of them to be towed to the mill. We had the overhead skidder operations where the rigging was put up in the top of a tree and went back out 1800 ft. and they loggered a complete circle and they'd move on to the next site, but this was quite a unique operation, because the timber was so small that they had to ..... The type of operation they had at that time was best suited for the terrain and everything.

Carl: Leo, is there any difference between this pine and the yellow pine of Georgia?

Leo: This pine is a lot harder. It will not bleed turpentine Now I have heard people say you get turpentine out of these trees. There was a turpentine experiment carried out on Grand Bahama, but it was not successful as it would not bleed so therefore that operation fell through.

Carl: Now this wood here - up in Georgia they would call it fat wood. I don't know what they call it here, but it is loaded with turpentine.

Leo: Yes, they call it fat wood and is loaded with turpentine but for some reason or other - you take a ~~tree~~ here that is about 8 in. in ~~dime~~ diameter. A tree here would be about 75 yrs. old whereas in Georgia or north Florida or Alabama a tree 8 in. in diameter would be about only twelve to fifteen years old. Here you would need a microscope to count the grains. One of the things that was very amusing to me, when I first come to Pine Ridge I had always done my own typing and there was <sup>a number</sup> the open windows and stuff = whenever I had any typing to do, ~~one~~ of the little native boys would come sit by the window to listen to the typewriter going. One of the keys jammed on me, and at that time I had a few cuss words about things - couldn't hold myself back, and the kids said "What's wrong, Mr. Leo?" and I said, "Doggone it, the type= writer's broke down and I've got to have a wrench." He said, "Well, tell me who to go see" and of course it had always been throughout any industry, when someone didn't know what was going on, he sent them off on a fool's errand for a left-hand monkey wrench. Of course, this is what happened - I sent the little kid and told him to go see Albert down in the machine shop - he was working on some tractors and tell him to send me that left-hand monkey wrench as I needed it for the typewriter. This little kid hauled off for running, went on down there, and of course, come back bringing a 24 in. Stilson wrench. Well, I never did tell the kid I couldn't use it - I took it and thanked him, but I swore then that I would never do that again. Whenever I used to go back on my periodic visits

~~that I would never do that again.~~

to the states I would ask anybody if there was anything that I could bring back for them and I always had a list of things - ladies and mens - dress sizes, colors and you name it, but for some reason or another, I had become very ~~xx~~ lucky and knew the staff who was working at Montgomery Wards in West Palm Beach, so on my first stop I would give them this list and told them I would be gone four or five days and would be coming through, and want you to have this order filled. I would take suit cases - you have them packed for me - just let me know what the bill is so I could take the stuff and not lose any time, and most times I would have two cases and sometimes three. On one of my trips, for some reason I could not get back to Pine Ridge from West Palm, so I am in Nassau and take Bahama Airways which was flying at that time once a week, and they was flying the amphibious plane out, and here I was getting ready to go through Customs and I had at that time three suitcases full of you-name-it in there; none of it belonged to me so as we were going through I asked the Customs to give me a customs declaration and I done locked the suitcases. He said, "You Mr. Leo, ain't you?" He said, "Give me that slip back He tore it up, said "Git out of here." He said, I know what you doing - you're helping us out." I said "Yea." Of course, you can't put that in the book.

Carl: No, I won't put that in the book.