This is an interview with Mr. Ben M. Stevens, Jr., Mrs. D. O. Thoms, Mr. D. O. Thoms, W. Forrest Stevens and Mr. Henry N. Stevens, owners of Richton Tie and Timber Company. Also present and contributing to this interview is Mr. A. L. Moser.

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BY: Bobbie Jean Dickinson

Dickinson: Mr. Stevens, it is a privilege to be here this morning and interview you for The MFA Forest History Committee; also, you other gentlemen and Mrs. Thoms who are present today. Please introduce yourselves. Also, as thoughts come to mind, jot these down so we won't miss anything during the interview.

Ben M. Stevens, Jr.: My name is Ben M. Stevens, Jr., and I'm Chairman of the Board of Richton Tie and Timber Company. We're here this morning to discuss with Bobby Jean the history of our company, which was founded by my father, Ben M. Stevens, Sr. With me this morning are other owners of the family business. They are, my sister, Mrs. D. O. (Daisy) Thoms, my brothers, Henry N. Stevens, and William Forrest Stevens, and my brother-in-law, D. O. Thoms. Also, with us is Mr. A. L. Moser, a long-time employee of our company, who has field experience with all phases of our operation since the early 1940's. All are active in the operation of our present company.

I might just give a brief background history of the Stevens family and their settlement into the area around Mississippi, Richton, and Perry County. My great grandfather, Benjamin Stevens, came from Massachusetts in the middle 1800's and settled at Old Augusta, Miss. Old Augusta at that time, was one of the major land grant offices of the Federal Government. He became involved in the land and timber business as a result of his locating in Old Augusta. That office served a large part of the southeastern section of the United States. During his lifetime, he accumulated approximately 30,000 acres of timberland and was also in the logging and lumber business. A large part of his logging operation consisted of rafting logs down the Leaf River into the Pascagoula River to the Dantzler Lumber Company. In 1867, he opened a store, which was the Ben Stevens Store in Old Augusta. That store was later moved in the early 1900's - with the location of the railroad - over into Richton, and is still located in Richton. It has been operated by my father, his uncle, and the family members that are with us here today. Actually, my father, in the procurement of raw material and the shipment of pulpwood, continued to really do just what my great grandfather was doing. The only difference was that he was moving different, smaller type of timber by rail instead of by river and raft. Incidentally, my son, Benjamin and two of the Thoms' sons, Joel and Richard, are presently employed in various phases of our operation. Consequently, we are really a fifth generation family in the timber business in this section of the state.

Dickinson: You mentioned "Old Augusta". Is that near New Augusta now, in Perry County?

Ben Stevens, Jr.: Old Augusta is near New Augusta. As a matter of fact, it's just across the Leaf River. The Leaf River Pulp and Paper Company is located in Old Augusta.

Henry Stevens: It was originally really Augusta. They call if Old Augusta, but it was Augusta.

Mr. D. O. Thoms: A couple of years ago some men were doing some work in the Leaf River and they found a raft and some submerged logs that belonged to our great grandfather. Forrest and I went down to the site as they were pulling them out of the river, and they were in wonderful condition. They had great grandfather's mark---his stamp, on them, the one he used as he floated them down the river. Then about a year before last (1987) someone brought me a cut off butt of a log someone had found in Thompson Creek. How it got there we don't exactly know, but I have it at home on my porch. It also had my great grandfather's stamp on the end of it.

Dickinson: How old do you think this would be? How long had it been in the river?

D. O. Thoms: Well over a hundred years. I'd say maybe 120 or 125 years.

Mr. D. O. Thoms: There was no deterioration of the wood. It is just as solid as it can be. Since it has dried out, it has cracked some, but the wood has no rotten spots or anything. It's perfect wood.

Forrest Stevens: A logger told me that he had found some old logs from our land on his side of the creek--had pulled them out and cut them into lumber. He also told us about this raft on our property. Over a two-year period the water washed it out, but I think now someone has come along and pulled it out of the banks of the river or either a tree has caved in on top of it and covered it all up again. I can't seem to locate it.

Dickinson: What year was this --- the practice of floating the logs down the river; and what year were they found?

Forrest Stevens: Back in the 1860's and 70's, and they were found in about 1986.

Dickinson: That's well over 100 years old.

Forrest Stevens: As Daisy mentioned, the old logs have a "B. S." on them --- you can barely see it. But I was wondering if somebody recorded the marks, and if there is someplace where they were recorded. Maybe in the State Office Building somewhere or in some office where everybody had their marks registered like they use to have the old cattle brands.

Dickinson: Mr. Jimmy Bryan wrote in his history something about his work with L. N. Dantzler and he mentioned this. I can't remember whether he said there was a list of the different brands, but we could certainly check into this.

Ben M. Stevens, Jr.: One thing further I'd like to mention about my great grandfather, who was Benjamin Stevens, is that he served in the Civil War, and was a Captain in the Civil War. He had ten children; six sons and four daughters. All of his sons were named for Confederate Generals. My grandfather was named for General Nathan Bedford Forrest. His name was William Forrest Stevens. He was an attorney with law offices up in Carrollton, Mississippi and served as a judge in Carroll County. His wife, my father's (Benjamin McClellan Stevens) mother died when my father was about three years old, and my grandfather, William Forrest Stevens, married Daisy McLaurin Stevens, who was the daughter of the then Governor of the State of Mississippi. They were married in the Governor's Mansion. The first child ever to have been born in the Governor's Mansion was my aunt, Mrs. Daisy Stevens Lockwitz, who died just a few years ago while living in Tulsa, Oklahoma.

My grandfather died when by father was 14 years old, and he was reared by family members in Hattiesburg, particularly by his grandfather, who was still farming and living at Old Augusta, or Augusta, Mississippi. He would work on the farm with my grandfather who had large herds of sheep and cattle, and as I indicated earlier, substantial timberland holdings. My father later went to prep school in North Carolina and graduated from the University of Mississippi. He was sent to Richton after graduating from the

University of Mississippi to begin preparing himself to go to law school. He was working with his uncle, Mr. C. H. Stevens, in the C. H. Stevens Company, which is now the B. M. Stevens Company. As a result of that association, when Mr. C. H. Stevens died, my father purchased the company from the C. H. Stevens family and continued to operate it all through his life. He married a girl from Richton, Mississippi, Arlean Nicholson, and my sister, my two brothers and I are the children of that marriage.

Dickinson: When you purchased your first land, was it at a time when any of the virgin timber was on the land, or was it after it had been cut and replanted?

Ben M. Stevens, Jr.: When my father began to purchase land it was after all the virgin timber had been cut. The land that he was purchasing, he was able to buy from fifty cents to a dollar per acre. And then in later years, after some of us came into the business, we began to purchase land at a value of $10.00 to $20.00 per acre. In most cases we were able to cut the timber off of it, and consequently, have the land with no cost involved in it. So today, while our land base is fairly substantial, in terms of dollars invested in it, it's very little because it was acquired at a very low land base cost. Actually, after the virgin timber was cut, land could be bought in this section for about fifty cents an acre --- you could have bought all the land you wanted, but there was no money. My father had opportunities to buy large blocks, but he just didn't have the capital with which to do it.

Daisy Thoms: This was really a section of Mississippi known as the Pine Belt. Originally, we had about five or six sawmills in a close area around Richton. (At one time Richton had about 20,000 people I've been told). There was cut over land everywhere at that time.

Ben Stevens. Jr.: Henry's wife's family (Henry Stevens who is with us) had a large sawmill operation in Richton and owner substantial timberlands. Henry's father-in-law and my father's brother-in-law, let 30,000 acres of land go back to the government for the taxes. They just felt like land had no value. These were wealthy people --- but they wanted to put their investments in stocks and bonds. They just had absolutely no use for land in this part of the country after their sawmills had cut out the virgin timber.

D. O. Thoms: In the area around Ovett, they sold land for ninety cents an acre net; that section is now a large portion of the DeSoto National Forest.

Ben M. Stevens, Jr.: Now I'd like to give you just a bit of history about the Richton Tie and Timber Company, and the pulpwood business. My father was the first pulpwood dealer in the State of Mississippi, and one of the first in the South. He got into the business through an association with the Masonite Corporation in Laurel, which was founded, I believe, in about 1925. My father was returning from a business trip to Jackson one day and in passing through Laurel he came upon a truck loaded with sticks of fresh peeled wood stalled in the highway, and some of this wood had fallen off. Daddy stopped to ask the driver what was the purpose of those sticks. The driver told him that a fellow by the name of Mason was trying to take that wood and make a board out of it. As a result of that contact with that driver in the middle of the street in Laurel, daddy contacted Mr. Mason and developed a pulpwood relationship with the Masonite Corporation. He shipped in the first car of wood, and for many years we continued to supply Masonite with wood. At one time, we were their largest supplier. That was when Masonite was probably the largest industry in Mississippi. We've had a very fine relationship with the Masonite organization over a number of years. In addition to supplying Masonite with wood, we helped them acquire large blocks of land located in Perry County. As a matter of fact, at one point Masonite owned over 50,000 acres of land in Perry County, and a large part of that acreage was procured through the efforts of Ben M. Stevens, Sr.

In the early days of supplying pulpwood for Masonite, it had to be hand-peeled, and was stored on rail sidings for drying. Masonite required the wood to be at least 120 days old before they could use it in their process. My father had a close association with the Gulf, Mobile and Northern Railroad people. As a matter of fact, he worked with them in trying to develop industry along the line. Incidentally, the railroad sent him out into California to help develop the chicken business. The railroad, through the efforts of my father, opened a chicken farm just South of Richton. Actually, to digress further, my father's association with the GM&N Railroad was such that when he told them he had the opportunity to buy the Stevens Company, but had no money, and instead proposed to move to New Orleans where he already had a job with a bank, they told him that they could not loan him the money, but they made an arrangement with the bank in Richton to keep on deposit enough money in the Richton Bank for him to borrow until he could pay it back. They did not want him to leave their line. They, in effect, subsidized the purchase of the B. M. Stevens Company store, by my father from his uncle.

In the early days of the pulpwood operation, all the cars were loaded by hand and loaded in boxcars. In the summer months that was very, very hot work; picking up that freshly peeled slick wood and carrying in into the back end of a boxcar, so daddy prevailed on the officials of the Gulf, Mobile and Northern Railroad to tear some of the sides off the railroad cars. As a result of that, the wood rack was developed. It became the pulpwood wood rack, as we know it today. In addition to that, pine stumps from the virgin forest were being shipped out of Richton to a company called Continental Turpentine Company in Laurel. The stumps were being shipped on a per car rate. My dad prevailed on the officials of the Gulf Railroad to let him ship wood on a per car rate. That established what was known as the Laurel pulpwood freight rate, which survived in the industry for years and years. The railroad on a number of occasions tried to change the rate to a per cord basis, but this rate had been established and they were very unsuccessful in getting the rate changed to a per cord basis until the mills themselves agreed to the rate.

As Masonite grew they expanded my dad in his operation. The first pulpwood bought North of Laurel was bought at Louin, Mississippi. It was delivered by a black man by the name of Elder Wilson. As the business continued to grow, my dad had to send people from Richton up to Bay Springs, Louin, and Montrose in order to teach people how to cut wood, show them how to peel and stack the wood --- train them to do the job that was being done in the South. At one time, he had probably 150 to 175 different railroad sidings throughout Mississippi on which pulpwood was stacked. Each week he would have people go by, as Mr. Moser who is with us this morning, would do, scale the wood and pay for it on a weekly basis. The plan was that Mr. Moser, or one of the other field personnel would be at a place at a certain time. For instance, if he was to be at Louin at nine o'clock in the morning, all the haulers would be there at nine o'clock in the morning waiting for one of the field representatives to come by and scale the wood and then pay them for it.

Daddy also had people who would peel some of the wood. He would buy the wood rough or peeled --- hardwood or pine, but he would pay the people who hand peeled the wood separately. When he first started buying wood he received from Masonite, I believe it was $3.80 a cord. That was the price for the wood loaded on a car in Richton, Mississippi. People felt like the second growth pine that we had, as mentioned earlier all the virgin forests had been cut, was of no value. They wanted it cleaned off their fields in order to plant row crops, and my dad established a price of fifty cents a cord, even though a lot of people were willing to give it to him for the stumpage for the pulpwood.

In the early stages he had his own crews and his own logging camps. Mr. Moser may have been responsible for working some of those logging areas. I remember particularly Colonel Hinton, who was one of the black supervisors for his crews. He would furnish the rations and they would stay out in the camps all week. We had somebody to do the cooking for him and his hands. One of the reasons that my dad was particularly interested in getting into the wood business was it was a method of feeding his store. He was trying to develop some type of business that would furnish an income for the people in the area that would help him in the B. M. Stevens Company operation in Richton. Actually, when he first moved North of Laurel, he opened a store at Montrose, Mississippi. The objective was to have a store, but the pulpwood was a secondary phase of the operation. His objective - the objective of the pulpwood purchasing business - was to furnish income for people to buy groceries and goods out of the store. An interesting view about the Montrose store was that the man that managed the wood operation also managed the store. As people would drive up to the store to get their wood checked, he would always measure it on the side closest to the entrance to the store. It wasn't long before the haulers started bringing all the wood stacked high on one side and all the big butts loaded to the side where he knew that the manager was going to be scaling. As a result of that, we developed a shortage in our operation and began to check out what was causing it. We soon realized what it was --- that the haulers were loading the wood with the high side to the entrance of the store.

Dickinson: Would you comment about the commissary and the medium of exchange that you used there?

Ben M. Stevens, Jr.: Also, in trying to feed the income for the store, daddy did not pay off in dollars. He paid off in what we called a "jug-out" or really a company script. When people would haul a load of wood in, he would give them a "jug-out". A "jug-out" was just a little piece of paper that was run off on a mimeograph machine and the dollar amount was filled into the "jug-out" as to how much the man was entitled to. In fact, it was used to buy eggs, meat - whatever.

Daisy Thoms: When Saturday came, the office personnel added up all the "jug-outs" each individual had and if he had any left over, he got paid in cash, as I remember it. At this same, I might mention that as a teenager in high school, I would go with daddy on Saturday to Masonite Corporation to get his payroll for the week. Money was tight. But daddy thought it could be dangerous for him to go by himself to get the weekly payroll, so he would take me with him. He thought if I rode in the car with him nobody would think he had money with him. Sometimes we'd be at Masonite by nine o'clock so we would be the first one to get paid off. Many times it was one o'clock before we got the money. We brought it back to Richton and sometimes it was eleven or twelve o'clock at night before we paid off everyone.

Ben Stevens, Jr.: One of the reasons for the delay in getting back was that Masonite didn't have the money and they would hold up issuing the check to daddy so that it would not get into the bank in Laurel before the early part of the next week. If they gave the check to him in the afternoon, then it didn't get deposited in the bank in Richton in time to get back to Laurel before they could get their money in the bank.

Daisy Thoms: But back to "jug-outs"---- they were used instead of cash during the week.

Dickinson: It would be good to have it recorded the way it was used. That was the name, but you didn't think then how to spell it, until now when we're trying to write it down.

Daisy Thoms: I think we spelling it "jug-out". Let me tell you some more early company history in which I was directly involved. During the war when all the men were in the Army, I was in charge of the office operation of the timber company, which involved bookkeeping, etc. I was not trained in that field at all. I was educated as a musician. But I did learn to run the timber operation after I had been taught by Mr. Archie Moser before he left for service. He was a brother of Runt (A. L. Moser). Jewel Rogers and I ran the office while the men were all gone. I was just out of college, and daddy instilled in us that "THE COMPANY" was one of the most, if not the most important thing in our lives. The Company had to come first, because if we didn't have a Company, we didn't have anything as a livelihood. We all had a certain love and appreciation for our heritage and the Company and felt that we had some obligation to it.

Dickinson: You mentioned earlier something about the prisoners of war that were worked. Tell us about this.

Daisy Thoms: I think Mr. Moser would be the one to tell you about that.

A. L. Moser: Well, it was during the period of time of World War II and all the pulpwood mills were having difficulty getting enough raw material to run the mills. I suppose it was Mr. Ben, wasn't it Sonny, that got with the government officials at Camp Shelby, Mississippi. Our Company, working with Masonite, made arrangements with the military people at Camp Shelby to utilize war prisoner labor in producing pulpwood. So we established a prison camp out at an old CCC Camp near Richton. We had several hundred prisoners out there. We also had prisoners of war who were in prison at Camp Shelby, Germans and Arabs.

Dickinson: What year was this?

A. L. Moser: It probably was in 1944-45. The need for pulpwood was so acute that Masonite went on their timberlands and marked timber. Some of it was almost virgin pine timber - big sawlog timber that they cut into pulpwood because of their acute need for pulpwood. We got our local wood producers to train these war prisoners to cut, peel and stack the wood. Somebody might check me on this, but I think the set-up was that we paid the government for this labor in this manner. I believe that the prisoners got one-third of the pay; then one-third of the pay went into an escrow account for the prisoner; and then one-third went to the government for their expense in maintaining and keeping the prisoner.

We had great difficulty training the prisoners to work. Some of them rebelled. Many of them just refused to get their quota. (The military put them on a quota). Of course, we had, as far as the Germans were concerned, doctors, lawyers, dentists, all kinds of professional people. Some of them had never seen a tree felled and they had to be trained to do that. They rebelled on producing the amount that they were supposed to, but with pressure the military applied, we soon had them getting their quota, even though they did it very reluctantly. We had a lot of trouble with the Arabs. They didn't want to work efficiently, but we put pressure on them also, and finally got them to doing the kind of a job that we expected. Actually, I would think that the fact that we utilized this war prisoner labor was the main thing that kept our Company going, and probably Masonite, too, during the war years. I really think this was the beginning point of better times for Richton Tie and Timber Company. We did produce untold thousands of cords of wood.

Dickinson: What was the main use for the government? Did you sell it to the government for use by the war effort at that time? What was the main use of the timber?

Ben M. Stevens, Jr.: All of Masonite's production at that time was going to the government. The government was taking the full production of Masonite board.

Moser: The Army/Navy had someone that watched production and dared Masonite to sell any of their products to any other source except for government use.

D. O. Thoms: Yes, Masonite won the Army/Navy "E" Award.

Henry Stevens: Masonite, as a result of their efforts with the Army and Navy, secured special equipment such as trucks that my dad was able to use to produce this wood for them. I believe that certain personnel was exempt from service in the military as a result of the need to supply wood to Masonite for their war efforts.

Moser: There are many interesting side notes about working those prisoners. One interesting side note was that when we had so much trouble with the Arabs. Over at

Camp Shelby they had a Sergeant. He was a very stately looking gentleman and he was a full-blooded Egyptian, but he was a Sergeant in the U. S. Military. It so happened that he was the one in charge of the prison labor. One morning they brought in a group of new prisoners - Arabs - and we didn't have room on the truck for all of them. This Egyptian Sergeant said "we'll load them on a trailer." (We had a small trailer that we used to deliver the tools and water to the woods, and I think six men could crowd on it.) So this Egyptian Sergeant forced these extra prisoners to get on the trailer and ride behind the truck. It was a dry summer and the road we traveled that morning was extremely dusty; we had to travel about 30 miles to the cutting site. When we arrived at the cutting site, the six Arabs on the trailer were covered with dust. They were just white - and about to choke to death. They rebelled, and demanded to be taken back to the camp to the hospital. But the Egyptian Sergeant who came behind the crew tagged along with us in his jeep. He used some words, which we won't use, and told them they had to work even though they were really struggling to get their breath. Then they used some other means of punishment too, to see that they did get their work done for that particular day.

If I recall, the military people required that we pay them consistently the prevailing price of cutting pulpwood. In other words, whatever we paid the public in general, that's what we paid the government. And they in turn, as I've already told you, divided the total amount up three ways. To determine the amount of pay, we stacked the wood in pens. So many pens back in those days represented a unit of wood. It was not in cords --- it was 168 cubic feet. The pens were three feet high and it took ten of them to make a unit, or five six-foot pens. To explain the pens I'm talking about, the workers would just put two pieces of wood down and the next two they crossed the other way, and just made a pen. (Like a log cabin). That was the unit of measurement. Our supervisor, and their supervisor, (each crew of about 30 men had a supervisor) both checked those pens. That was one way of seeing that each producer got his quota, and also a means to determine how much we were to pay the government for the amount of wood that had been cut. That was the way it was established - by stacking those pens. Incidentally, we might say this - and this is interesting. The timber sometimes would be so thick on the ground that when we checked up one day's production, the pens had to be torn down to make room to stack wood for the next day's production. The timber was thick on the ground. I believe that pretty well covers the method of payment we had and of scaling the wood.

Ben M. Stevens, Jr.: One thing further in regard to the payment. At some point the government decided that all payment had to be based on so much per hour. They were trying to force the Wage and Hour Law and at that time the prevailing rate was 40 cents per hour. This was toward the end of the agreement that my dad had with the military. My dad refused at first to agree to pay the 40 cents per hour. He did not want to put a whole group of prisoners of war that he had absolutely no control over, on the 40 cents per hour. He was going to discontinue the prisoner of war operations. Some of the prisoners of war sent word to him that if he would continue to operate and make the payment, they would assure him that he would get his money's worth. He did agree to this - and after the war and after the prisoner of war program had been discontinued, we were probably a year or more cleaning up the wood that these prisoners had cut and penned in the woods. The amount of wood that they cut more than exceeded what he had ever expected or thought they would get out of it.

We have since had one of the German prisoners to come back to Richton and visit with us - one of the prisoners that worked in the woods. He had lunch at the Richton Rotary Club and visited with Mr. Moser and some of the other people in our Company that he was working under.

Daisy Thoms: I think it is interesting to note that one of the things that were stressed by the returnees, more especially, was the kindness and the understanding of those who worked the prisoners of war.

Dickinson: The man who came back to visit was an example. It is unusual for a prisoner of war to come back and visit. Do you know where he was from?

A. L. Moser: Commodore Meadows could answer that question, because he has had some letters from him, but I can't think of it. I did know. I think it was in the Richton Dispatch (NOTE: Please obtain a copy of the paper from the Richton Dispatch, if possible).

Daisy Thoms: It was a real successful war operation as far as the government was concerned, and for us too, even though we did have problems at times.

Henry Stevens: Another interesting fact is that the prisoners of war got real upset about treetops left in the woods. The Germans didn't waste any wood products in their own country and it upset a lot of them to see so much waste. When we got up to the limbs of the trees, we pretty well stopped cutting. Isn't that right?

A. L. Moser: That's correct, and the Germans made the statement that we wasted more than they had. They told us about the Black Forest in Germany and the rules and regulations there. If they cut a tree one had to be replanted immediately, you know. They were very conscious of forestry practices because they don't have nearly as many trees in Germany as we have.

D. O. Thoms: We had several who wanted to come back and help us establish a mechanization program for utilizing all the tops and waste in the woods after the war.

Dickinson: Well, according to what I've heard, that's true not only with wood products, but almost everything. Americans do waste a lot.

Ben Stevens, Jr.: Another interesting phase of the pulpwood business was the use of Indian labor, particularly as it related to Philadelphia, Mississippi and that section of the State - in the peeling of pulpwood on our wood yards. I can remember going up to Philadelphia with my dad one day and I bet there were 50 to 75 Indians on that pulpwood yard peeling wood. They had fires in the yard; they had babies hanging off their mother's backs; and some of them were sitting around smoking and eating when they were really supposed to be peeling wood. My dad almost had a stroke when he came upon this. Of course, he discontinued the practice of families coming in on the yard to peel the wood. However, at the same time, the Indians continued to do a lot of hand peeling on our pulpwood yards in that section of the State.

Henry Stevens: Another thing that happened about this time was that the competition had become such that the mills decided to change the method of scaling wood from cords to units. The mills were glad to find that the producers had no objections to cutting a piece of wood five feet, three inches instead of five feet in length, and the extra three inches gives the additional measure that increased it from 128 cubic feet to 168 cubic feet, to a unit instead of a cord. Actually, what you were doing, you were buying on the basis of five feet, three inches, really. Another interesting thing that we had in the peeling of wood, and an instance where government interference caused certain people to become unemployed -- one of the better peelers that we had for a number of years only had one leg, and he could not stack the wood up to the specifications after he peeled it. The other men that were peeling on the job would help him stack it. When the government raised the minimum wage -- he could peel the wood, but he could not stack and peel wood and meet the minimum wage. The government would not give any special consideration to him, and as a result, a person that was willing to work and wanted to work, was unemployed and on the government relief rolls.

Dickinson: What year did the law change the method of measurement from unit to cord?

Henry Stevens: We went from the unit to the cord, I would say, in the early 1960's, I think -- maybe later than that.

D. O. Thoms: It was later than that.

Moser: You may need to check me on this. The reason that Masonite changed from the cord system to the unit system was that industry took the attitude that the producer could handle a five foot, three inch stick of wood with the same speed, and he would be getting that much more volume of production when it came to loading and handling the wood. So they just come up with a new unit of measurement and the producer was handling about twenty percent more wood with the same time involved.

Forrest Stevens: As Henry has said, we had no objections to cutting five feet - three inch wood instead of five feet, and also, the five foot - three inch wood would stack better on the wood racks than the five foot wood would.

Moser: And then, another thing that entered into the measurement of the wood, even today since we've gone to the weight station, the wood haulers will cut wood in some cases just as long as they possibly can so they won't have to load it so high on the truck. In other words, they could cut six-foot wood and not have to load the truck so full to get an excellent load. That's one thing about weighing the wood, it gives the producer an opportunity to cut random length wood and still get the job done.

Ben Stevens, Jr.: One of the things that we did in the early stages of our operation was store wood at various locations and where we were buying this wood stacked on the railroad, we would require the producers to stack it 53 inches high, which was an allowance for the bark shrinkage when we hand-peeled it versus a 48-inch that our competitors were buying and shipping into their mills on a rough basis because their mills were peeling it at the mill. We had to peel it as I indicated earlier, out in the woods and out on the yard or had to purchase it already peeled in order to dry it for the Masonite process.

Daisy Thoms: Women worked among the wood peeling personnel. Some women peeled more than the men, and that was kind of a forerunner.

Ben Stevens, Jr.: Yes, we had certain women that could peel just as much wood as a man could out on these wood yards, and they got the same pay that a man did. It was paid on a per unit basis.

Another thing about the early history of our company that I failed to mention was that the title - the name of the company is Richton Tie and Timber Company. That came about as a result of the crosstie business that my dad was in, in supplying to the Gulf, Mobile and Northern Railroad. All the crossties that we bought were hand-hewed, and he would buy them at these different railroad sidings, just like he bought his pulpwood. They were loaded by hand and it would be amazing to see some of the people loading some of those great big heavy oak crossties---throw one up on their shoulder and walk with it, and load it into a box car. But that was one of the big phases of our business in the early days of the operation of the company.

Henry Stevens: Another first was the instrument used to peel wood. The first peelers were made by the peelers themselves. They took regular hoes and straightened them out and made the peeler. Later on, after this was shown to be practical, the manufacturers actually made a wood peeler. It was simply a hoe that was just straightened out.

Moser: The most popular peeler that we had finally got to be such a big thing was home-made out of an old cross cut saw. It was cut the same width as a hoe, and we made them in our shop. Grafton Rich welded a piece of pipe on them and put the handle in. That old cross cut saw has real good metal in it and the wood peelers could file them and have a real sharp home-made peeler. That became the most popular with the people.

Ben Stevens, Jr.: Runt, you might also tell them about some of the early tools in the cutting of pulpwood. You mentioned the crosscut saw, and in the early stages everything was done with a crosscut saw.

Moser: Later came the Sandwick saw, the bow saw. That was a great improvement. It was lighter to handle and one man could cut with the sandwick saw where it took two to operate the cross cut saw. This is something interesting as far as production is concerned. I can well remember when a person by the name of George Dykes had three people: Jethro McSwain, Jesse Hinton, and Jack Sutton. Those three men would cut and load four loads of wood per day, and the loads contained from three to four units per truck. George drove the truck and had these men cut and load this wood with a Sandwick saw and load it by hand, and he would deliver four loads per day consistently. Of course, today if you mentioned that to some of these people that struggle to get one load of wood with a power loader and a chain saw, the wouldn't believe it. But I can give you witnesses to tell you that what I'm telling you about what labor would do back in those days is true.

Dickinson: In the early days of the company, did you ever use oxen?

Moser: Not only in the early days, but later, after I went to work for the company. All during the 1940's and 50's we had several who used them. Woodrow Cochran up at Ovett used oxen and horses to get timber out of the bad places. It wasn't a common practice but a good many producers did because it was an economical way to operate.

Dickinson: Do you know anybody that uses oxen or mules in logging today?

Moser: The only oxen I know about are the ones that they take around to these fairs just for show.

Ben Stevens, Jr.: But it was done by Mr. Conway until about six or eight years ago, in this general area. That's Mr. Bura Conway and his son, J. M. Conway. They would have pictures of their operations that would be available I'm sure. In fact, we have a picture here of some of those oxen of Conway's.

Dickinson: Mr. Stevens, you have some pictures here that you said you would provide us. Do you want to have copies or negatives made and send these to me or do you want me to take these and have them made and send the pictures back to you?

Ben Stevens, Jr.: It makes no difference to us. You all may have a better method of doing it and getting what you want, so as far as we're concerned, we'll provide the pictures and you can send the pictures back to us. We will assist you in the cost of the project.

Ben M. Stevens, Jr.: Another important fact about the forestry industry is that the wood supply system in the South has historically worked through what is knows as a wood dealer system. The system, for the benefit of those who have come into the industry in recent years, came about for the following reasons. When the pulp and paper industry developed in the South, the paper companies were small, money hard to come by, the timber lands were cut over, over taxed, and no longer of much value, and many had been ravaged by fire. Transportation was slow and the railroads were practically broke. The industry, if it was to grow needed help---help that it could not afford to buy or to hire. The wood dealer provided part of the answer. The dealer had the minor responsibility of getting raw material to the mill. His major responsibility was to get ad valorem taxes reduced, develop a positive attitude for the growing of timber, fighting the battle of stream pollution, and convince the politicians both on county and state level that the paper and pulp industry was not a "cut-out and get-out" industry as were the sawmills in the days of the 1920's and early 30's. The dealer evolved as a link between the mill and the people, both politically and economically. The dealer solved a lot of the political problems that the pulp mills had and it was just impossible for them to put enough people out in the woods or on the road to go out and buy raw material, so as a result of this the wood dealer was formulated. It's still a practice today that's utilized by the industry.

Some of the early attempts by Congress were to try to get the producer tied in as the employee of the dealer. Numerous hearings were held before the House and the Senate Labor Sub-Committees. At that time, Senator Kennedy was one of the chairmen of the Labor sub-committees that some of us testified before. One of the most interesting hearings we had was down in New Orleans when we were able to get Jimmy Roosevelt to come down. He was chairman of the House Labor Sub-Committee. We actually took small trees or pieces of pulpwood to the hotel where the hearing was to be held to show him what we were dealing with. He was from California and he looked at our timber as being the same size as the big Redwood forest. He couldn't understand why we couldn't mechanize the operation---why we had all of these small producers. They thought it was a method to continue slave, poverty-type of approach of labor cost and that the mills were hiding behind this to keep their cost down, when actually, after showing him the size of timber that was involved, his attitude began to change. They later developed what was known as a 12-man exemption. Anybody that worked less than twelve men did not come under the requirements of meeting minimum wage and for their producer it was later reduced to an eight-man exemption. All of this effort was being handled through the Mississippi Forestry Association and the Mississippi Manufacturers Association in conjunction with the leadership that was being furnished in Washington by the American Pulpwood Association.

Some of the early people from this section of the State that testified on a national basis were R. D. (Rube) Wilcox of Laurel; I (Ben M. Stevens, Jr.) was one of them, Ben M. Stevens, Sr.; Tom DeWeese; Bob Lindsey of Taylorsville, Moon Mullins of Natchez. The mills like International Paper Company and Masonite Corporation were furnishing the money and the leadership for this work to be done, but the American Pulpwood Association in conjunction with the other Associations that I've mentioned earlier, were the ones that were really putting the programs together for the testimony.

Dickinson: You mentioned Moon Mullins, from Natchez. Is this the same one who lives at Starkville now?

Ben M. Stevens, Jr.: The Moon Mullins at Natchez is not the same one who lives at Starkville. Moon Mullins is now dead, but he at that time was one of International Paper Company's largest pulpwood dealers, and he had a big operation over in the Natchez area.

One other interesting thing that has happened in the history of the industry is the attempt by the labor unions to organize the pulpwood producers. Here just outside of Hattiesburg there was an organization called the Gulf Coast Pulpwood Cutters Association. At one time, there was a group - the Carpenters and Joiners Union - attempted to organize the group in Mobile. A hearing was held before the Wage and Hour Committee. The hearing officer had all of the people that were supplying Scott Paper Company come in for a hearing. At that point the Carpenters and Joiners were trying to show that the dealer was nothing but an arm or tool of the mill and everybody was an employee of the mill. At that hearing, the Carpenters and Joiners union attempted to show that the suppliers such as Weyerhaeuser Corporation were employees of Scott Paper Company. Of course, when they got into all of the ramifications of this, it just blew the case out. But a number of efforts have been made to unionize the labor force in the pulpwood industry, but so far as I know, none have been successful.

Dickinson: Mr. Thoms, why don't you add the information they've been talking about here? It sounds like there's an interesting story if you've been shot at someplace!

Henry: He should have been shot at more than one time!

D. O. Thoms: Bobbie Jean, I was paying off for wood one Saturday afternoon in Stringer --- downtown Stringer, Mississippi, which is a small town. Quite a few people were gathered around the car and it was a hot July day. I had this old gentleman who worked with me, Mr. Ed Kelly, out of Sylvarena over there, and he sprayed the wood as I measured it and marked it. I had gotten back in the car and was sitting there when I heard some of the people leaning on the hood of the car holler, "Look out Mr. Bud, he's going to shoot." I looked to my right and this young black boy had a pistol that looked like the barrel of a 12-gauge shotgun pointing right at me. I told him to put the pistol down. Luckily he broke and ran - and went down the railroad track. I called for the sheriff to go get him, but I wanted that pistol. So Monday morning, I went by Bay Springs. Sheriff Bob Alexander had the pistol and I don't believe you could have gotten a small pencil in the barrel of it. I still have the gun. That was an interesting experience and a very dangerous and frightening experience for a few minutes.

We had a lot of good times in the wood business. I had a territory from Laurel up to Newton; then from Union across to Jackson by way of Ludlow, Lena, Tuscola and Walnut Grove. In the winter months I had to have the help of a fellow by the name of Gibson who kept up with our loading, peeling and other things out in the area there. He had a jeep that would have to pull us through the mud holes all the way from Union across to Tuscola and Fannin. Of course, Fannin is probably covered up now with the "Ross Barnett" Reservoir. But then we had a wood yard there. Also, there was one in

Jackson, down by where the Coliseum is now. This was the last point on my wood run, and the haulers would wait for me until I got there. If I were delayed, I would usually stop by and bring some watermelons so they could eat the watermelons while I scaled and paid off their wood. I would get home anywhere from twelve to one o'clock, and had to be at Mossville, at above Laurel, again at six o'clock the next morning.

The wood we sold to Masonite was bought with the bark on. I measured it and paid for it. As Ben told you earlier, we came back probably the next week, or the next, and the men on the yard had peeled it, and we paid them for peeling it. That wood was advanced on by Masonite. That was their wood, so to speak. I went out with Masonite men on Monday morning making the entire round of all wood yards, of which there were approximately 150 to 175 rail siding yards. We would go by and Masonite would spray the wood again, showing that they had advanced on it. We would load it and ship it in on orders from Masonite. They would withhold their advance and pay us the balance.

In 1955, Scott Paper Company bought out Hollingsworth and Whitney in Mobile. Buck Stabler, the procurement man with Scott Paper Company, called Mr. Ben and asked him if he would entertain the idea of coming down and being a yard dealer for that mill. Forrest (Stevens) had just come back out of the military service and Mr. Ben asked me if I would go down with Forrest and open up a wood operation there in Mobile - Baldwin County and Washington County. We stayed down there for a number of years, about 20 years, until Scott started getting mechanized and now they are more or less doing the barging down the Tenn-Tom River. But that was a real interesting experience. In Baldwin County, timber grew real tall in the flat land down there--much different from what we had had up here in the piney woods. But the timber was pretty. It was a real competitive market there. International Paper as strong there, but we enjoyed a real fine business down there for a number of years.

In those days, as Mr. Moser said, we started off with the cross cut saw, and then went to the bow saw. But down in Baldwin County, Mobile, they used a wheel saw. It looked more like a push lawn mower with big bicycle wheels on it. The saw worked on a swivel. You could either turn it sideways and cut the tree down, then turn it upside down. It had no safety guard on it or anything of that nature. When going in the woods, I tried to stay as far as possible from that saw because I just knew the blade was going to sling off and certainly cut somebody's leg off, but I never did experience that.

Bobby Jean, I know you're from up in the area of Union and Sebastopol and you're real familiar with it. But when you left Union, it was strictly mud, and we had a jeep that would hook to us and pull us through there --- Horse Shoe, Kitchener, Nevel and all those points in there --- but we would get through. We'd leave out of Union about six o'clock and as I said earlier, it would be sometimes ten or eleven o'clock before we got to Jackson.

A. L. Moser: Answering the question as to how many wood yards we looked after on what we called the South end, the greatest number we had at any point in time was 33, and that included an area from Laurel, Mississippi - south to the Alabama line. The last yard we had in Mississippi was Shipman, Mississippi. Then we went down the M&E. We had five yards on the M&E Railroad---that was from Lucedale to Moss Point. We had five yards on the B&HS Railroad, which was the railroad from Beaumont to Hattiesburg. I believe it was five yards to be correct, was it not? Wingate, Mahned, Bellvue, New Augusta and Central Battery, a siding close to Hattiesburg. We had five yards on the ICG

Railroad, which was an area between Hattiesburg and up to Lux and Sanford - five yards on that ICG Railroad, locations where we stored the wood on rail side, mostly, and then loaded it on the cars later. But 33 yards was the total or most we had at any one time.

Dickinson: Mr. Stevens, what is the main product of your company today? Is it just the trees, or do you deal in lumber and other products?

Ben Stevens, Jr.: We supply over 200 thousand cords of pulpwood to various pulp mills. We supply saw logs and poles and piling to a number of sawmill operators throughout the state. I have a map here of Mississippi which I will give you that shows the locations of our various wood yards. We have approximately 20 to 25 yards located in different towns in Southeast Missisippi, and this map will give you an indication of where those yards are located.

At one point, we operated a sawmill. We bought what was known as the Clinton Lumber Company in August of 1965. We continued to operate it as a sawmill until about 1975. In conjunction with that sawmill, we operated a building supply business in Petal. That's where we are today. We're still operating the building supply, but we closed the sawmill in 1975. An interesting story about the purchase of our sawmill is that Mr. Clinton had owned a mill in Petal since the early 1920's. He proposed to get out of the business, but he was selling his chips to Masonite in Laurel. Masonite did not want to lose their chip supply, nor did Masonite want to lose a market for the timber off of their timberlands in this area, so through our negotiations with Mr. Clinton and Masonite, we purchased the sawmill. We came into this operation having not put one dime into it of our own money. Masonite agreed to put up all of the financing for the machinery and equipment with us to pay it back out of the chip supply. The bank, which at that time was First Mississippi National Bank, agreed to put up all of the inventory financing. So, we took over Mr. Clinton's operation on August 15, with no experience in the sawmill business and no money involved in it. But we had a lot of experience with the timber business and we knew what we were working for. The sawmill proved to be a good investment for us. Of course, we have our own lands that we are managing under a timber management program.

Some interesting things relative to the management of our timberlands, my dad would never cut any hardwood or destroy hardwood timber when it was the popular thing to do by the foresters when they first started a real timber management program. Hardwood didn't have much value, and blackjack oak had absolutely no value. But he refused to let any blackjack oak to be deadened or cut on any of our lands. His theory was (he had been told by Masonite) that the blackjack oak had more chemical properties in it than any other species of wood, and that one day Masonite would be buying the blackjack oak for the chemical value rather than for the fiber value. This, of course, never did develop, but at the same time we didn't start cutting any blackjack oak until after his death.

In the purchase of timberland his theory was always to buy as much land as possible that was in the bottom. He felt like water was going to be a major problem and source of need for everyone. He wanted to buy, and a large part of our acreage today is located in bottomland, even though we are growing pine on a high percentage of it. One other interesting sidelight was that he always wanted us to reserve the air rights over our land, because he felt like at some point the air rights would be worth something. We don't do that but this was just one of the theories he had about protecting the environment and your surroundings. We built the first mechanical pulpwood yard for Masonite in the early 1950's and it was located here in Hattiesburg, Mississippi. In order to provide the necessary storage space for the wood that Masonite needed for drying purposes, all of our yards that we were building at that time, (nine of them) were built with a minimum of about 15 acres. Today, some of them have as many as 30 acres. Today, with the purchase of long wood and the buying of wood by weight, and the storing of long wood on the wood yards, those yards are proving more beneficial to us today than they were back at the time we built them. We continue to operate these yards, buying both short wood and long wood, and it is all handled mechanically, purchased by weight.

Daisy Thoms: In talking about daddy, may I add this? Daddy was spurred to action by the necessity of economic survival and the opportunity he envisioned for Forestry as a viable undeveloped economic frontier, whose by-products could be the preservation of the natural ecological process and the conservation of forestry resources for the future. He felt the time was ripe for the vision he had because the timber was available. The market was wide open for such a plan. The economic future for all needed some sort of "shot in the arm", and the "little man", as well as the "big man", would have a market for his timber.

Daddy saw a future of coordination and cooperation between the sale and use of corporate, public and private timber, as well as the potential for a bright future between timber industry and timber dealerships. One of the first steps of implementing such an idea was to revive an old idea of tree farming - cutting timber and replanting it so that it could be made a continuous life-producing economic factor. Daddy was one of the early Presidents of the Mississippi Forestry Association, and he used his term as President to press forward his own visions of tree farming for profit, and his ideas of cooperation between all parties involved in the growing, production and marketing of trees.

Since daddy's initial vision, economic maturity and certain market stability has evolved. Timber and its related services now produce income for Mississippi in excess of six million dollars. NOTE: (The total value of Mississippi's 1988 timber harvest delivered to the first point of processing, such as pulpwood yards or saw mills, was $611,423,609.) From MFA-VOF, June 1989.

When I was a young girl and daddy was planting his first trees, he told me, "These trees will be for my grandchildren's education." I think it is an interesting side note that daddy was one of the early Presidents of Mississippi Forestry Association, his son, Ben Stevens, Jr., was President of MFA and his son-in-law, D. O. Thoms, was also President of MFA.

Ben Stevens, Jr.: How long have you been in the wood business, Runt?

A.L. Moser: We've been in the wood business since 1942, which would be 47 years - going on the 48th year.

Well, today I guess my job; if I had a title would be timber procurement. My main efforts are trying to bid on and purchase timber sales which is the lifeline of the logging and wood business. Of course, in addition to that, I do the best I can in coordinating how these different sales are cut; the different producers that we place; then keep records to be sure we get them cleaned up; and merchandizing the different species and kinds of timber that we have on the sales. But I guess that's what I would say that I do, procurement and merchandizing of timber sales that we buy.

Ben M. Stevens, Jr.: Runt, how many years have you been telling us that we are running out of timber?

A. L. Moser: Well, almost ever since I started to work for you, I guess, Ben. But according to the statistics, when they had this last Forestry Field Day, Perry County is running out of timber. We're cutting, I gave you the figures, and I believe 30% more in Perry County than we are producing. And I think state wide, they say we are holding our own, but in our area we definitely are not.

Dickinson: Is that because it is not being replanted when it is cut, or do you know?

Moser: Well, we're just in the center of so many of the larger mills. I guess in our area that we probably have more people trying to get timber out of our areas than any other areas that I know of. Of course, my knowledge might be limited on that. But we have some of the biggest mills in the world in our area. Monticello - Georgia Pacific, Leaf River, Scott, International Paper - and they are all within a - well we ship to all of them, do we not? It's very highly competitive and there's a big demand in our area.

Ben Stevens, Jr.: I'd like to add one thing about the territory that I came into when I first came into the business. I graduated from college on April 9th, and started to work in Morton, Mississippi on April 10, 1948. My dad never did believe in any of us not having a job, and from the time we were born, he always kept us in something to do. The territory that I operated in was from Forest across to Jackson, and we had yards at all the small sidings across the ICG Railroad there.

One interesting thing about my activities was that I was not married at the time and the girl that I was going with was in school in Atlanta. So on Friday afternoons I would make it a point to finish scaling wood in Forest, Mississippi and change clothes with paint all over them, at a "filling station" in Forest --- get in the car and drive on to Atlanta for the weekend for my date. Of course, I later married the girl. I was in Morton until my dad brought me back into the main office. I came into the business in 1948, Bud came into the business in 1945, and Henry came into it in 1947 and Forrest in 1955.

Dickinson: Mr. Stevens, and everyone here, I want to thank you again for the privilege of being here and talking with you this morning. This certainly will add to our forest history file, and I know the committee certainly appreciates this opportunity that you've given us too.

Ben Stevens, Jr.: Thank you, Bobbie Jean, and you've really done a very professional job. After we've had a chance to look over this and had a chance to think some more, if we come up with any additional stories, pictures or information we think you might be interested in, we'll pass it on to you.