U.S. Forest Products Lab Centennial Oral History Project

**Title:** U.S. Forest Products Lab Centennial Oral History Project

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**Repository:** University of Wisconsin-Madison, Archives and Records Management Services

**Abstract:**

Digital audio recorded interviews with 52 current and former employees of the U.S. Forest Products Laboratory located in Madison, Wisconsin. The interviews were conducted as part of an oral history project undertaken by the University of Wisconsin-Madison Oral History Program in cooperation with the Forest Products Laboratory, to document the Forest Products Laboratory’s history in their work to promote healthy forest and forest-based economies through the efficient, sustainable use of our wood resources in Wisconsin and through the U.S. in preparation for the Laboratory’s centennial anniversary in 2010.

Interviews were conducted by Lauren Benditt, Ellen Jacks, Allison Page, and Brad Wiles between January and November 2008. All interviews have been fully transcribed and keyword indexed; the transcripts and indexes are on paper and also have been preserved in electronic form. Also included in the collection are project documents relating to the planning, research, and execution of the oral history project.

**Biography/History:**

Established in 1910 by the U.S. Department of Agriculture Forest Service through the efforts of the newly appointed U.S. Forest Service Chief, Gifford Pinchot, his deputy Overton Price, and the chief of the Office of Wood Utilization, McGarvey Cline; the U.S. Forest Products Laboratory, located in Madison, Wisconsin, became the first research facility of its kind focusing principally on the study and research into the physical properties and resource utilization of wood.

Originally residing at 1509 University Avenue on the University of Wisconsin-Madison campus, now the Materials Science and Engineering Building, the Forest Products Laboratory was comprised of four research divisions: wood preservation timber testing, wood chemistry and wood technology. Within a short time the Laboratory developed divisions in other research areas in engineering, pathology, wood distillation, and pulp and paper.

Since its founding, the Laboratory has served as the nation’s leading wood research institute. Many of the Laboratory’s significant contributions have included crucial research and cooperative studies with the U.S. Armed Forces during both World War I and World War II, performing experiments on wood for airplane construction; as well as research into box and packaging materials, and charcoal used in gas masks.
More recently, through the inclusion of other research areas, the Laboratory continues to play a significant role in responding to environmental pressures on forest resources by focusing on the study of recycling, developing environmentally friendly technology, and understanding ecosystem-based forest management.

**Scope and Content:**

This collection consists of digitally recorded interviews, keyword abstracts, full-text transcriptions, and project documents relating to interviews conducted by the University of Wisconsin-Madison Oral History Program from January to November 2008 with current and former employees of the U.S. Forest Products Laboratory whose careers span from 1942 to present (2008).

The interviews document the history of the USDA Forest Service, Forest Products Laboratory from its founding in 1910 to present through current and former men and women scientists, technicians, and secretarial/clerical employees at the Laboratory. While two of the narrators were present at the Laboratory during its wartime operations and several have been employed in the early years of the turn of the 21st century; the bulk of the interviews conducted focus on the post-war FPL period and careers from the 1950s and 1960s to the late 1990s.

This collection is arranged into five series: the digitally recorded audio interviews with fifty-one of the fifty-two narrators, including one additional session each for three narrators; abstracts to the transcriptions of each interview, paper-based full-text transcriptions of the interviews, the interviewers’ research files including interview notes and materials collected on FPL, and the project’s administrative files.

Series 1: The Audio Recordings series contains the digitally recorded audio MP3s of the oral history interviews. Each narrator was assigned a single Oral History Number upon completion of his/her initial interview, regardless of whether a second interview was conducted. Access to individual audio recordings is available upon request through individual oral history tape numbers. All the interviews were transcribed and the transcripts are located in Series 3.

Series 2: The Abstracts series consists of keyword and time code indexes to each interview session constructed by the oral history project team. The series is arranged alphabetically by the narrators’ last names and contain biographical and professional information relating to each narrator, administrative data relating to the conducting and processing of individual interviews, as well as the keyword, page, and time coded index for individual interview sessions with each narrator. Abstracts are available for viewing in hard-copy in the University of Wisconsin-Madison, University Archives’ reading room.

Series 3: The Transcripts series contains the full-text transcriptions of the recorded interviews found in Series 1. The content of the interviews primarily focuses initially on biographical information about the narrator’s pre-FPL lives and careers, with commentaries on their motivation or interest in forestry or a related field, early education and previous employment, as well as their initial impressions of the Lab and about their hiring and training process in the early years.

When discussing their careers at the Laboratory most focused on their scientific research areas and projects conducted at the Lab’s facilities or as a representative of the Lab in fieldwork at locations such as the Pacific Northwest Forest and Range Experiment Station in Portland, Oregon. Research areas and significant scientific contributions are highlighted by the narrators and range from research in: adhesives, wood preservation and resource utilization; bioenergy, pulp and paper, wood anatomy research; mechanical testing, recycling, mycology; wood and fungi identification, and
finishing and restoration of wood products. In addition to their research, many narrators reminisced about their colleagues and the social atmosphere of the Laboratory, providing stories about departmental and Lab parties and picnics, leagues such as the FPL bowling and softball teams; contributing to the staff newsletter CHIPS, and participating in organized groups like the Men’s Club and FLPEA (Forest Products Lab Employees Association).

Narrators also commented on their later years and for the bulk of the narrators, their retirement from the Laboratory. Many reflected on their careers at the Lab and on working for or with an agency that is part of the U.S. Forest Service, in addition to their opinion of how the Lab is viewed nationally and internationally. Many of those that are current employees, considered their ambitions for their future work at the Lab, as well as their expectations and hopes for the future of the Lab itself.

Series 4: The Interview Notes and Background Materials series contains the research files collected by the project team on the Forest Products Laboratory, interview notes and resources. The background research documents include a copy of the first administrative history of the Lab in the form of a PhD thesis by Charles A. Nelson titled, “History of the U.S. Forest Products Laboratory (1910-1963),” compiled in 1971; a bibliography to miscellaneous publications about FPL, as well as other publications regarding the history of individual research areas at the Lab.

Series 5: The Administrative Files series primarily contains the project team’s administrative files relating to the funding, planning, execution and outreach of the FPL oral history project. Included are files relating to the budget, grants, purchases and cash distribution of funds for the project; the Institutional Review Board approval, the joint venture agreement contract between the Board of Regents of the University of Wisconsin System and the USDA Forest Service, Forest Products Laboratory; and miscellaneous documents relating to the hiring and status transfer of the student project team members. In addition, the Administrative Files series contains project meeting notes, documents relating to the planning and development of the project, and spreadsheets documenting the workflow and process of the oral history project itself.

Also included in this series is correspondence between interviewers and narrators between February and October 2008. These files, which primarily consist of letter format with some printed email correspondence, include actual and templates of introductory and thank you letters sent to narrators, letters providing narrators with instruction on reviewing and submitting edits to the transcript of their interviews, and release form requests. Also within the correspondence subseries are files containing materials submitted by narrators, which contain the transcripts that were marked by the narrators with their corrections and returned to the project team, correspondence from narrators, and other materials submitted by narrators such as copies of their published works, which are arranged alphabetically by narrator. The permission agreement or release forms are also filed within the correspondence series, making the transcripts available to researchers.

Administrative/Restriction Information

Access Restrictions

No release forms were gathered from Douglas Crawford and Bryan River. Researchers, therefore, should not quote directly from these interviews. Additionally, researchers should note that records relating to interviews conducted with David Schumann and J. Dobbie McNatt are restricted indefinitely.
Contents List

Tape Number  AUDIO RECORDINGS

Tape No.910  Baker, Andrew
Note: 2 audio CDS

Tape No.978  Boone, R. Sidney

Tape No.919  Caulfield, Daniel F.

Tape No.987  Clausen, Carol A.

Tape No.980  Crawford, Douglas M.

Tape No.983  Dietrich, Diane

Tape No.911  Esenther, Glenn R.

Tape No.925  Ethington, Robert L.

Tape No.926  Feist, William C.

Tape No.928  Fronczak, Frank J.

Tape No.923  Geimer, Robert L.

Tape No.976  Gerhards, Charles C.

Tape No.934  Gjovik, Lee R.

Tape No.991  Micales-Glaeser, Jessie A.

Tape No.937  Godshall, W. Duncan

Tape No.971  Green, David W.

Tape No.984  Gust, Dolores

Tape No.972  Hamilton, Thomas E.

Tape No.990  Highley, Terry L.

Tape No.989  Holmes, Carlton A.
Note: No audio track. In place of audio interview, narrator provided a written statement.

Tape No.929  Johnson, Bruce R.
Tape No.921  Kirk, T. Kent
Tape No.922  Klungness, John H.
Tape No.914  Kurtenacker, Robert S.
Tape No.918  Laundrie, James F.
Tape No.985  LeVan, Susan
Tape No.992  Lulling, Robert M.
Note: This interview was conducted in two sessions. Each session consists of 2 audio CDs.
Tape No.979  Lunstrum, Stanford J.
Note: This interview was conducted with oral history program staff in one session. Additionally, the narrator submitted a revised audio version of his original answers to his original interview. Therefore this interview consists of 2 audio CDs of the original interview; as well as 1 CD and 1 audio cassette of the narrator’s revised version.
Tape No.920  McDonald, Kent A.
Tape No.930  McNatt, J. Dobbin
Tape No.916  Maeglin, Robert R.
Tape No.932  Miller, Regis B.
Tape No.974  Minor, James L.
Tape No.927  Moody, Russell C.
Tape No.973  Myers, Gary C.
Tape No.982  Ralph, Sally
Tape No.975  River, Bryan H.
Tape No.931  Rowell, Roger M.
Tape No.917  Schumann, David R.
Tape No.912  Setterholm, Vance C.
Tape No.981  Simpson, William T.
Tape No.935  Soltis, Lawrence A.
Tape No.933  Springer, Edward L.
Tape No.938  Sykes, Marguerite
Tape No.993  Tuomi, Roger L.
Tape No.986  Wolfe, Barbara
Tape No.988  Wolfe, Ronald W.
Tape No.977  Wolter, Karl E.
Tape No.924  Youngquist, John
Tape No.913  Youngs, Robert
Tape No.915  Zerbe, John
Tape No.936  Zinkel, Duane F.

INTERVIEW ABSTRACTS
INTERVIEW TRANSCRIPTS
INTERVIEW NOTES AND BACKGROUND MATERIALS
  Background research
  Interview notes
  Interview questions
  Interview resources
  Narrator lists and contact information

ADMINISTRATIVE FILES
  Budget and Hiring Documents
    Budget and cash distributions
    Funds, Brittingham
    Institutional Review Board
    Joint venture agreements
    Supply purchases and reimbursements
    Student Employment Documents
  Correspondence
    Correspondence with narrators
    Letter templates to narrators
    Materials submitted by narrators
    Permission agreement forms
  Project Planning, Workflow, and Outreach
    Oral History Association Conference
    Project meeting notes
    Workflow planning and spreadsheet