

**Don Hibbitts – March 14, at library in Camp Wood
Tape 1 (7:46)**

It's recording right now...

Don: And they actually, you know, brought the cedar in, and they would saw it up and, you know, make lumber out of it, but, of course, actually it was a big thing right, right after the war. And, of course, during the war, of course, during the war most of the young people were gone. There was no one here to cut that cedar

Ken: Right, right.

Don: Except the older people

Ken: Uh-huh

Don: And the real young

Ken: Right

Don: Of course I was in my twelve, thirteen, fourteen age at that time. And most of the cedar, by that time the railroad was gone.

Ken: Uh-huh, yes

Don: So all – and the sawmill was gone. So it all had to be trucked out of here on these tractor trailers, 18-wheelers. And, even just as a kid, I used to work helping them load that cedar. There were two or three fairly large what we call cedar yards here in town where people bought it from the people that did the cutting and brought it in, you know, in different sizes. And they had it in different stacks, and that sort of thing.

Ken: Right

Don: And it, they used it, of course, for fence posts

Ken: Mostly for fence posts

Don: Mostly fence posts, right.

Ken: Um-hum

Don: And, I know up where the current post office is right now

Ken: Yes

Don: There was a big cedar yard there and there was one person here that pretty well dominated it. His name was Henderson. O.C. Henderson

Ken: Um-hum

Don: He, what he would do is he'd go out to these ranches that had big areas of uncut cedar and it was desirable cedar – that is it had posts – big posts.

Ken: Big corner posts kind of things

Don: Yeah, yeah, all sorts of it. And, of course, the bigger they were and the longer – the more expensive they were

Ken: That's right

Don: And he would contract with them to – to let him, uh, have that cedar cut off. Well then he would dole it out

Ken: Yeah

Don: Whoever wanted to go and chop it, you see. He had it going both ends, see

Ken: I see, uh-huh

Don: He had people – and then he'd buy (laugh)

Ken: I see

Don: And then he would buy it

Ken: Right, right, right

Don: But then he would sell it to these people – these truckers that hauled it off to west Texas and god only knows where all it went

Ken: Right. It was all for fence posts, mostly at that time

Don: Yeah, it was always primarily for fence posts. But it was a big thing, I mean, back, uh, oh '45, '46, '47, along in here, Campwood was booming. You know, we had a lot of people, and uh, a lot of activity. All these stores were open. You had drive-in stores and cafes. The American Legion Hall was out here ...

Ken: And it was on, uh, it was partly Mohair too, wasn't it?

Don: Yeah

Ken: Sheep and goats

Don: Yeah, sheep and goats

Ken: And cedar?

Don: And cedar. That's really about – that's all there was!

Ken: Yeah

Unknown person: I didn't know about the cedar

Ken: And there was talk in here, in this book, about the cedar oil. Where was that?

Don: They did have a place in Leahey that does that

Ken: I see

Don: And they'll take any kind of cedar, see – stumps, branches, pieces. And they grind it up

Ken: Is it on that road going over to Leahey?

Don: Vanderpool

Ken: From Leahey to Vanderpool?

Don: Uh-huh. It's on the left

Ken: We passed it – that's right, that's right. And I thought I saw a cedar post that was as long as this room. They just – I mean they looked

Don: I doubt that (laugh)

Ken: I know, I saw cedar – I saw massive cedar. I thought that they were cedar posts

Don: There was another one. As a matter of fact the old stacks are still up there between here and Barksdale – about halfway in between. You can see them off to the west

Ken: Uh-huh

Don: They used to do the same thing up there. They, uh, uh, ground it up, and, maybe they just bought it, whatever. Anyway, they got like this oil of cedar furniture polish stuff, you know

Ken: Yes

Don: And I guess that place is still going up there between, uh, Barksdale and Rock Springs they had another one. Just recently. But what they were doing – they weren't making the oil they were taking the cedar stumps, posts, whatever, they'd take anything, grinding it up and taking it to west Texas to use it for, uh, loss circulation material. You know what I'm talking about? When you're drilling a well?

Ken: Oh, yes.

Don: When you're drilling an oil well and you run into a very porous zone of some sort and all drilling fluid is just (plutttttt) going into, going away!

Ken: I see

Don: And you're not getting any kind of returns, then you need to stop it up

Ken: Uh-huh. And it plugs it up.

Don: It helps plug it up. It's loss circulation material, is what they call it.

Ken: I see

Don: That's what they were doing with that

Ken: I see

Don: Well, that was pretty big business for a while. I Don't know whether it's still going or not.

Ken: Um-hum

Don: So there's lots of uses for that darn cedar. And, uh

Ken: Ya'll were cutting it – were you cutting it back then?

Don: I (laugh) yeah, I was doing my share of it.

Ken: With an axe?

Don: Oh, yeah, with an axe

Ken: That's pretty – I Don't know when the chainsaw came in

Don: (laugh) You know that story about the Aggie that they guy promised him he could cut two cords of wood with a chainsaw a day, you know, of course, the Aggie goes off and he can't cut no two cords of wood, you know. And, he finally takes it back to the guy and says "you told me I could cut two cords of wood with this a day." And he said, "well, you should be able to." He puts it down, you know, he reaches down, he grabs the starter rope and yanks it and the thing goes "woooooooooowachhhhhhattt". That Aggie says "what's that noise?"

(All laugh together)

Unknown female: I'm surprised you didn't tell that story of one guy that cut cedar here and he put his axe and his gloves in the tree and said I'll never cut cedar again

Don: I'll never cut any more cedar. It's very hard work.

Ken: Oh, I'm sure it was.

Unknown female: Harvin Jones (laughs)

Don: It was incredibly hot.

Ken: Of course it was

Unknown female: Oh, yes

Ken: The cedar brakes are really hot

Don: Oh, yeah, you know William?

Ken: Uh-uh

[Conversation interrupted]

Hibbits - Tape 2 (4:58)

[Missing part of tape]

Don: ... can do the rest of my life. And he was out there chopping one day and he was saying, 'the longer ____ the madder I got.' And they generally had these double bit axes, oh man they're sharp

Ken: Yeah

Don: And work gloves

Ken: Oh, yeah.

Don: He said he sunk his axe into a cedar tree. He took his gloves off, sat 'em on the handle and went and told his Daddy, he says "I ain't cuttin' no more cedar."

Ken: (laugh)

Don: (laugh) And he came to town and he went to Uvalde and joined the Navy.

Ken: What year was that? It was like '42 or something like that.

Don: No, no. It was later than that

Ken: Oh, later than

Don: '47, '48

Ken: I see

Don: He was in the Korean War.

Ken: Uh-huh

Don: As a matter-of-fact he drove a, one of those Amtrak things, uh, hauled the Marines into Inchon When they landed in Inchon.

Ken: OK

Don: He was driving one of those Amtrak, or whatever you call it, landing boat.

Ken: Right

Don: But, yeah, and, but, I always, I like to tell that story

Ken: Yeah

Unknown female: he wants to go eat with his wife ---

Ken: No-no

[....more about lunch and copies]

Don: When he got out of the Navy, of course, he didn't have any education except for maybe seventh grade or something like that. He got out of the Navy and he came back here for a little while. Married, and, uh, then he got a job with the highway department – in Uvalde, TX, Highway Department. And he worked with them until he retired. And now he, he's got a good retirement. He's got insurance. And he Don't trust anybody

Ken: (laugh)

All laugh together

Ken: You couldn't do it until you were, I you know, you couldn't, I mean, you had to be a pretty young man to

Don: You'd be surprised if you, if ... these around some of 'em I know. You know, they were up in their sixties and early seventies and they were still cuttin cedar.

Unknown woman: Oh, my gosh

Don: still cutting cedar. And lots of times it was a family job. The whole family had to do it just about to make a living

Ken: Uh-huh

Don: just to get by

Ken: Just to get by

Don: To get by

Ken: Absolutely. Those axes, you Don't, you Don't still have one of those axes, do you? I'd love to see one of those.

Don: Ah

Ken: 'cause I hear they were just

Don: No, uh, I Don't think I've got a double bitted axe. I've got a single bit axe.

Ken: Yeah, but they were big, big heavy double bitted axes

Don: They weren't all that heavy.

Ken: Uh-huh

Don: Two and a half – three pounds. But, uh, I'll tell you this one more story. I was up in, I told you I had to work when I was just a kid, loading the posts and all that sort of – this family came in one time (some of 'em still live here in town, by the way) and, uh, one of 'em was just a little kid. I'm saying seven years old, eight maybe. Somewhere along there. He was chewing tobacco.

Ken: Um

Don: And I though "man, that's a little different." (laugh) I didn't chew tobacco. My Daddy would have whapped me

Ken: Um-hum, um-hum

Don: raw. Well I thought now if old Arthur can chew that tobacco then I think I could. And again it was one of them hot days (laugh). So I said "Arthur, let me have a little chew of your tobacco." "Oh yeah," he pulled out his glove and gave me a little chewing tobacco. Sick ---- oh, god! It was hot, you know!

Ken: (laugh)

Don: I got so sick, needless to say, I didn't want to chew tobacco anymore (laugh)

(laugh together)

Don: That, you know, and they, the families, most of 'em were, they were pretty, pretty large families, you know.

Ken: Uh-huh

Don: There might be five or six boys in a family

Unknown woman: Um-hum

Don: And they all went

Ken: Uh-huh

Don: You had to.

Ken: You had to drag it. You had to move it, didn't you?

Don: Yeah.

Ken: It was probably as big a job as cutting it.

Unknown woman: So they didn't go to school, probably.

Don: Very little.

Ken and unknown woman: Uh-huh

Don: Very little.

Unknown woman: It was just survival.

Don: That's right. That's exactly right. And even some of the girls. I knew some girls when I was going to school that I wouldn't want to mess with

Ken: Uh-huh

Don: They were pretty stout.

Ken: Um-hum

Don: Themselves, from, not necessarily cutting cedar, but,

Unknown woman: Just haulin' it.

Don: Manhandling it, loading it, and that sort of thing.

Ken: Yeah

Don: It was a, well it was just a matter of survival, is what it amounted to.

Ken: Yeah, that's something, and we didn't even know about it

Campwood - Tape 3 (9:51)

Ken: What was your name again?

Don: Hibbitts. Don Hibbitts.

Ken: Don Hibbitts. OK.

Don: I left here, I graduated high school in 1950 and I left when I was in college. In the first summer I went to college. That year, and I came back for the summer of '51. And one of my uncles was cuttin' cedar. He had some cedar to cut way over here in what we called, uh, Cedar Lake, Cedar, uh, Silver Lake. Over by Brackettville.

Ken: Uh-huh

Don: Virgin cedar. I mean, nobody had ever cut it before. Lots of it. And it, we were camped out.

Ken: Were these big ole heart, they were talking about heart cedar. Were these

Don: Some of it was, but not all of it.

Ken: Um-hum

Don: That was really desirable, the hart cedar was

Ken: They used that for, um, they used that for foundations, I believe?

Don: Yeah, yeah, they wouldn't rot

Ken: no, no

Don: quite as quick. We went over there, just he and I. We camped out in the cedar brake. And, fortunately, he was a real good cook. Right in the middle of summer – hot. We'd get up early in the morning – and I'm just right out of college, you see, (laugh) I hadn't been doing anything. And, uh, we'd get up early, eat breakfast, and we'd go out and we'd cut until, oh, about 11:00am.

Ken: Uh-huh

Don: And then we'd come back from camp, have some lunch, and then we'd lay around and nap until about 4:00pm

Ken: Yeah

Don: See, until it cooled off a little bit

Ken: Yeah, not much (laugh)

Don: We'd cut again until nearly dark.

Ken: Uh-huh

Don: They we'd come back in. Well I did that for a week, for five days. We came back on a Friday. Loaded up our cedar and come back. So I had worked that Monday, Tuesday, Wednesday, and Thursday, basically, and part of Friday, and I made twenty dollars.

Ken: Oh-my. Did you get paid by the post

Don: Yeah, and that's when I decided maybe I need to do something besides cutting cedar (laugh)

Ken: Go back to college (laugh)

Don: I wanted to get my ___- back in college and learn how to do something besides cut cedar!

Ken: I did the same thing after working in the factory for a while.

Don: But, believe it or not,

Ken: Wow

Don: we had some people here that were excellent cedar choppers. And, I mean they were strong. And, they, it was just all axes.

Ken: Were they mostly white men

Don: Oh, yeah, yeah

Ken: or were they Mexican?

Don: They were all white guys

Ken: Um-hum, um-hum

Don: And, uh, Toby Weaver was one of the best in the country. Everybody always said he could go out and cut a truck load of cedar and a road to it in a day. He was just good, you know.

Ken: Uh-huh

Don: He was a very strong person, and, and, he didn't, uh, of course he had a lot of stamina too. He could just keep going

Ken: Yeah

Don: Go, go, go. That's what he did every day. But most of 'em weren't quite that good. And unfortunately there were a lot of people that just barely got by

Ken: Uh-huh

Don: And they would be able to cut just about enough today to buy 'em some gas for their truck that they could get back to the cedar brake tomorrow. And maybe a little something to eat. And that was all

Ken: Yeah. Couldn't raise their families

Don: And that was every day. Men and women

Unknown female: Yeah, that was tough.

Ken: Women were cutting?

Don: Oh, yes. Well, or helping them load

Ken: Uh-huh

Don: They would load, help 'em load

Ken: Were they like local people

Don: Oh, yes

Ken: That lived in town and all

Don: Oh, yeah, they were local people that lived here

Ken: Um-hum

Don: Raised here and everything

Ken: Yeah

Don: Yeah

Ken: Well, see we've got that going all the way to Austin, you know, the cedar hills west of Austin

Don: Well, unfortunately, most of the cedar you see anymore is not really very good for cutting posts. It's too – it's more brushy

Ken: Yes, uh-huh

Don: It's thick, and lots of it.

Ken: Right

Don: But it's not very big

Ken: So it was different back then – it was older trees.

Don: Oh, yeah, yeah. But, from between here and Leaky, they didn't open up the road between here and Leaky until about '47 or '48, after the War. You couldn't get to Leaky without going to Uvalde and back up 83. All that country between here and Leaky was just virgin cutting, you see. And the hills that you can see now that are pretty bare, they was covered. You know when they first opened that highway up – they were just covered with cedar. Thick. The only place that I know of that looks like that anymore is, uh, Silver Lake. Over towards, between Brackettville and Rock Springs

Ken: Uh-huh

Don: over in that area. And they Don't allow you to do it. They won't cut it over there, for whatever reason.

Ken: It's, uh, preserve or something

Unknown woman: It's probably a preserve

Don: No, no, it's probably ___ but the people, they just Don't want you to cut that cedar. And a lot of 'em, even around here, people didn't want you cutting that cedar. Even though it takes so much more water.

Unknown female: Oh, yeah

Ken: Oh, yes

Don: It just sucks the ground dry

Unknown female: Tremendous

Don: But, uh

Ken: So, if drive, going west of here – you can see some of that virgin cedar? Or, do you have to go

Don: Uh, I'm not sure you can get to it from here. It would be between Brackettville and Rock Springs. That highway.

Ken: I've been down there before

Don: It's a beautiful drive if you don't want to be in any hurry. It's a narrow, windy

Ken: Yes

Don: That goes along, what we call the west fork of the Nueces. In most of the areas that you see it's dry. But over there there is quite a bit of water

Ken: Hum

Don: You get up towards the headwater. It's a beautiful water over there.

Ken: Hum

Don: You can see it from the road

Ken: Um-hum

Don: But, uh, that's, well I think, there is an area out west of the road going over towards Rock Springs called Cedar Creek, Cedar Creek Road and out that way. I think there may be some virgin cedar out there, but, you don't see much of it any more.

Ken: No.

Don: And then a lot of it, see the government had a program back in the '40s to, to just drag it down. And they would get great big bulldozers with a huge chain, like a ship anchor chain

Ken: Um-hum

Don: And this bulldozer here, and then two or three hundred yards over there is another bulldozer. They'd just go across the whole country and they drug down everything. Cedar, mesquite, oak, whatever

Unknown female: Why did they do that?

Don: Clearing it out. Just clearing it out.

Ken: Range land?

Don: Yeah. And the government subsidized that. There was a friend of mine here that kind-of supervised that sort of thing and I used to go with him a lot to go out and look, watch him, and, uh, it was fun to watch for the kids. Bulldozers ... whoo (laugh)

Ken: (laugh)

Don: And a lot of it, the cutting was, you just cut everything. You know, you were paid maybe by the acre.

Ken: Um-hum

Don: to cut cedar. And you just cut it off. It wouldn't make any difference whether

Ken: Even if you couldn't use it?

Don: That's right. You just cut it. Cut it down. And leave it laying right there, you know. You'll still see a lot of that

Ken: Um-hum

Don: Around where it's dead

Unknown female: Yes

Don: Around the old stumps. They'd just clear it, cut it.

Ken: Right, right

Don: They'd take what posts they could

Ken: Right, and just leave

Don: It didn't make any difference whether there was posts in it or not, you cut it down. You just got paid by the acre

Ken: Right

Don: For cutting it down. But, uh, hard work.

Ken: Oh, you know it. I know it

Don: Hard work

Ken: I cut it with a chainsaw now – there is no wind in a cedar brake.

Don: No.

Ken: It cuts it all out

Don: You're getting the draw, you know, and those low spots, there is no wind down there, and there's wild hogs and rattlesnakes, and all sorts of boogers you know (laugh)

Ken: (laugh)

All laugh together

Ken: Well, that's interesting. We'll be driving around this afternoon, looking around...

Don: There plenty of cedar around here. It used to be a jumping little place.

Ken: I can tell. I was looking at that history book.

Don: Back when the trains came up for little kids, you know, that was really a big deal to watch the train.

Ken: I bet

Don: It didn't come every day

Ken: Uh-huh

Don: Maybe once or twice.

Ken: Uh-huh, uh-huh

Don: And you can still see places between here and Uvalde where the tracks were

Ken: Um-hum

Don: It crossed, it was always on the east side of the river, it never went across the river. And right down here, just, oh, a half mile from the city limits down here, that's where it crossed the road, the highway

Ken: Uh-huh

Don: And then went into the western part of town. And you can still see where it's an old railroad embankment, you know, where the tracks were

Ken: They took all the tracks up, I guess

Don: Yeah, yeah

Ken: Probably used them for scrap metal or something like that

Don: I'm sure they did, right before the War. Probably shipped it to Japan.

Ken: Yes

Don: You know, that's before the war when they were shipping all that metal.

Ken: Good. Thank you very much. I appreciate that.