

Elliott State Forest 2017-2019 Oral History Project

Interviewees: Jerry Phillips, David Gould, Bob Jacobson, Roger Johnson, Gary Vonderohe
Interviewer: Bob Zybach, with Amber Ross and Randy Wiest

Tape 1A. Interview with Jerry Phillips at his home in Coos Bay by Bob Zybach on October 6, 2017. The focus of this brief discussion was some of the peripheral characters in Phillips' book *Caulked Boots and Cheese Sandwiches*. The interview was also conducted as a test of the relative quality of recording devices being considered for subsequent field trips. The digital recorder was tinny and difficult to work with, so this and following interviews were recorded on cassettes with a portable tape recorder. No photographs were taken during this interview.

1. October 6, 2017 Coos Bay Test Interview: Jerry's Book Characters

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Tape 1A. Interview with Jerry Phillips at his home in Coos Bay by Bob Zybach on October 6, 2017.

- Bob Zybach: And this is the very first test and recording of our oral history. So first thing I'll ask you Jerry, we'll just go over some of the names we mentioned earlier. What do you remember about Rex Wakefield?
- Jerry Phillips: I never met him. All I remember is people talking about him. When he was the Supervisor of Siuslaw National Forest. Well respected, knowledgeable, popular, and that'd be all I know about him.
- Bob Zybach: Okay. Well, how about Bill Hagenstein?
- Jerry Phillips: Bill, I think I have met. Again, highly respected, senior member of the profession, and I remember calling him, when I wrote my book, and asking him: "Bill, I'm gonna title it, *Caulked Boots and Cheese Sandwiches*, and I'm wondering what you think I should use for a spelling of the word calked? You and I both know, that it's really spelled C-A-L-K-E-D, but most people would misspell it with a, C-A-U-L-K-E-D, or C-O-R-K."
- Jerry Phillips: He said, "I would use, C-A-U-L-K, because that's how most people do it, even though it's wrong as a spelling" so that's what I did.
- Bob Zybach: Uh-huh. Well, he and I were good friends, so when he died, I stopped putting a hyphen in Douglas fir, because he was picky about that.
- Bob Zybach: Dale Thomas? He was a neighbor there in Eddyville. My youngest kid went to wrestling camp with him.
- Jerry Phillips: I don't know that name at all.
- Bob Zybach: Dale Thomas was one of the kids that came out and worked from Iowa. He was a wrestler, part of the wrestling group, and you've got him in your book. He became a famous wrestler, a wrestling coach at Oregon State. Won lots of championships, and he became an Oregonian. He became transplanted. In your book, you mention him as one of the . . . Well, here's another name, Dick Posekany.
- Jerry Phillips: Dick Posekany is a brother SAF professional. I have met him at SAF meetings, but I don't really know him personally at all.
- Bob Zybach: He just died recently, another good friend of Wayne's [Giesy]. But Dick Posekany, married a sister of one of the wrestlers that came out. The wrestlers, I think were from Iowa or something. They worked here one summer, maybe '42 or '43.

Jerry Phillips: They were called the Boys of Cornell.

Bob Zybach: Oh, Okay. Dale Thomas was one of those guys.

Jerry Phillips: That was a famous group here. They really worked in fire protection, but they lived, when they were in town, they lived on the hill. The Coos Fire Patrol Headquarters were there, and the group . . . I'm not sure how many they were, a pretty small number, maybe 15, 20 men, something like that, and everyone assumed that it was the other Cornell.

Bob Zybach: There was more than one?

Jerry Phillips: There is. There's a famous one, and then there's the one they were from.

Bob Zybach: And they were all wrestlers, part of the wrestling team.

Jerry Phillips: I didn't know that.

Bob Zybach: Okay. You've got that in there, and Dale, you mentioned that he got --

Jerry Phillips: I put a chapter, The Boys of Cornell, that's what they were called.

Bob Zybach: Yup, and Dale was one of those, and in the book you say he decided to relocate in Oregon, and that's just what he did. He moved right out in the country, outside of Coos Bay.

Bob Zybach: T.J. Starker.

Jerry Phillips: Now, I probably met him at Oregon State. Although, he had left the faculty at that time. There's a story about how that happened, but I'm not gonna relate that.

Bob Zybach: I know that story so . . .

Jerry Phillips: But he was highly respected, and was appreciated for his knowledge and commitment, and then went on, as we all know, to purchase high quality forestland, mainly I think in that county, in Benton County.

Bob Zybach: And Lincoln County, too.

Jerry Phillips: Maybe some Lincoln, too. And what his beliefs were in growing and managing Douglas fir, were they all worked out, and I'm not sure his brothers or sons, followed him in the profession, and it's still an Oregon forestry name that everyone respects.

Bob Zybach: It seems to me that the Starker Forest, they went to Bruce, and he died in a plane wreck, and then his oldest son, just retired.

Jerry Phillips: Bond.

Bob Zybach: Bond retired at age 70, just a few months ago. But it seems to me, between your management of the Elliott and the Starkers' management of Starker Forest, those are two, one's government and one's private, but those are two of the nicest managed Douglas fir tree farms that I can think of, or ever experienced.

Jerry Phillips: High compliments.

Bob Zybach: It's pretty true though. Wouldn't you agree generally with that? It's hard to find another piece of ground that's been so well managed and cared for, and it's in great shape today.

Jerry Phillips: He is part of a club, an informal club, that was referred to as the brain trust, or whatever it was, of their peers, that peer group, of senior, successful, well-respected people in the forestry profession. And they made a visit one time down here on the Elliott Forest, and they didn't hesitate to criticize what they saw. We did never forget their visit.

Bob Zybach: When I started reforestation work, I was working with T.J.

Jerry Phillips: I laugh because T.J. had a number of basic rules, don't violate these rules. One of those rules was never put anything on top of your pickup truck, on the roof. Never put anything on the roof.

Bob Zybach: He also had a reputation for other things, too. Mostly for being pretty darn tight with a dollar, or a nickel.

Bob Zybach: Let's see. Faye Stewart?

Jerry Phillips: Faye Stewart was a man to be reckoned with. He and his family, there was a family group there, were owners and managers of what was called Elkside Lumber Company. They had a little mill in Elkton, and one they bought at Lakeside and remodeled it, so it was the Elk-Side, combination of those two, and they bought a fleet of trucks to navigate the tough roads on the Elliott Forest; a fleet of trucks that could handle a pretty adverse grade and Faye was so knowledgeable that we didn't have anybody who knew all what he knew as far as the management requirements for managing a major forest. But he knew all those things from experience, from their operations over at Row River. He had a sense of humor, but he was very quick to speak and very knowledgeable and you couldn't help but respect the guy, whether you liked him or not.

Jerry Phillips: He had a yacht up at Reedsport that he sat right there, that he would bring us up onto his yacht, and he introduced us to balloon logging in 1963, and you couldn't help but like the guy. You didn't always agree with what he was saying, but you couldn't help but like him.

Bob Zybach: Uh-huh. He was just really friendly and out-going. I heard he also offended people, that some people didn't like him.

Jerry Phillips: Loud! I'm sure he did, but if you're easy offended well you shouldn't be involved in the woods work.

Bob Zybach: Well there you go. Then Bill Davis.

Jerry Phillips: Don't know that name at all.

Bob Zybach: He was a professor at Oregon State, and you brought him in there just because he helped with some surveying or something.

Jerry Phillips: Okay, yeah seems like he was involved in the engineering department at Oregon State. I don't think I ever had him as a professor, but I think he was in the engineering department.

Bob Zybach: I did an oral history with him too after he was dead. I did it through his wife [Joan Davis] through some recordings.

Bob Zybach: Ralph Saperstein.

Jerry Phillips: Ralph is a neat guy, I always liked him. He came with us as a trainee, and we had him at Reedsport, at our operations there, so he was as a trainee with several others, working on timber sale preparations in the north end of the Elliott Forest. Sense of humor, smart, very likable, yeah.

Bob Zybach: So we talked about Bill Hagenstein. Roy Silen.

Jerry Phillips: Roy Silen. There were two men, [Joseph] Wheat and Silen. They were pioneers in the area of the Tree Improvement Program, the genetic tree improvement program. When I was first initiated there were a number of places, but this was a co-op here involving International Paper and BLM and ourselves, State Forestry. I'm not sure if there was another member or not right now, at least those members anyway, and we were chosen to be part of that co-op in establishing progeny test areas, and we had to fence them because otherwise the elk would move in and just eat all the little seedlings that we had planted there, but that was a very interesting program, we eventually had three progeny test areas and Silen and Wheat they were the fathers for that down here. Not sure if we were the only ones, but we were one of the co-ops.

Bob Zybach: He was somebody I worked with and really appreciated his work, he died snorkeling when he was 80 [85]. He led a good life, too.

Jerry Phillips: No kidding. No kidding. Never heard that.

Bob Zybach: Yeah, that's been a while, maybe 8 or 10 years ago.

Bob Zybach: But see, those are names that all came out of your book. Paul Dunn.

Jerry Phillips: Paul Dunn was Dean of the School of Forestry when I was there. I don't have a lot of personal memories of him, although when you were about to graduate you had to be interviewed by him as a potential employee. You had to knock on the door, introduce yourself like he had never met you before, and enter the room as a potential employee, and his first question to me was: "What's the main reason I should not hire you?"

Bob Zybach: That's interesting.

Jerry Phillips: He had you thinking on your feet there a bit, there. So I didn't really personally know him, but I saw him as a very respected Dean of the School of Forestry.

Bob Zybach: So he's kinda isolated. How about [Walter "Mac"] McCulloch?

Jerry Phillips: He was his next in command, I think he was his successor, I believe. He's a little more colorful person. People seem to have more stories about him, and so on, but I didn't really ever have any class from him. He was a very important part of the faculty.

Bob Zybach: You mentioned Wylie Smith, and I talked with a local person named Jason Smith. Wiley Smith had Coos Head Lumber company.

Jerry Phillips: He and his brother. It was Wylie and Willis Smith, they were brothers. Willis was in charge of the mill operations, and Wiley was in charge of the woods operations.

Bob Zybach: Did they start that business themselves?

Jerry Phillips: I think they renamed it. I think it was called something else before. They had a pulp mill out in Empire, a pulp mill, and the mill there on Isthmus Slough, and I'm sure it was a successor of another firm that predated them.

Bob Zybach: But it wasn't a family business?

Jerry Phillips: I didn't know of anybody else who was involved with it, so I guess it was. Coos Head Timber Company. I mainly knew their forester, Mike Groban,

that's who we dealt with mainly but we knew it was Wylie who was there running things. Whatever happened he was either doing or approving everyone, one of the two. He was a very likable guy as I said the man who worked for him, Mike Groban, his chief forester, when he became disabled he fell in the woods. An easy fall, maybe eight feet, we've all done that sometime. But he hit wrong and then broke his neck. So he, he's a paraplegic, and Wylie rebuilt the access to his office so he could get in there in a wheelchair. And this is a stairway, talking about a stairway going down to his office. Rebuilt that, and rebuilt his car so he could drive his car as a paraplegic. He was very loyal to his employees.

Bob Zybach: So he treated all his employees well, it wasn't that this person was --

Jerry Phillips: I think so. I think that's how it was.

Bob Zybach: So Jason'd be maybe a son or grandson or nephew?

Jerry Phillips: I would have to assume that, but I don't really know that.

Bob Zybach: You had William Greeley, too, that you mentioned.

Jerry Phillips: Well I just mentioned him but he wrote a book, you know he has a book. I mentioned him because he was the counterpart to Gifford Pinchot. Those two guys, at one time were pretty much neck and neck in whose gonna have the most influence about national forestry view, and it was touch and go because Pinchot thought the government should own the whole thing.

Bob Zybach: Total socialism.

Jerry Phillips: All forestland. Only they knew what to do with it. Greeley was sure that there was a role for private parties too. There was room for both, and then the co-op, he's number one.

Bob Zybach: Greeley was a personal hero, and I think he was the role model for Bill Hagenstein, so that's how old Hagenstein was, he knew Greeley personally.

Jerry Phillips: Greeley, I don't know, he may have also been involved with World War 1, the logging outfit in France in the US Army. My dad [Jim Phillips] served with that.

Bob Zybach: Oh, he did? Wow.

Jerry Phillips: My dad was a logging engineering student at Oregon State College of Forestry.

Bob Zybach: Wow, I didn't know that.

Jerry Phillips: But when he got enough experience in France, then he came home and he changed majors.

Bob Zybach: But he'd been a forest engineering major? So he would have had T.J. Starker as an instructor?

Jerry Phillips: Probably. Probably would.

Bob Zybach: Wow, we're covering almost all the Douglas fir history.

Jerry Phillips: Talking about 1920, and '20 through '22, right in there.

Bob Zybach: Well, I had a couple other, let's see, we got a minute or two. I was just curious, Ken Messerle and Arnie Roblan and some of the other people that have come after your book, basically. What are your thoughts on working with people like that in regards to the Elliott?

Jerry Phillips: Well I would say Messerle would be a natural fit. They have family tree farms, they probably have four or 500 acres, maybe more than that; timberland that they've harvested on. When I came to work here in 1952 they had a little sawmill on their ranch, cutting some of their own wood there.

Jerry Phillips: What was the other name? Arnie Roblan. I see Roblan as, course he's a Democrat so he's got a little bit of that politics in him, but I see him as being an intelligent, fair-minded person. He's a person who's pretty balanced in his outlook.

Bob Zybach: How about Caddie McKeown?

Jerry Phillips: I don't know her, hardly at all. She was a classmate of my daughter's [Sally Phillips Baird-Scott] at school. I've heard mainly good things about her, but of course she's another Democrat, so she's influenced by that, I understand that. Coos County is a pretty balanced county politically, it's about half and half.

Bob Zybach: Well what we've done here is given the recorders a good test, and covered most the names that weren't directly associated with the Elliott; peripheral characters from your book, and so now I'll check these out at home, and then we'll be ready to go Tuesday.

Jerry Phillips: Let's do.

Bob Zybach: Okay.