Bob Cutts

Interview Transcript 17 December 2016

Oral History Project

Reliving the past: Stories from our communities

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Interviewee: Bob Cutts
Interviewer: Liz Cutts
Date: 17 December 2016
Transcription: Liz Cutts

Bob Cutts

The sawmilling and timber industries of the Pilliga Forest

Sawmilling in the Pilliga Forest started as early as the 1870s. By the 1930s it had become a thriving industry and Baradine had become the centre of the forestry industry for the region. Small but thriving communities developed as forestry men and their families lived and worked at the remote sawmill sites. In this interview Bob Cutts recalls his stories of growing up and working at the Rocky Creek Sawmill.

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Interviewer (I): This is Liz Cutts, and I'm in Baradine on Saturday 17th of December 2016 and I'm talking to Bob - Robert Cutts – known as Bob Cutts about some of the sawmilling history of the Pilliga and his life in the Pilliga forest. Now, Bob can I ask you to state your full name and date and place of birth.

Subject (S): Robert Edward Cutts and I was born in Coonabarabran on

23-08-1937.

(I): And can you please state your mother's full name and then your father's full name, please.

(S): Coral Kathleen Cutts.

(I): And your father's full name?

(S): George Edward Cutts.

[0:00:49] (I): Ok, thanks Bob. OK, so we are going to talk a bit about your early life. You've lived in the Baradine district off and on most of your life, especially when you were younger?

(S): Yes.

(I): Right, so I am particularly interested in talking about your life out at the Rocky Creek sawmill and telling me a little bit about the sawmilling industries and history. So would you like to start by talking about when you were young? How old you were - can you remember when you first went out to Rocky Creek and why?

(S): I was thirteen years of age. Dad got the job as engine driver at Rocky Creek and we moved out there to live and stayed on there. We

had correspondence for school; there was no school or nothing there. It was quite a pleasant place and in those days Rocky Creek had a good heap of people. Do you want me to name them?

[0:01:49] (I): Yes, if you've got names and remember how many, that would be wonderful.

(S): Yeah, well in those days my dad was the engine driver. Henry Schwagger was the manager of the sawmill, Steve Jack was the foreman of the mill, Bert Ruttley spent most of his life at Rocky Creek; he used to do a lot of the stacking out and checking the logs when they came in on the trucks. They had to take the numbers down that the cutters had marked on so they could be paid for that amount. And ah, we had working on the dump at that time a little bloke called Harry Martin, who later cut his hand off on the breaking down bench. Harry, yeah, well, most of his hand, like all his fingers and that went. A New Zealand bloke, came there riding a pushbike and after he lost his hand, Tony [Bob's brother] bought his pushbike off him because he couldn't ride it any more.

And then we had Arthur Wadley and Tom Sutherland, the two log cutters. Tommy Burrows and Walter McCullum. Tommy was a benchman and Walter was a tailer-out - - -Tom was also the local bookmaker. And then we had Aub [Bob's brother] was on the scantlings, where they had to get rid of the waste; the wastage from the timber, and Snowy Gesla[1] and Les Hitchin, they both worked on the dump on and off. Old Mr White, Jimmy White as we called him, old Jim, he was a snigger - that used to snig the logs to be carted in. He used to come from Kenebri out in his dray, he had a horse called Robbin and he used to drive her in and out on the dray at weekends and he would take her out of the dray and use her for snigging all the

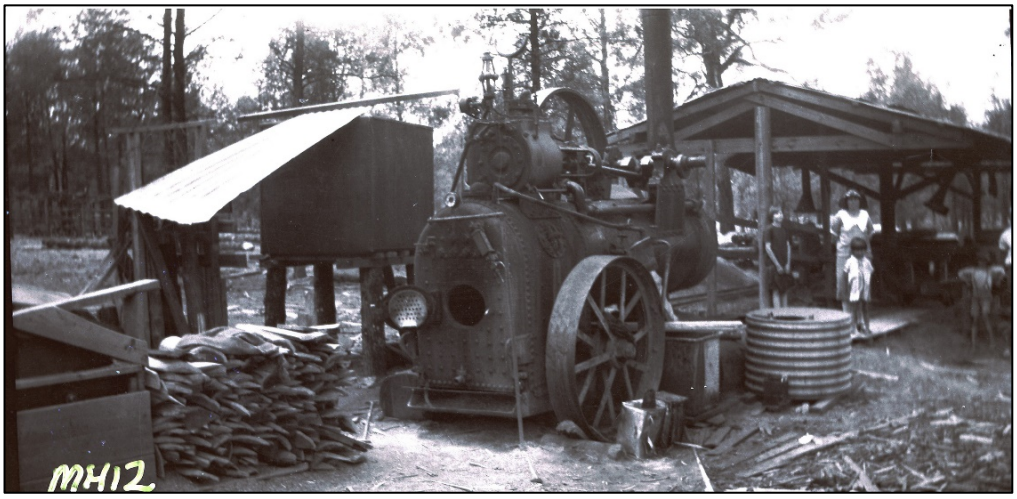
[1] The spelling of this surname may be incorrect.

week and then take her back into town. And then, as I said, we had Bert who was a stacker-out with the timber on it and then we had Yabby Taylor, he worked as a docker. The dock was the one who cut the lengths on the timber….Keith Davis used to cart the timber from the mill into the stack at the railway and put it on the trucks at Kenebri to be carted away.

[0:04:24] And, as I said, Les and Mary (Hitchin) they lived there at Rocky Creek. Next to them was Arthur Clark. Arthur was a bit of a handyman and they put him out bush cutting logs or put him on the mill; yeah working on the mill and that sort of thing. And, oh we had Yabby Taylor – Yabby used to come up and give a bit of a hand on the stacking and docking and that, but it was quite a pleasant place, those days everybody knew each other and we all mixed in together. George Ruttley; he used to work in the bush log cutting and he also worked on the mill. George, young George, his family were reared there on the mill. As I said, Steve was the foreman and Isabelle his wife and they had the two kids there.

We had no schooling, the only schooling we had was at the correspondence, you know, at the time. Tony and I and Garry (another brother) we worked in the forest cutting logs. I was just turning fourteen and Tony and Garry were just thirteen and we went out, we were cutting logs for a while and then we were put out of the scrub because we were too young and they threatened to take Jack Underwood's licence off him, if he kept us in the scrub cutting logs. So Jack then gave us the job on weekends cleaning the sawmill; we used to get two pound to get rid of all the sawdust and scrap and everything from the mill over the weekend and have it ready for the Monday morning on the thing, you know, yeah.

The shower at the mill, they had the shower. The tank stand was done in and the shower was on the mill and most of the people used hot water from the steam. Dad used to pump from the engine, dad had the hot water running from there and that was when most of us showered in the evening because most the houses didn't have bathrooms or anything like that; you just had a big tub to wash in.



The Rocky Creek Sawmill

[0:06:39] (I): Can you remember how many families or how many people roughly worked at the sawmill?

(S): Yeah. Well there was Arthur Wadley, Tom Sutherland, Peter Ramsey, Dad, Les Hitchin, Bert Ruttley, Yabby Taylor, Harry Martin that got his fingers knocked off, umm, Tommy Burrows, Walter McCullum tailored-out and Aub (Cutts) on the scantlings, yeah. And then that time you had other coming in on different work, carting timber away, you know. Giving Keith a back-up if he got too much, Keith Davis a backup, he used to cart the timber into Kenebri, as I said before. And then there was Arthur Clark, yeah, he lived up next to Mary and Les. And of a weekend, them days, there was no such things as saws for cutting timber or anything like that and the sleeper cutters used to leave the chips and Les Hitchin used to get us boys and we'd go out on his ute to get a load of chips for mum and a load

of chips for Les. Every weekend, that was our job carting our firewood and all that, you know, bringing it in.

I think we all learnt to swim there, Rocky Creek was never dry; never known to be dry those days and the same at the Aloes. The Aloes was always running, you know, on the thing. We'd go into Kenebri once a week, Dad and myself would go in with the horse and cart and get a lot of groceries. Sometimes we'd get groceries for the other ones at the mill, whoever wanted stuff, and bring it out.

We were there in the floods one time. We went over the creek going into Kenebri; it was alright on the Saturday morning and coming back, we got half way across the creek and the flood water came down and washed us down the creek. Dad and I were washed down. That was one experience we had. Another experience, we were going home and we had a mare called Ginny; a big black mare and we were driving in the gate at Rocky Creek, where the old gate was, and trotting down past Harry Martin's place and Tony raced out and as he did, Ginny shied at him. Well, Dad got pelted out of the cart and he's hanging on to the reins. Then she starts kicking and bucking and I landed out on the other side and we spent a good week or a fortnight gathering up tins of fruit and jam and peaches, scattered all over (laughs) the creek where the mare had bolted and that was one of the highlights (laughs) of Rocky Creek, you know. It wasn't very laughable at the time.

Then, of course, we had the bushfires there; where everybody had to go out and fight the fire. You know, us kids went out as well pulling tankers and all the works and that. Then we had the floods, of course, the big flood in '50; that sorta hemmed a lot of us in, when you couldn't get out of the place.

[0:09:58] (I): Did any of the fires come close to the sawmill?

(S): Yeah, they come within a mile, or closer in some places; the big fire. But in them days there was no such thing as being guided by Forestry or nothing, everybody just went and fought, you know. All the mums packed what they could in food and that to take out, yeah.

[0:10:21] (I): You mentioned going to Kenebri, how far is Kenebri from Rocky Creek?

(S): Eleven miles.

(I): So how long did it take you to get in there to go to the shops.

(S): In the sulky roughly about – in the cart it would take roughly an hour to get in and around another hour to come out; which you just sort of walked the horse along and what's a name. In those days you had so many brumbies in the scrub that you had to be careful, you know, that the horse didn't sorta take off when they'd start wild galloping - It would take a good half a day in and get the groceries and get back out.

[0:10:59] (I): And, of course, you are even further away from Baradine really?

(S): That's right. Yeah, yeah. With what's a name, nearly thirty-three mile from Baradine, you know.

(I): You mentioned your brothers?

(S): Tony and Garry.

[0:11:10] (I): Tony and Garry and Aubrey. Can you list the names of all your brothers and sisters and tell me a little bit about them when they were out at Rocky Creek.

(S): Yeah, well when we were out there, as I said, Aub was the eldest; he got the job on the scantlings there, he was doing that for a time and then his health started to catch up with him. And then Kevin worked there; he was the second one. He worked there stacking out

for a while and, as you say, on the sawmill you could be doing this today and not tomorrow, on the mill.

And I used to go over and help Aub on the scantlings; get them out of the road. We used to load them on this little carry-thing on rail tracks and push it down about a hundred yards from the mill, unload them because that is where they would be burnt, yeah, and then come back and do that. And you had to hurry down and back because all that time the tailor-out would be bringing his down and all the rubbish just dropped at his feet and you had to get rid of all that, while it was going. So it was no easy task at times. And then Joan, my eldest sister, Joan, and then myself, Tony and Garry and then Maureen, Ronnie, Malcolm and Doug, yeah. Then, of course, Ron's appendix burst out there and he ended up in Coonabarabran hospital for six weeks with peritonitis and Joan had to sort of take over while Mum was staying in Coonabarabran. Joan sort of took over…

[0:12:49] (I): So how did you manage on the sawmill, considering how far you were away from town and the lack of transport, how did you manage with emergencies like that?

(S): Well, if anything happened and they had to run to hospital Steve Jack, he had his car then. Steve got rid of his other one – he bought a new Pilot when Pilot's first came out; a car called a Pilot. And he used to run them in, or Henry Schwagger would run them into the mill if an emergency cropped up. I remember when dad got thrown out of the cart and was dragged along with the reins and had the wheel of the thing on his ear, he had to be taken into hospital.

[0:13:26] (I): So you are one of ten siblings – a big family. How did your mother manage living out there on the sawmill?

(S) Alright; it was hard on her, you know. She done a bit of sewing out there as well for different ones on the mill; mum was a great dressmaker, you know. She done a bit of sewing there like that, but

we managed. People, say like oh, this is no good for you that is no good for you. We mainly lived on potatoes and pumpkin - pumpkin, potatoes and cabbage and that sort of thing but we always had a bit of a garden and dad was always a gardener, mainly, you know more than anything like that. We managed, it wasn't easy - no way was it easy. But we were sort of happy. You know what I mean? Because there was no such thing as racists on the mill.

Arthur was an Aborigine and Tom was a quarter-cast, Tommy Shovelin; quarter cast or something like that. Yabby Taylor was half Aborigine. Mervyn Banks he was; we used to call Merv the blond Abo. He had blond hair Tom did, but everyone sort of mixed in well, there was no blue's. Only ever one blue there was between Aub and this Snowy Windsor. Snowy wanted to fight Aub, anyway, after it was over - after the mill stopped work they went to fight, well Dad broke it up. He said, "Any fighting done here I'll do it," and George Ruttley picked up a four by two, young George, and raced out and hit the old man from the back. But Dad turned round and grabbed the four by two and knocked George out and then when George come too he scampered like a rabbit to get away and that was the only squabble I ever remember being on Rocky Creek.

[0:15:18] (I): Cause your dad was known as a bit of a boxer, wasn't he?

(S) He was a fighter, Dad was a professional fighter.

(I): Do you just want to talk a little bit about that, while on your father?

(S) Yes. I'll never forget when dad, well I wasn't [born then] - and dad bought a bloke from Sydney, they brought him up to fight dad and Jack Underwood, this was when they were in Gil, the fight was in Gilgandra. Lubbe [Adrian] was the fellow's name that he fought and old Jack he always went crook on dad because he didn't know dad at

the time; he knew this Lubbe being a Sydney fighter, you know. So Jack put two hundred pound, in those days it would have been a lot of money, and he said to the copper in Gilgandra when dad was climbing into the ring, he said to this copper, "How will this bloke go?" He said, "If you've got any money put it on him," and he put it all on Lubbe and dad knocked Lubbe out in forty-three seconds in the first round. So Jack, he always reminded dad that he cost him two hundred pounds. But Dad, you know, he fought a lot of good men in his day, you know. Les Cain, Sweeney, all those blokes but…

[0:16:34] (I): And, your father - sorry?

(S): He never picked a fight, you know, never but he hated bullies - he just despised stand-over, he always sorta - not that there were many men around then who tried to pick on him, you know. He had a run in there at the back of the pub, I will never forget it, years ago. All the Windsors, cause the Windsors always moaning - blues, you know and anyway dad was there and this little what's-a-name ah, Taylor he was running around, "I pay my way, I do this and I do that," and he's trying to argue the point with Dad, and Dad said, "Well, you're too bloody small to hit," so he turned him around and booted him in the backside, I'll never forget that because we were out under the fence. But he was always a hard worker even before we went to Rocky Creek, he worked on the railway here. He'd go home and down the back he'd be digging away on the garden. He always had a big garden, when were in town, in here he'd be working on the railway and used to sell his tomatoes and that for sixpence a pound, you know, on the garden and all.

[0:17:54] But getting back to Rocky Creek, all in all, Jack Underwood was very fair to us kids, you know. He often we would come over sit there for hours talking to us, "you'll be right" and things like that. And

his daughter Jill, who married Butch Meyers, well Jill used to drive from 'The Ranch' over to there - her sister Isabelle, was married to Steve Jack, of course. And she'd drive there and she would often take Joan for a drive into Kenebri in the car, you know.

But, as I said, we were all happy. The kids played together, you know. We had our own little cricket team and, of course, that's when we first started trapping brumbies. The first brumbies we trapped was at Rocky Creek and we got a couple of nice little mares there. Vixen I called my one and another one Silver we had out there. And Tony had a chestnut mare and a foal. But we had broken Vixen in and Solo - Aub had Solo that was his old sulky horse, which we got as a brumby. Then somebody opened the gate and let them out at Rocky Creek after we had broken them in and quietened them down. And Ginny, our old mare, she was the only one branded and, of course, the bloke that stole them, we couldn't claim them back. As the Sergeant said at the time, we got the mare back, Ginny back but we couldn't get Vixen and Silver and the other chestnut mare, Tony's mare and foal back because they weren't branded and they were classified as brumbies. But the bloke that stole them paid for them a dozen times over that he didn't know about because he had boundary fences; something mysteriously used to happen to the boundary fences every now and again and it cost him more money. Whoever reads this will know who I am talking about… (laughs).

[0:19:58] (I): Just going back to the workings of the sawmill, so Rocky Creek sawmill milled White Cypress Pine?

(S): White Cypress Pine, yep.

(I): Right and what was that mainly used for?

(S): Building, all houses and everything was built out of Cypress Pine, see. Cypress Pine was the only thing that white ants wouldn't not touch, and it was the go. Everything them days was built out of timber, and then they brought the fibro, of course fibro and that into it and then everything was sort of fibro and timber from the mill. And it was a big concern. Anyway, the mill had a lot of people; we had on average about fourteen people at the mill there, you know, their wages and their families and the works.

[0:20:44] (I): Can you remember what year the sawmill would have closed down? Roundabout?

(S) No. Roughly - because I…

(I): What year are we talking about when your family was there?

(S): About '49, '50, '51, '52 and then, of course, we came into town and Dad kept working at the mill and he would come in weekends and so forth, yeah.

[0:21:11] (I): Because and at that time there were lots of other sawmills operating in the Pilliga?

(S): Yes. Oh yeah, because in the Pilliga we had Wooleybah, which was over the other side, of course. But see Jack Underwood and Tom Underwood were brothers and Tom had Wooleybah and Jack had Baradine - he had Rocky Creek. And Jimmy Underwood, Jack's son, he built a two-storey hut at Lightning Ridge. There were two rooms on the bottom and one room upstairs and we always called it the palace because it was so funny, this little [hut]. Fairly well built - but we always called it the palace – the way it was, you know. But, as I said we came to town then I was just on fifteen, when we came to town and started school.

[0:22:03] (I): And what happened when you came to town? Where did your life go then, what direction?

(S): Well, we come to town and Dad was still at the mill, working and we then took on droving - anything that was going. We'd go burr cutting, ringbarking, bag sewing. Anything, anything that was going, we done it. Them days there was a lot of bag sewing and that, because in the old days they took the bags, the header would come round and they took the bags and the bag sewer would come along. And later on they brought in a platform and put, with headers with the platform on. Well, with some of them you had a single drop into the bag and you could sew the bag on the platform. When you had about five or six on the platform you would hit the lever and it would drop in the one heap. So when the truck come along they would pick them up and take them to the mill. Then later on you got the what's-a-name, you got the two bag, two-slot header that came out, while one bag was filling you'd be sewing the other bag up and all and get ready to have another bag to put on, which made it a lot better to work. You had to work fast.

[0:23:14] (I): So we are talking about the late 1940s and early to mid-1950s when probably the main industries in Baradine was timber and agriculture too?

(S): Yeah, yeah, yeah there was a bit going on with wheat and that, yeah.

(I): Can you remember much, or talk about the agricultural side of Baradine. We just talked a little bit about the harvesting, which would have been seasonal obviously.

(S): Yeah.

[0:23:44] (I): So what else can you tell me about the agriculture of that time?

(S): Sheep. Sheep, the main go then was sheep and wheat. Few had cattle, but more so on the sheep and the - Because wool them days - I remember when I looked after Archie Evans's dog while he went

down in 1948, Archie went down, we lived next door to him on the Coonamble Road there, and he went down to the wool market with the wool sales to see his wool sold and he got a pound per pound; that was a record - it was a great thing on the wool then.

It was a pound to a pound. He used to give me ten shillings to look after his dogs for the fortnight; or his dog. One dog he had and the old dog there he always called it Shit; that was the name of the dog - and anyone thought it was - that was his dog's name and [he was] a beautiful dog, he was unreal - a kelpie and a good worker and everything.

[0:24:48] (I): So Baradine at that time was sort of in its heyday, would you say, with businesses?

(S): Heyday that was it. In the '50s Baradine was flying, we had all them mills in town, see Norman Martin had the mill down the bottom, Nick Malouf had the mill over the creek from him, Harold Pincham had the mill down the bottom on the creek here.

Then they built the other mill just up here in this street [Darling Street] around and then others had their little mills. Joe Flood, I remember Joe Flood when he started a little mill himself out in the scrub there; he had a few out there working for him. And Stan, Stan Tassell had one out there going, one out there working and that. Joe worked on that mill as well and Tony, that's where he got crushed at the mill at Bugaldie. Chapman's had the mill at Bugaldie there, you know like you would more or less call those ones backyard mills, like Chapman's and the one Stan had and that. They sort of only had the bench and the what's-a-name and that. They didn't have a planer, a planer to go with the timber, a planer to smooth the timber off. But you know, you had all them mills and even out the other side here, we had heaps.

[0:25:58] Gwabegar, Gwabegar had six sawmills. But Baradine at that time had three produce stores. We had Gardiners, on the bottom, on the corner Gardiners. We had Gardiners up where the chemist is now, used to be Gardiners, Gordy Gardiners shop as well until when they got burnt out on the corner, then old Mrs Leithead had the block between the bakers and the paper shop there and Gardiners built the other house there; the other shop there and, of course, it got burnt down too.

We had three produce stores, we had two barbers, two billiard rooms, we had three skin buyers - Greenhaigh was a skin buyer, Riley Newman's was up a skin buyer up there where the shed was next to the ambulance station yeah, and Nugent was the one over next to the church, next to the convent school - on the skin buyers in the town, you know.

[0:26:57] We had four cafes you know or four meal places, the main cafe was MacDonald's Café - in the main street where Joe Cowan used to have the garage and the cafe was next to that, where the CRT is there now, you know. And then when you went up the street past there was - where Pop Pentes is, that was originally…Phillips's cafe. Duncan & Duncan had the one next to him which Stan Tassell later on bought. Then we had the big drycleaner firm who used to do all the dry cleaning themselves. Spud White and McLeod had the dry cleaning place.

Then you had the Post Office, see, and Frazer Beveridge had Farrell's, where Farrell's is now, he had that and the car sales there. And next to the Post Office, Laurie Ford he used to have one of the taxi's, we had two taxi's, Laurie Ford and Mick Worrell. When errr Lynchy he got the cafe where Laurie Ford was, off Laurie Ford. We had a billiard room at the back of that. Jimmy Purdy had the hairdressers in the

front of it and when you crossed the road you had the Co-op there and you had what's-is barber's shop as well with another billiard room in it, Frank Hogan, yeah. And as you went down you had Alan Thompson, he was a baker, and Permewan Wrights had a big shop on the corner. Tommy Tassell built the place where Kenny Smith is now. Well, Tommy Tassell built that originally, yeah, it was international sales and all that.

[0:28:43] (I): So really Baradine was really big?

(S): It was a thriving town, yeah. Everybody was in work. Even the young fellows, you could go out burr cutting, you know, you could go out burr cutting, ringbarking the timber, no such thing as poisoning them days; it was all done with the axe, all the clearing. You go burning off. Tony and myself cut our teeth on burning off and droving; us kids were always on the road droving and that.

[0:29:13] (I): A hard life? I mean there was a lot of physical work?

(S): Hard, physical work but we never sort of complained about it. You know, breaking in is the same, I was breaking in horses when I was about, well I was thirteen at Rocky Creek when we drove Vixen and them. But when I come to Baradine, I started breaking in, my first job was outer school was out at Goorianawa Station breaking in. In them days Goorianawa had a lot of horses, and they used to bring their blood horses up from Sydney to spell them and I had to look after them as well, on the thing. But I'll never forget, I rode out there and Jack Campbell, I left school on the Friday, I rode out on the Saturday and Jack Campbell, he owned the whole of Goorianawa then. In them days it involved all the properties; it has been cut up now (excuse me). Anyway, when they, when I rode out there, Jack Campbell said to me, "how old are you, son?" I said, "I'm eighteen Sir," cause I was tall, I wasn't that good looking, but I was tall (laughs). Anyway, he said, "can you ride a horse?" I said, "I rode one out here."

He said, “I mean handle a horse? Different thing,” he said, pretty abrupt he was, old Jack. He said, ‘There’s a big difference between riding a horse and handling a horse.” “Yes,” I said, “I broke a few in.” So that’s when I got the job breaking-in.

[0:30:38] He took me down to the sale - the yard and they had a mare there - He gave the mare to Mrs George Faulkner who owned Haddon Rig Stud but when they broke her in they buggered her up, she threw a few of them and they turned her out. So when I went down he got the groom, because they employed about thirteen or fourteen people on Goorianawa then, and he got the groom to get the horses in, get them around and that Faulkner mare was there, I nicknamed her the Faulkner mare because he had given her to Mrs Faulkner, and we got her, cornered her up, got her saddled. Anyway, I got on her and she was like all blood horses, she used to buck high which was much better than you get a pony that jumps around and slips from under you, anyway, I had no trouble riding her and she what’s-a-name, so I got to walk around the yard, because she was half broke-in, liked mouthed and all that, but they never turned her out because they couldn’t ride her. I got her walking around the yard and then I would have her jogging around the yard and turn around and canter around and that. And I said to Mr Campbell, “if you open the gate, Mr Campbell,” I said “I’ll take her for a ride in the paddock, around the paddock.” He said, “you certainly will not my boy,” he said “you are sitting on a three thousand guinea mare there.” Well, as you know, a guinea was twenty-one shillings, you know, yeah (laughs). He wasn’t going to trust me out and about in the paddock with her, because that was the main paddock in those days. And that’s how I started on Goorianawa.

[0:32:14] (I): When do you think, or why do you think the timber industries started to shut-down and things began to slow down in the Baradine and Pilliga area. What were the reasons?

(S) Well, it went from the mill boom to sleeper cutters. Sleeper cutting really went well and then, of course, what happens, Carr turns around and gave most of the good country to the National Park and, of course, all the sleeper cutters were put out of work, there was no timber.[2] When the timber slackened off the mills, it went, so that was the end of Baradine.

[0:32:57] (I): And, of course, the railways started using concrete sleepers.

(S): Concrete, yes, not here, but away they did. And, but, see them days we had train services three days a week.

[0:33:09] (I): Tell me a little bit about the train services because you could go to Sydney from Baradine?

(S): Yeah oh yeah. You could get on the train here at about twenty past three and you'd get to Sydney six o'clock the next morning in the old steam train, it was good. The old box benches, you could get in and have a sleep whatever (laughs). I'll never forget when in the carriage one day and we were going down and Jimmy Purdy was sitting in the corner and this dark lady got in with a baby and she's feeding the baby and the jolly… … and myself were sitting in the carriage and this Jimmy Purdy kept looking at this lady, anyway and she looked at Jimmy Purdy and she said, "would you like some?" He nearly died (laughs).

But as I said, we had three rails a week, you know you could get the railway from here to Binnaway. You know, it was good, you got one at three o'clock and get down to Binnaway and back. But it was all

[2] Robert John Carr was elected to the New South Wales Legislative Assembly in 1983. In 1995 he was elected as the Premier of New South Wales, resigning in 2005. (Parliament of Australia, Former Senator the Hon. Bob Carr, at: https://www.aph.gov.au/Senators_and_Members/Parliamentarian?MPID=wx4)

good. As I said, it was hard. I mean, we were on the road, you know, you go on the road droving, you had nothing. You had the sulky, no such thing as a camp or nothing, you know. If it start raining you had a tarp, you'd put the sulky over to the fence and put a tarp over the shafts and sulky for your protection if it ever happened, you know. But…

[0:34:33] (I): Ah - going back to the sleeper cutters, they cut timber with an axe back then?

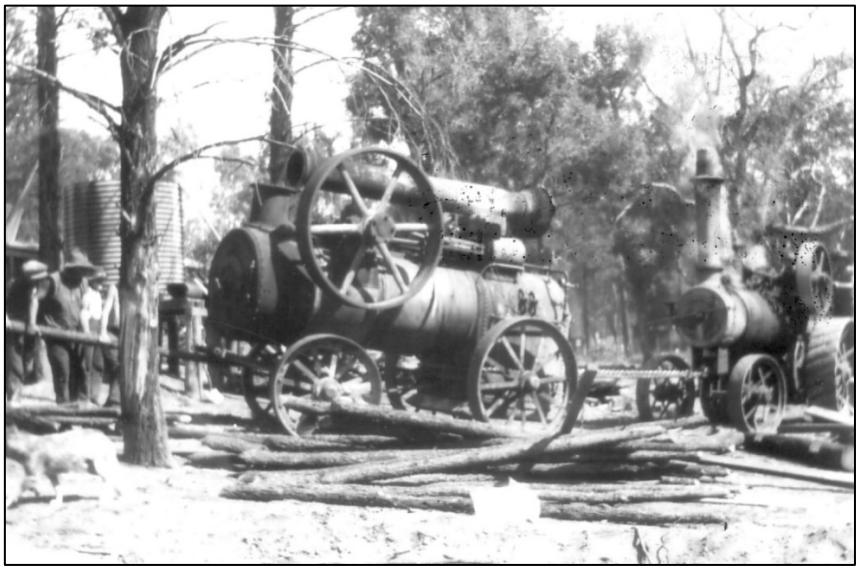
(S): Sleeper cutters started off with a squaring axe and then, of course, when the chainsaws come in everyone got into it, yeah.

[0:34:46] (I): But there was no worry about health risk and safety issues?

(S): No. No way. As I said, they would cut into here and there, roughly about eighteen inches to two foot sleeper chipper you know and then they would square it up with the axe and then cut it, another big piece in and then - (inaudible) and that was a sleeper. I think those days they were getting about three and six a sleeper, yeah (laughs).

[0:35:17] (I): Tell me a little bit more about the sawmills, umm and the steam engine driving because when your father was the engine driver it was actually a steam engine he had to get started?

(S): Yes, he had to maintain all that himself. He had no intentions of someone coming and showing him what to do or anything like that. He was brilliant on steam because he had spent much of his life on it as well.



Steam Engine at Rocky Creek Sawmill

[0:35:43] (I): Some of those steam engines, you see the old ones, they are massive. How did they get them out, did they drive them out there?

(S): The first steam engine to come to Baradine, old Golliga Pincham drove it; the first traction engine, yeah, ever came to Baradine.

(I): Because they are pretty hefty umm things aren't they…

(S): Oh my oath.

(I): …to manoeuvre around?

(S): Oh yeah.

[0:36:05] (I): And that was the standard way to, I assume they went to electric, that they drove the sawmills with?

(S): On a what's-a-name in later years, take them on the trucks or whatever.

(I): Any other memories of Rocky Creek or living in the Pilliga? Any funny stories?

(S): No. You know you could tell a lot of funny stories about the place about what happened and what didn't happen and what you'd seen happening, but it never left Rocky Creek, you know. Well, as I said, everybody was friendly. You know, they all mixed in well.

[0:36:47] (I): You said you were taught by correspondence at home…

(S): Yeah.

(I): …so did you find that it was adequate when you ended up coming to town; did you go to school when you came to town? And did you find you knew enough about reading and writing and the basics?

(S): Yes, well when we were living out the Coonamble Road before we went to Rocky Creek, we were going to school here, see we had that schooling and well - - -the what's-a-name, we did quite a bit there at the school as I said…. And of course, before we came back up here, when we went to Sydney when poor old Grandmum was dying; see we went to Sydney for those few years and she died, we had schooling then.

I went to St Benedict's brothers then. The girls went to the convent and I went to St Benedict's. But other than that the education part was hard. As I say to kids today for god's sake get an education; you need it today. Them days you didn't need it because you just had to take the bush work on, you know. You know, you never heard of anyone studying to be a doctor or anything like that then. But the ones that had the money sent the kids on and so forth and they done well.

[0:38:03] (I): Any other memories you want to talk about with your early life, Baradine, the sawmill? I expect there are still people you know?

(S): We went rabbiting. Before we went out there, we were driving rabbits. Dad, myself and Jack Thurston - he married mum's sister. We were driving rabbits out on Fishers and Urawilkie and those places. And we drove twenty-two hundred rabbits, yeah, on the what's-a-name, yeah. Eleven hundred a pair. You used to have to pair them and gut. Pair'em for the freezing works, gut them and hang them over the fence. And there was twenty-two, we sent eleven hundred, twenty-two hundred single rabbits into the freezers.

[0:38:51] (I): And how much did you get paid, do you know?

(S): One and threepence a pair, yeah.

(I): A lot of work?

(S): (laughs) That's all you got for them, yeah.

[0:39:00] (I): So was that at the height of the rabbit plague?

(S): Yeah. But even just trapping the rabbits, men could make a good living out of it then, as well, on the thing, set sixty to a hundred traps a night. That was the hard part when we were finishing with Dad and you'd be carrying maybe fifty - twenty to fifty rabbit traps over your shoulder, walking along with Morley setting the traps and you'd take'em. And you'd have to go round them at midnight, run them at midnight to get the rabbits and you'd be carrying the rabbits back in bags, and all that and then you'd be up at daylight to get'em the next morning. You had to be up at daylight because you couldn't leave them in the traps after that, foxes and that, would get them and you'd have to do the same thing again.

That was hard work. You know - we always ate well, that sort of thing, well that way. We had this big camp oven and any rabbit that was too small, too small for the freezing works, you put it in a curry, whatever and, you know, you always, you could always go back and get a good curry, curried rabbits or whatever…

[0:40:12] (I): So what other sort of things when you were back out at Rocky Creek or back out in the bush, what sort of other things would you eat? You said you had a vegetable garden growing.

(S): Yeah, oh well, you know we always sort of had our cereal and porridge was the main thing. Them days mum always had this big porridge and you always had your big plate of porridge for breakfast. Your school, when we came in here, you would pack your lunch. Those days they had what you call a big tank loaf and you'd have to

slice it. No such thing as butter because your rations was on. Tickets wouldn't last long and what's-a-name and you used to have your bread and dip it in the fat, you know, your bread and fat.

[0:40:55] (I): What about meat? Did you have sheep, mutton?

(S): Oh, we didn't have much meat, no. Mainly underground mutton; it was the rabbit, we used to call it underground mutton. But, no, you had meat now and again but it was very rare, you know. Mum used to breed a lot of chooks, poultry and that, you know you'd killed a rooster, yeah that way. But we always had a feed, you know, we never went hungry. At times at Rocky Creek when the flood come up or something, you had to go very be sparing, because if you run out there was nowhere else to go. I often think back myself, I often think back myself, how poor old mum battled. You know really, with ten kids.

[0:41:50] (I): A tough life?

(S): Yeah. But if she hadn't been a good sewer and things like that, I often wonder, because she used to make our shirts and all for school and all that. We got a pair of sand shoes say twice a year. Three and six a pair of sand shoes used to cost, you know and that. But you went to school bare-footed.

[0:42:10] (I): What about Christmas or birthdays?

(S): We always got a one and threepenny stocking, always, yep (laughs) at Christmas time. But it used to have a comic in it, a little car and a little thing of lollies, boiled lollies you could suck, you know. That was our Christmas present. Never went above that, we all had a stocking.

[0:42:32] (I): What about birthdays?

(S): Birthdays - mum always managed something for us, it wouldn't be much, but you know sometimes it would be something you could wear, a shirt or something like that. Coory Brothers used to do the rounds then, go to Rocky Creek, they used to have like a travelling Woolworths type of thing, you know. The Coory Brothers, they're a big concern they're still up at Goondiwindi and them kind of places. And they'd come and mum used to often buy material and that off them and if us boys saved up any money and that, we could buy ourselves shirts, shorts or whatever, you know.

[0:43:06] (I): Going back to your mother because she was a very good sewer, wasn't she?

(S): Mum was a brilliant sewer; she was unreal, yeah. Everybody she ever sewed for, you know.

(I): Do you want to talk a little bit about her early history?

(S): Well, I don't remember, mum used to sew for David Jones in Sydney, she was the one who did designs there, she got, and when we were in Sydney we had Tasman's Drycleaners at the time, we had that, and mum used to do a lot of sewing there, as well. And, of course, when we went over to the fish shop she couldn't do much there because she was pretty busy and that all the time. We had the fish shop there in Erskineville. But, then, of course, back to the bush. I think it was much easier for them in the country than it was in the city, though, because it was during the war that we were in Sydney and everything was rationed and you know, but umm….

[0:44:05] (I): So easier in the country from the point of view because you could grow your own vegetables and things?

(S): You could grow your own vegetables and rabbits; you could go out and shoot a rabbit or trap a rabbit, because rabbits were everywhere, you know; you didn't have to walk far to get a rabbit,

mate. Yeah and as I say, Mum always used to have a lot of chooks and you'd kill a rooster here and there, yeah.

[0:44:29] (I): Anything else we haven't covered, do you think you'd like to add?

(S): Oh just thinking, yeah. When we come to Baradine, we come to living down the creek then. I'll never forget Sandy Hawkins and Les Dadd, old Les, he said, "You'll never have to go to a rodeo while ever the Cutts's are around with you," because we were always breaking in horses and everything, you know.

[0:44:58] (I): Well, you stayed in Baradine most of your life, apart from various times away, so you've come back, and you must like it?

(S): Yeah, oh yeah, I came back because Baradine is a good little town. You know, I often say to people that are winging and moaning and going on about the place, I say why the hell did you come back? A certain bloke, I can't mention his name, you'll probably know who I am talking about. Well, he said, "Oh I don't know why I came back to the so and so place for." I said, "What did you come back for?" You know, it's true all and all, Baradine isn't a bad little town. You know, we haven't got that much here but we, it's reasonable. We could do with a much better medical system, you know, that way, because when you got to travel from here to Dubbo to have an x-ray and that sorta thing, it gets you down at times. And they, some of the specialists, seem to think that you live next door and say, "I'll see you tomorrow, see you this day," you know. But I've always said, you know, Baradine and I mean, we've seen the hard side of it - Baradine, growing up. The young ones have got it made today, you've got buses to school. We used to walk three mile to Gwabegar; used to have to walk three mile into town going down and carrying things home on your back no cars or anything to get out and all. If the creek was up, you'd use to have to paddle across to get into town and around, but…

[0:46:30] (I): How has the forest changed? Talking about paddling across the creek, but nowadays the creeks rarely run, do they?

(S): You seldom see them run and like the Aloes and Rocky Creek, they always ran, always had water. But now days the drying up of things, yeah.

[0:46:53] (I): So good memories. A hard life maybe, but good memories?

(S): Good memories. You know, I often think that. You know, we dare not start go crook because the old man was, he'd pick up the first thing to give you a flogging with - he wouldn't what's-a-name. I never forget once I killed a snake out when we lived at Round Plain, Gwabegar, and he come home and I had the snake hanging on the fence. He asked, "what happened there?" and Aub said, "Bobby killed it near the gate," and then he gave me a hiding with a two inch hose, you know - - - not because he liked the snake, but the fact that I could have been bitten. You could have been bitten and no-one to take care [of you] - and everything like that. But I got off worse than the snake did because it didn't have any pain.

[0:47:42] He wouldn't listen to you. If you got into trouble at school or anything like that, he was down there like a clock. I'll never forget Dick Johnston one time. Joan went home, we were in school and we were having singing and we had bad teeth, like the water, no fluoride nothing and the teeth were shocking and you'd get toothache and I had my hand up on my jaw like that, singing and Dick Johnston came along and he just brushed my hand off like; didn't slap me, just brushed it away and back up to his place where we were singing. Joan went home and told dad that Dick Johnston punched me in the jaw. So I didn't know a thing about this. Because I used to have to do the shopping; I was always the sucker who carried the sugar bag with the bread in the afternoon from the baker. So when I got to school the next morning, Dick Johnston is sitting over under the big pepper tree

and his eye is sitting out here and he was a shocking mess and he called me over and he said, “Bob did you go home and tell your Dad that I punched you in the jaw?” I said, “No Mr Johnston, no way in the world.” He said, “I didn’t think you did.” But Joan went home and told - and got that - he nearly killed Dick Johnston, you know. Today you’d get twenty years for it (laughs) yeah.

[0:48:58] But that way he was good, but he was hard. Dad was a hard man because he’d had a hard life himself. His brother got killed, well died coming back from Gallipoli and his old man died at fifty-six, I think - old Samuel was when he died. And he went to live next door to Toynton’s there at about twelve or thirteen and had it pretty rough there for a long time. But, as I said, he was a hard man, but he, to you - but if something happened, if somebody done something to you or anything like that, ah mate.

I’ll never forget Jimmy Weston; every afternoon he wanted to fight me, so I go down the back of Laurie Ford’s taxi. I’d give him a hiding and Laurie Ford came down and broke us up. I go home and told Dad, anyway I said to Jimmy one day, at school we were good mates; just after school, you know. Anyway, I said to Jimmy, “why, what’s wrong with you mate? You get a belting every day and you keep lining up for this all the time, you know.” He said, “Oh Dad said I got to keep on fighting you until I beat you.” And I said, “What do you want me to do, lie down or something?” Anyway, I told Dad this, so of course Dad said me, “Come on,” so away we go and him and Fay, Jimmy Weston used to live with Fay Hall, Jenny’s mother, see and they had three boys, Jimmy and Arthur and Des. Anyway, we went down and the old man knocked at the door and whatsy came out, Jim come out and said, “What’s the trouble, George?” He said “I wanna give you a bit of trouble,” He said “Well, I’ve got my son here. Bring your son out here now and they can watch me give you the biggest bloody

hiding you've had in your life." And old Jim started panicking. He did, he threw him up against the wall. But, and after that we never had another fight. Every day after school it was the same thing, you know, and you'd feel sorry for him, you'd knock him down and the silly bugger would get up - but, anyway.

[0:51:05] (I): Lots of things were different back then, as we say?

(S): Oh, I remember when Tony jobbed old Tadpole Dunn, we used to call him tadpole, our headmaster, because he looked like a tadpole (laughs). Anyway, this day he went to get the cane, he brought him up to cane Tony and Tony jobbed him and took off. Well, he sent these kids after him but as the kids caught up with Tony, Tony would knock them down (laughs) and the kids wouldn't chase him anymore. He what's-a-name, you know. Yeah, old Dick Johnston, and our punishment now see - (inaudible) that used to be a punishment in the class, if they'd done it today the teacher would be sacked on the spot - (inaudible) - if you played up you'd have to sit next to Ruth at the front of the class. But those things were unreal.

[0:52:05] (I): Do you look back on your life as the good times, the good old days?

(S): Yeah, well really I do because a man's handshake that was his bond; he didn't need solicitors or nothing because you could talk to people, you know. You had your rogues. I mean I could write a history of some of the rogues some of these old timers in Baradine had got what they got today but they'd take you to court (laughs). And, but, you know, I often, when we were all sick, we had the measles there together and you had hoping cough and things like that, you know, poor old mum would be run off her feet. With nothing - imagine a

little bottle of medicine going around ten of us or something, you know. And, of course, castor oil, shudder. If you got a pain in the stomach it had to be from eating green fruit. Mum couldn't take it, it just couldn't come normal, you had to be eating the green fruit, you know, from the trees. So we copped that castor oil - yeah.

[0:53:13] (I): Any other home remedies you had or can remember?

(S): Well, no. That castor oil and paraffin oil. Oh just silly little things that if you swore or done this you'd get your mouth washed out with mustard and things like that.

[0:53:37] (I): Anything else you would like to add?

(S): You couldn't talk at the table; you daren't speak at a meal, not like today when your flat out getting a word in and if you didn't stand up when a woman walked in the room, if you didn't stand up, you wouldn't be able to sit down after Dad had finished with you.

And I'll never forget, mum used to sew for old Mrs Ellingham and she lived down there where whatsy is living now; where Judith Hadfield lives. Anyway, she is there one day talking and, as innocent as could be I was, I was about seventeen I suppose eighteen and I have always had a lot of respect for women and old Mrs Ellingham was there and she said about something, oh, she said - and I can remember this happening and I said, "And it wouldn't be yesterday either, would it Mrs Ellingham?" "Well, you will be old one [day]," and she started crying, she said, "You will be old one of these days." I was so innocent of the fact that I said, "It wouldn't be yesterday," you know, and she started crying and reckoned I was having a go at her age. She was about eighty odd then and she used to walk down for mum to do her sewing and that, you know, but that's how it went.

[0:54:48] Kids had no rights them days, none whatever. But the system is today, when I look at it today and I thank God that we grew up in those days and not today with the drugs, the ice and the rubbish that's on - then, you know - Ron and Doug and Mal, they got it fairly easy because we were working and putting all the money in, you know…. But Dad made the rule at home, at Rocky Creek especially, one had to split the morning wood, quarter the morning wood to light the fire with, one had to light the fire and put the kettle on. I reckon if Dad got up and that kettle or fire wasn't going - one had to get the night wood in, morning wood for the what's-a-name, but everyone had their job to do it; you knew to do it because you know. But as I say, mate, no.

As I said we lived in Sydney but that wasn't happy times, Sydney wasn't a happy time. You know, you had sirens going off all night and you'd be dragged out and had to go down to the air raid shelters you know, they used to have the air raid shelters. At school, they would take us down during school hours and show us what part to go into and all that and then if a siren went off at night, everyone had to meet at the park. When we were at St Peter's and Erskineville and you were sort of a nervous wreck then. Because everyone's windows had to be painted black and you could not have a light. Poor old mum would be there with a candle making those little dogs and things; dogs and little things and that, you know. She'd make them there in the dark and you had to stuff them and whatsy.

[0:56:56] (I): And did you sell those, did you?

(S): Yes. Mum used to make them for this mob, some store. She used make bloody hundreds of them. She used to get Joan there sometimes stuffing them, putting it in the little buggers that would stand that high (laughs) dogs. But Sydney wasn't great; I never liked it. Back then - when we were kids - you weren't allowed out of the

house; it was during the war days and you had all the bad ones then too. You had the underworld and that going, you know. Yeah, you couldn't go up to the shop on your own or whatever.

[0:57:44] (I): So you felt safer in the bush? Everything was much better?

(S): Much better, mate. That's why I came back when Jan died and brought the little bloke back to the bush. Much easier to rear him in the country than what was in the city.

[0:58:03] (I): Anything else you want to add, Bob?

(S): No, not that I know of, mate

This story will form part of Macquarie Regional Library's Oral history Project. The interview was conducted by Liz Cutts on the 17 December 2016.