ANNOUNCER: Welcome to Mansfield University Voices, An Oral History. The following interview is with Mr. Norman Woodhouse, a lumberman and farmer from the town of Morris. In this interview Mr. Woodhouse talks about life in the late 1800s and the early 1900s in the lumber industry at that time. The interview was conducted by former Mansfield University history professor Dr. Paul O’Rourke in late July of 1973.

DR. PAUL O’ROURKE: And what business was your father in? What did he do for a living?

NORMAN WOODHOUSE: Well, he worked in the woods mostly, peeling bark and, oh, cleaning this farm up back here. You see they brought the timber and all onto the farm and then they built a log house. Then in, oh I don’t know, five years, they sawed the lumber and built a lumber house, built out of the sawed lumber.

DR. PAUL O’ROURKE: They sawed it themselves or had it sawed down at a mill?

NORMAN WOODHOUSE: No they took it down to Morris and sawed up at the mill, a water mill, running with water.

DR. PAUL O’ROURKE: All right. So you were born, were you born in the log house?

NORMAN WOODHOUSE: Yes, I was born in the log house, yep.

DR. PAUL O’ROURKE: So your father, what did he, how many acres did your father have here?

NORMAN WOODHOUSE: Fifty acres.

DR. PAUL O’ROURKE: And what did he do with that fifty acres, what did he farm on it?

NORMAN WOODHOUSE: Oh, the first of it was oxen, then after we farmed with oxen we farmed with mules. And then after mules, why we got horses and then afterwards we used oxen.

DR. PAUL O’ROURKE: Why did you replace the oxen with mules, were mules better?

NORMAN WOODHOUSE: Well the mules and the oxen, we couldn’t handle them too good they would run away. And the mules we’d put bits in their mouths and then we could drive them. That’s the way you handled them.

DR. PAUL O’ROURKE: But the oxen were hard to control?

NORMAN WOODHOUSE: Well yes, I had been to the Christmas tree and took my mother and aunt down to the Christmas tree at [indecipherable] and the oxen ran away one night. I come home and I had to walk through the snow and it snowed like a bugger. I come up to the cabin and here they were outside again. They had been running around the cabin the oxen was trying to get in the log barn. We had a log barn and it was all snowing. If they’d seen the snow then, or see the snow now, that we’d seen then, people would think the world was coming to an end.

DR. PAUL O’ROURKE: What year was that that you had the snowstorm.

NORMAN WOODHOUSE: Huh?
DR. PAUL O'ROURKE: What year was that, do you remember the year?

NORMAN WOODHOUSE: No I couldn’t remember the year but I wasn’t too big a boy.

DR. PAUL O'ROURKE: How old were you, about seven or so?

NORMAN WOODHOUSE: Probably seven or eight years old. I had walked home and got them darned mules, or oxen, and come back down to the church and they was a waiting for me to fetch them home.

DR. PAUL O'ROURKE: Was it hard for a young boy to drive a team of oxen?

NORMAN WOODHOUSE: I got in between the two of them and road on the tongue, with a whip, with a long whip and steer them to get home. I let them run as fast as they wanted to go after they got in there. Box sleds my mother and them rode right in there. It snowed, oh my, we got about two foot of snow that night, or a littler better, something like that.

DR. PAUL O'ROURKE: I see. But oxen were hard to control when you were plowing?

NORMAN WOODHOUSE: Huh?

DR. PAUL O'ROURKE: Oxen were hard to control when you were plowing is that right?

NORMAN WOODHOUSE: The bastards would run away. That was the trouble with using the mules.

DR. PAUL O'ROURKE: What do you mean, they would run away when you left them alone?

NORMAN WOODHOUSE: Yes, well, sometimes you would be right with them, and away they'd get started a little bit you know, and by golly, they had better land than us boys and they would run away. Well, then Dad would be cleaning and putting up what we call banks to burn it. Get rid of that stuff so it might grow something. And them bastards, they would go again.

DR. PAUL O'ROURKE: But your father cleared this land then, is that right?

NORMAN WOODHOUSE: Huh?

DR. PAUL O'ROURKE: Your father cleared this land. It was forest when he bought it? Is that right?

NORMAN WOODHOUSE: Yes.

DR. PAUL O'ROURKE: And what was growing here? What kind of trees were growing on it?

NORMAN WOODHOUSE: Huh?

DR. PAUL O'ROURKE: What kind of trees were growing on this land?

NORMAN WOODHOUSE: Well, hard maple, and hemlock. Hemlock though, was thinned out a little by a fellow who was a head man by the name of Bunnell.

DR. PAUL O'ROURKE: Bunnell?

NORMAN WOODHOUSE: Bunnell. And it was all thinned out, the hemlock was. Some, not yet. We had big hemlock trees. Awful big ones.

DR. PAUL O'ROURKE: You can remember seeing some of those big hemlocks?

NORMAN WOODHOUSE: We would peel them. We used to peel them and sell the lumber, the logs down
there in Morris. To a fellow had a mill down there. A big mill down there on that ball ground. Above that.

DR. PAUL O'ROURKE: Down in Morris? The ball field?

NORMAN WOODHOUSE: Yeah, down in Morris.

DR. PAUL O'ROURKE: So, all the tanneries were interested in was the bark?

NORMAN WOODHOUSE: Huh?

DR. PAUL O'ROURKE: The tanneries wanted just the bark from the hemlock. And what would you do with the rest of the tree?

NORMAN WOODHOUSE: The rest of the stuff?

DR. PAUL O'ROURKE: Right.

NORMAN WOODHOUSE: Well, years afterwards, later hardwood was taken. And then some of these mills that were around used to get the hard maple and they would make stuff with the prints and they used them and they would take them and hauled out of this country, but not too much.

DR. PAUL O'ROURKE: What trees did they use for that?

NORMAN WOODHOUSE: Huh?

DR. PAUL O'ROURKE: What trees did they use for this making prints?

NORMAN WOODHOUSE: They used maple mostly, and beech. Beech with a red heart. Beech had two hearts, they had one white and then one red. And the red heart was what was used. I guess they use some of that here, up in the Northern states and around.

DR. PAUL O'ROURKE: Now what would they use? Would they use just the bark from the tree?

NORMAN WOODHOUSE: Yes.

DR. PAUL O'ROURKE: They used just the bark from the beech tree?

NORMAN WOODHOUSE: No, they would cut that in two. Years ago, I would help them crosscut saw and cut them in two. Different times, we didn't have power saws. We used to cut that for some time. They were made 'em different lengths. It depended on how they split them. They would split them and then they would make a compass for the [indecipherable] and claw, different figures for claw. That's where they used to get it. I don't know how they get it now, I often wondered.

DR. PAUL O'ROURKE: What part of the lumber would theses figures for the claw come?

NORMAN WOODHOUSE: Mostly beech and red beech and maple and ash, and then we used buttonwood. Buttonwood was quite the thing. That used to grow along the creeks. It didn't grow of any height. It would grow up a ways and then stop. They would cut them trees and take them to use for something. I don't know what.

DR. PAUL O'ROURKE: What did your father grow on his farm here?

NORMAN WOODHOUSE: Oh, buckwheat and potatoes and, mostly buckwheat. Now we can't grow it. I don't know what's the reason. Deer eat it up now.

DR. PAUL O'ROURKE: What would he do with the buckwheat?
ORMAN WOODHOUSE: Take it to the grist mill and make pancakes.

DR. PAUL O'ROURKE: What he grew, he kept himself? Is that right? He didn't sell much of what he grew?

NORMAN WOODHOUSE: Oh, no, no, we took about all the buckwheat we could raise, to keep us, two boys and had a mother and dad. There was only four of us.

DR. PAUL O'ROURKE: Only four?

NORMAN WOODHOUSE: Yes, four in the family.

DR. PAUL O'ROURKE: So you ate a lot of pancakes, and bread, and that kind of thing.

NORMAN WOODHOUSE: That's what we used to eat and apple butter. I went to school many a day, had dinner with apple butter and pancakes. That's all we had.

DR. PAUL O'ROURKE: Did you eat much meat?

NORMAN WOODHOUSE: Oh, we didn't have much meat that time. We raised some hogs, but not much. Hogs was a bounty to get. Couldn't get a pig. Sometimes we'd go for miles hunting pigs. Once in awhile they'd be a family that had a few pigs, but pretty scarce.

DR. PAUL O'ROURKE: How did you get money to buy--

NORMAN WOODHOUSE: Huh?

DR. PAUL O'ROURKE: How did you make money to buy clothes? Did you make a lot of your own clothes and things?

NORMAN WOODHOUSE: Well, the women used to weave some of this cotton. It was called cotton but there wasn't much cotton about it. I don't know what they called it, kind of a white stuff. And they'd wind that together, and work it together and make overalls out of it for us.

DR. PAUL O'ROURKE: Did your mother have a spinning wheel or something like that in the house?

NORMAN WOODHOUSE: Yes, yes, they had a spinning wheel, yes.

DR. PAUL O'ROURKE: So it sounds like you were pretty self-sufficient in that family.

NORMAN WOODHOUSE: Huh?

DR. PAUL O'ROURKE: It sounds like you were pretty self-sufficient.

NORMAN WOODHOUSE: Had to be. And potatoes, we used to raise these here blue ones. They weren't white, they was white after you peel them. But they was what we called, "the old blue potatoes." And then, I told some of the girls delivering feed the other day, they bring us baked potatoes and they said, "How come you like a baked potato?" I said, "Raised on them." I said, "We'd been raised on potatoes hung up on a fork or a stick over the fire," and I said that, what would they taste like to me now?

DR. PAUL O'ROURKE: Your mother cooked over a fireplace?

NORMAN WOODHOUSE: Yes. She'd cook them over the fireplace and us boys would eat two or three besides pancakes.
DR. PAUL O'ROURKE: Potatoes and pancakes is what you ate.

NORMAN WOODHOUSE: Potatoes and pancakes. That was our feed.

Dr. PAUL O'ROURKE: I see.

NORMAN WOODHOUSE: And she used to churn the butter. We used to have one or two cows and we'd churn that butter and use that butter for self-support. I tell ya, sometimes you didn't have much.

DR. PAUL O'ROURKE: Right.

NORMAN WOODHOUSE: Didn't have any.

DR. PAUL O'ROURKE: How did your father get his hands on money? How did he get his--

NORMAN WOODHOUSE: That's a good question. I've often wondered how. But we didn't get much money. Now, if we wanted to go to a little picnic, or something like that, if we got a quarter, we got a lot of money. But very seldom did you get it.

DR. PAUL O'ROURKE: How about things like shoes, how did you get shoes? Did you buy them or--

NORMAN WOODHOUSE: No, it was mostly made by hand. You know, we used to have an old fellow over here, used to make them. I can't think of his name now. He used to make them. But they were sewn on top and sewn on the soles. And they'd make them old shoes and we'd use them all day in the snow and stuff. A big night around the fireplace we'd dry them some. If these fellows over at Potter County, having these times now, knowing what or seeing what us fellows have seen.

DR. PAUL O'ROURKE: Right, right.

NORMAN WOODHOUSE: They'd appreciate something too.

DR. PAUL O'ROURKE: What did your mother and father do for good times? What did they do when they want to have some fun?

NORMAN WOODHOUSE: Nothing to. They never got away. There wasn't anything going. Never was any good times a going.

DR. PAUL O'ROURKE: Did they belong to a church?

NORMAN WOODHOUSE: Huh?

DR. PAUL O'ROURKE: Did they go to a church?

NORMAN WOODHOUSE: No. Mother was a Baptist and they used to have a week of church down along Pine Creek. I just don't know where that was. And they'd go there and stay a week to that, what we used to call--

DR. PAUL O'ROURKE: Revival?

NORMAN WOODHOUSE: Revival meeting. That's it.

DR. PAUL O'ROURKE: And they'd do that whenever it was around? Once a year?

NORMAN WOODHOUSE: Yes, they used to have a place down there towards [indecipherable], what we called Dixie Run. That's all built up now and there's a lot of houses and stuff in there. And years ago, that was a great place for her meeting. There were all kinds of churches that would go together and they would
have what they called two weeks of revival. They would bring their dinners and live out under them trees and sleep out there.

DR. PAUL O'ROURKE: Did you ever go to one yourself?

NORMAN WOODHOUSE: Huh?

DR. PAUL O'ROURKE: Did you ever go to one yourself?

NORMAN WOODHOUSE: No.

DR. PAUL O'ROURKE: But this was a little before your time?

NORMAN WOODHOUSE: That was before.

DR. PAUL O'ROURKE: But they used to talk about going there for a couple of weeks? And what would they do? What would they do there for two weeks?

NORMAN WOODHOUSE: Well, they had the nicest singing that I ever heard. The best singing I ever heard. We've got some fellows down here in Morris, I wish you could hear them sing. Maybe you have. I don't know. But, anyway, them Menonites people down here. A man and a wife, and can they sing.

DR. PAUL O'ROURKE: I see.

NORMAN WOODHOUSE: And you can hear them for, I'd say, two miles. But I guess not that--

DR. PAUL O'ROURKE: But they used to have singing at these revivals?

NORMAN WOODHOUSE: Yes.

DR. PAUL O'ROURKE: Back around Dixie Run?

NORMAN WOODHOUSE: Yes, Dixie Run.

DR. PAUL O'ROURKE: And they'd have sermons?

NORMAN WOODHOUSE: Yes, they had a couple, three preachers for a week and then the next week they would have two or three more. But every time, generally, they got a new one. But they'd be good singers among them.

DR. PAUL O'ROURKE: I see.

NORMAN WOODHOUSE: They didn't have pianos and so on to go by.

DR. PAUL O'ROURKE: Yes. Why do you think your folks went? Did they go for the entertainment?

NORMAN WOODHOUSE: Well, that was entertainment and it was a week of, they claim refreshing month.

DR. PAUL O'ROURKE: Right.

NORMAN WOODHOUSE: Refreshing of religion. I believe it was a big help. I do. But, well, we didn't have very many churches in town.

DR. PAUL O'ROURKE: Oh, sure.
NORMAN WOODHOUSE: We’d have to go for miles if we wanted to go to church. Years ago, when I was probably 10 or 12-years-old, we’d go over to Wellsboro church. And there’d be maybe one or two churches over in that whole country.

DR. PAUL O’ROURKE: How often would you go up to Wellsboro? What would you go up to Wellsboro for, besides going to church?

NORMAN WOODHOUSE: Well very seldom. If we needed anything real bad we walked, if we had to have what they had, we’d walk over. And I remember part-way back, a mule or a horse or a buggy, the old-fashioned buggy.

MALE ANNOUNCER: That concludes part one of the interview with Norman Woodhouse. To hear more, please download Norman Woodhouse part two. These interviews are not copyrighted and you are encouraged to let others know about them and to use them for your own research.