

3-19-1984

## Interview with Barnett Abbott (FA 23)

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INFORMANT/FIELDWORKER DATA FORMI. INFORMANT.

Barnett Abbott

NAME [Include fullest possible name - first, middle and/or maiden, last.  
For example: John James Smith; Mary Franklin Smith (Mrs. John Smith)

Highway 92N, Monticello KY.,

ADDRESS

Owner of Boat Shop - 2nd generation oil driller - son of oil driller

PERSONAL DATA:Age: mid-60 Date of Birth: \_\_\_\_\_ Place of Birth: \_\_\_\_\_ Sex: MWhite/United StatesRACE/NATIONALITY/ETHNIC BACKGROUNDADDITIONAL INFORMATION: [Include education, occupation, places of residence, religion, etc.]Retired oil driller -Presently owns marine repair shopII. COLLECTOR.

Thomas Cleveland Arnold, Jr.

NAME (Include fullest possible name as described above)

1123 State St., Bowling Green KY., 42101

ADDRESS, LOCAL

Same as above

ADDRESS, PERMANENTPLEASE DESCRIBE YOUR RELATIONSHIP TO THE INFORMANT, SUCH AS COUSIN, FRIEND, BOSS, ACQUAINTANCE, ETC.No relationship beyond Collector/InformantADDITIONAL COMMENTS:Extremely knowledgeable on the technical aspects of oil industry

Interviewer's tape no.: WKU FL, FL & OHA Accession no.:

Interviewer: Tom Arnold Address: 1123 State Street,  
Dave Heighway Bowling Green, KY  
Tracey Brittain 42101

Interviewee: Barnett Abbott Address: Highway 92,  
Monticello, KY

Place of interview: Abbott Residence, Monticello, KY Date: 3/19/84

Other people present: Mrs. Barnett Abbott

Equipment used: SR Cassette Recorder, Series 564

Reel-to-reel tape: Brand: Size reel: Tape Mil: Speed:

Cassette: Brand: Scotch AVX 60 C-30/C-60/C-120 (circle)

Amount of tape used: (Side 1) all (Side 2):

Brief description of interview context and tape contents:  
This is an oral history interview concerning the oil industry in Wayne County, Kentucky, for Fieldwork class fieldtrip. This interview began at Abbott's place of business, but due to interruptions was later continued at his home.

ARNOLD: Well, can you tell us about - - I know that your dad and you were both involved in the oil fields. Can you tell us about, I guess, first, about your dad and when he got involved and some of the types of things they used to do in the oil fields?

ABBOTT: Well, he was one of the old drillers here. Back in, somewhere in the neighborhood of [Pause] of 19 and [Pause] I don't know, I guess he started working 1912, maybe 1914. I'm not sure about that. I know that he <sup>worked</sup> in eastern Kentucky, in Estill County, through World War I. And he worked there and then, course He worked here a lot and then worked in [Pause] Warren County. And I believe he worked some in Barren County and also over there at, I can't think of the other county. Over in beyond Warren, I can't, I can't think of the name of that county right now. But there was oil excitement there. And . . .

ARNOLD: Go ahead . . . . [Interruption here by customer, recorder was stopped.] So then you started working with your dad?

ABBOTT: Well, I was probably about 16, I guess. And we done just about anything there was to do in that day.

ARNOLD: About what year was that?

ABBOTT: Well [Pause] I judge it was in somewhere around [19]30, '30 or maybe late 20's. And course, right about that time there wasn't, wasn't much going on. There would be a well drilled occasionally. And there was other repair to be done, wells to be pulled, service to new pumps, that type of thing.

And then course, we used pole derricks to pull them with, three-pole derricks, I don't know if, maybe you've never seen them. I don't know. But we used three-pole derricks. They was about 35 feet tall and maybe 37 or 38. And they [garbled], they used mules, and two or three blocks if you had them, a heavy string of pipe or sometimes if you had to, had to unseat the [Pause] the [Pause] standing valve in the bottom [garbled] sometimes they was hard to pull loose. Also, sometimes you couldn't pull them, and you'd have to pull them wet, what we called wet was the tubing full of ~~for the~~ oil; oil, water or whatever was in it, and a pretty messy job. And . . . .

ARNOLD: Who owned the wells around here?

ABBOTT: Well, different people. We, we had people that ~~the~~ You see the people ~~the~~ the people, the people that done most of this around here was out of Pennsylvania, right around Bradford. This thing started about 19 - - early 1900 is when they got this oil here ~~the~~ was in early 1900. And course, it kind played out, up in the twenties, just a little bit.

ARNOLD: Can you tell us about - - You know you were talking about your dad was a tinkerer, and he was building something all the time, Can you tell us about that?

ABBOTT: Well, he, course now the first drilling machines that I ever saw that he had was a - - what they called a half-standard. It was, everything was exactly like a Standard rig with the exception of the derrick. You used a mast-pole instead of a derrick with four legs on it. A derrick has ~~four~~ four legs on it and a mast-pole is just a single pole with guy wires on it. Now that's what he had. And he, I don't know if he had more than one of them. And most of them was made out of wood, them old ones was. And then when they had to move for a long distance they had a few squared timbers in them that was squared. Course, that was done with a broad axe. And they was some fellows here could really use them things. They'd stretch a line and, and, and I don't know if you ever saw a broad axe or not, but now they're great wide thing and you could hear them things ring all over the country, they'd hit that wood so hard with them. And you could see the string move with them, when they'd hit that log [makes chopping motion and sound

with hands] with that. They, they, they could hit it exactly where they looked. Hello, brother [garbled].

ARNOLD: Go ahead. [Another customer walked into the office.]

[Later at 6 p. m., the interview continued at Abbott's home.]

You were talking about your dad when we quit, and how, how much you admired him and all the work that he did. I'd like you to tell, tell me his name and just some things about your dad?

ABBOTT: Well, he was Alfred Abbott. And course, he . . .

MRS. ABBOTT: Well, y'all must be students.

ARNOLD: Yes, ma'am.

BRITTIAN: We sure are.

[At this point, Mr. Abbott is pointing at the tape recorder and waving at his wife to be quiet.]

[Laughter.]

ARNOLD: That's okay. [Garbled.]

ABBOTT: And . . .

MRS. ABBOTT: Would you like to sit over here?

ABBOTT: He grew up in this oil boom, when it was going strong, which was in the early 1900's, of course. And I don't know just exactly how soon that he started, but he spent his whole life looking for oil, which he never did find much of. He drilled some for other people that got big wells, But for hisself he never - - he always was looking just over the hill, you know. [Garbled.] "There's a good place, you know, there might be oil there."

Oh, but he was really good at what he did. He could just about do anything with his hands, that he wanted to do, and without much to do with. And, of course, it was for years that a acetylene torch or an electric welder wasn't known, or an electric drill wasn't known. And nobody had one, or he didn't have one. And the holes that he would drill he'd do it with what they used to call a ratchet. Had square tapered bits went into this thing and then had a sleeve on there with threads that you could put pressure on the bit to make it cut, and ratchet it by hand just like a ratchet you might use with, with a socket set.

And he would go back here in the hills. And course, all these old wells were drilled with steam. And they used cord wood. They'd cut the wood there on the spot or close to it. And it's  $3\frac{1}{2}$ , 4 feet long, I don't remember exactly which. But I've seen him go back, back there in these places. And finally, he got a hold of acetylene torch. And the [garbled] flue end of the boiler where the smokestack, it was a firebox-type boiler they used. And ashes would collect in, in this smokestack end of the, where the flues are. And that would rust out over a period of time. And I've seen him cut the riveting. It was riveted in there. The fluesheet was with  $5/8$ 's rivets. And then had three-inch flues. The flues are OD, [outside diameter] measurement, Pipe, of course, is ID [inside diameter] inside. And he would cut - - cut this section out with an acetylene torch.

And then shape a piece of metal in the forge, like a blacksmith's forge. And he'd shape that metal, and turn a flange on there, just like it was with the old fluesheet, out of  $5/8$  [inch thick] steel plate. And then he would, he would cut these flue holes with a torch to - - for the flues to go in. The tubes, they called them tubes. And then, he would weld these sec - - where that he cut through the middle of where the tubes goes. He welded that back with an acetylene torch, between, you know, the sections between each boiler tube. And then he would drill holes by hand,  $5/8$ 's holes around the bottom. And then heat them rivets in the forge with - - with, Pittsburgh slack is what they used. It didn't have no sulfur content in it, and not much smoke. And they'd heat them up just white hot, just ready to burn, and then stick them through them holes and drive them while they was hot. When they cooled off, they'd contract and draw this section of metal up tight.

But, and then - - course these boiler tubes the way they're put in there - - They're just a little bit - - the hole opening where they go through is just a good fit. And then you got what's call an expander, a roller on a tapered mandral, that you stick in them boiler tubes and you roll that. And then that expands that tube out to where you get a water-tight fit. But I, I seen him do two of three of them things that way. Great big job, take a week to do it, and go back here where there's no electricity, back in the mountains and [Pause]--But when, when you'd first fire up, they'd leak just a little bit, carried 100 pounds of steam. They'd leak just a little bit on the first, but then slime and corrosion would get in there. And they'd seal up and be water tight. I don't know, I've seen him do so many things with nothing to do with. Use what you had.

ARNOLD: Yeah. But one of the things I want to ask you

about is that what kind of wages was he making? Do you remember?

ABBOTT: Well, very little, wasn't much. What I mean now, I don't remember what he got per job like that. But I'd say, I bet he didn't get over \$50.00 for it. I doubt if he got over \$50.00 for it.

ARNOLD: And he worked - - Course, you already said he worked all over this area and county.

ABBOTT: Yeah, he's worked all over this county and several other counties. Clinton County. He worked some in Clinton. And, but, but now he would [Pause] If you was way back here in the hills somewhere, which that's where all - - where you found - - if there was any oil, that's where you found it, the roughest of places. Well, something would tear up and he'd plan - - He'd figure someway to fix it so you could work all week and didn't have to come back in. He'd figure out some way, if it was at all possible, to use whatever he had to fix it with. I know one time he was working. I think this was in Estill County, and the gasline broke and he went down in a cane break and cut a piece of cane a tied it in to the line. The line [laughter] Now but he was always doing things like that.

END FIRST 15 MIN. SIDE I

REMAINING PORTION NOT TRANS.