

Riding the Last Tie Raft

Between November of 1997 and May of 1998, Oral Historian Alex Primm conducted interviews with 17 persons who lived in or near farms and towns that became Fort Leonard Wood. The taped interviews and subsequent summary report, titled "Oral History of Historic Settler Communities of Fort Leonard Wood and Surrounding Areas" was under the direction of Dr. Richard Edging, Fort Leonard Wood Cultural Resource Manager and was conducted for the U. S. Army Fort Leonard Wood Cultural Resources Inventory.

On October 18, 1997, Mr. Primm interviewed Napoleon Bonaparte "Bony" Ramsey during the third reunion at Rolling Heath, the restored school near Ramsey's home place on the Big Piney. The relatively short interview covered a variety of subjects, e.g. family, farming, and guiding fishermen on the Big Piney River. The following excerpt, transcribed by Terry Primas, concerns those hillfolk working in the timber and Bony's ride on the last tie raft on the Big Piney River.

Ramsey: To me, as I grew up the people on the uplands who were trying to farm did not do nearly as well. They usually had to have some other way to live. Of course, there

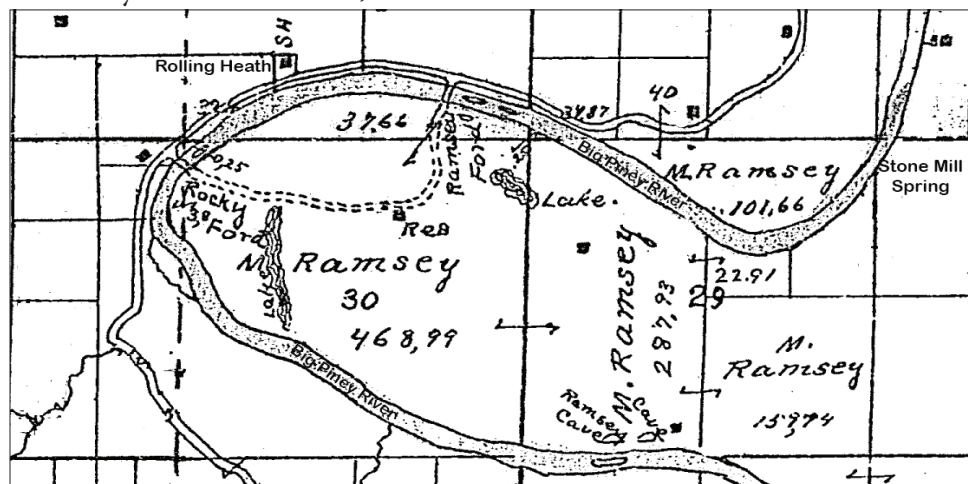
was a lot of timber here and a lot of ties made for the railroad so they were rafted down this river, down to Jerome where the nearest railroad was.

Primm: Did you ever see any tie rafts coming down the river?

Ramsey: One—the last one.

Primm: When was that?

Ramsey: That was in 1926, could have been as late as 1927 but not later than that. I think we came back from St. Louis in '25 and I think it was the next summer in '26. I was with my dad. I was about five years old. We had just walked down to the river from this little farm we lived on and there was a raft tied up. My dad knew the fellas, most of them, there were five or six as we approached that he said to me Now if they offer you some food don't you take it because they don't have very much. And when we got down there I was glad he warned me cause they offered me some things but the thing that smelled the best was corn bread that they made and they put it on a board and spread it out until it was about a half and inch thick and they put a rock under it and let the radiant heat from that fire cook that corn bread. Boy, did that smell good, that brown corn bread.



The Ramsey land was located on what is now Fort Leonard Wood, mostly inside of a sweeping curve of the river known locally as Horseshoe Bend. Bony Ramsey's grandfather, Monroe, parceled out parts of his 1,110+-acre farm to his sons Frank, Woodrow, and Charles to farm. Charles Ramsey's farm (Bony's father) was north of the Big Piney River, composed of a 101.66-acre and a 40-acre tract.

Primm: And they were on the last raft?

Ramsey: Yes, they told my dad that this is the last one. Dad said I would like for my son to ride on this raft. They said be down here by 7:30 in the morning and you can ride it as far as you want to.

Primm: And did you?

Ramsey: Yes we did. We got on there and we rode that raft down past Stone Mill Spring which in distance is about four miles from here.

Primm: Where did you get on the raft?

Ramsey: We got on the raft about a mile from here downriver and I rode it about four miles.

Primm: How long was the raft approximately?

Ramsey: I know I could hear them signaling. They had a signal, the man in the front of the raft, to a couple in the middle area, a man in the back of the raft with the brake pole which was stuck down between a couple of ties and this dug in the bottom of the river. At certain yells they would make, they would know whether to let up on the brake or ap-

ply the brake because if the back end of the raft tried to overtake the front end it would push it over to the bank. They wanted to keep that raft in the middle of the stream. I know it was a beautiful day and I think it was in June. As we rode along on the raft it would sink down almost and the water would come up to the top of the tie. My dad said when he was young he used to have a fly rod and he would get on one of those rafts and he would fly cast for fish and if he found a good hole he could just walk back on the raft. He could keep casting in the same place. As they said, this was the last raft. There won't be any more. This was hewed by men with just axes to make a tie.

Primm: How many ties do you think were in a raft roughly? A thousand?

Ramsey: Oh, I'd have to do some calculations on that. Those ties were about eight inches by eight inches by eight feet or nine feet. They had different length of ties. I would say that the raft was about, oh golly, it was less than a quarter of a mile but I'd say maybe three or four hundred



Alex Primm interviewed Napoleon Bonaparte (Bony) Ramsey at the third reunion of the Rolling Heath School. The school was built by Waynesville's Wyrick brothers in 1912 using their concrete block machine and local sand and gravel. Monroe Ramsey donated the land for the school and served on the school board during its entire existence. Bony went to the school for seven years.

yards, five hundred yards because going around the bends of the river, the lead rafter at the front of the raft who was sort of guiding it with poles in the water, he couldn't see the fella, this was before two-way radios, his yell would tell the fella in the back and also the men in the center area of the raft whether to brake or not to brake and they knew what was happening and they wanted to keep it away from the shore also. Like if a raft is going around a bend that goes to the left.

Primm: What was your father's name again?

Ramsey: Charles.

Primm: And he was a rafter?

Ramsey: No, he never rafted but he'd seen it as a kid growing up and they liked to raft when the water is up maybe a foot and a half. Sometimes the water would get up more than that when they were going down to Jerome and my grandpa had two big

barns and sometimes they would come up and ask if they could sleep in the barn tonight because everything they had was wet and if my grandpa had room for them to come in the house they would stay in the house where it was warm but this would be in the fall of the year or the early spring.

Primm: Can you remember the names of the men who were on that last raft?

Ramsey: No, I can't, I do not know but I do know my father knew them because he probably fly fished off their rafts.

Primm: Were there any guys or families known as tie rafters?

Ramsey: Well, oh yes. They were more or less professionals. They would take a raft from this area. You see, there is a tie slide not far from here, less than half a mile.

Primm: Does that tie slide have a name?



Albert Emily hacking a tie with a broadaxe. U. S. Forest Service photograph courtesy of The State Historical Society of Missouri..



Director of Finance & Administration
Nola Estrella

531 Old Route 66 Suite A St. Robert, Missouri 65584
573-336-5880
www.pcsd1.com



Operations Manager
Zach Shepherd

Ramsey: I think it's called the Ramsey tie slide. What they did there, they made ties up on the flat level and with horses they would take them over to the top of the hill where that tie slide was. The tie slide was made of wood and it was all kinda greased with hog lard. They would put those ties up on that slide and as I remember it was about two feet wide and had a high board on each side maybe about eight or ten inches because only one tie went down because they didn't want any lock ups on that and it had about a sixty degrees off the bluff, not quite straight down. There was a road down there. I never really saw it but my dad said they would dig down and if anyone came along in a wagon those horse knew how to step across those things and that tie might be going 30 miles an hour when it hit the water.

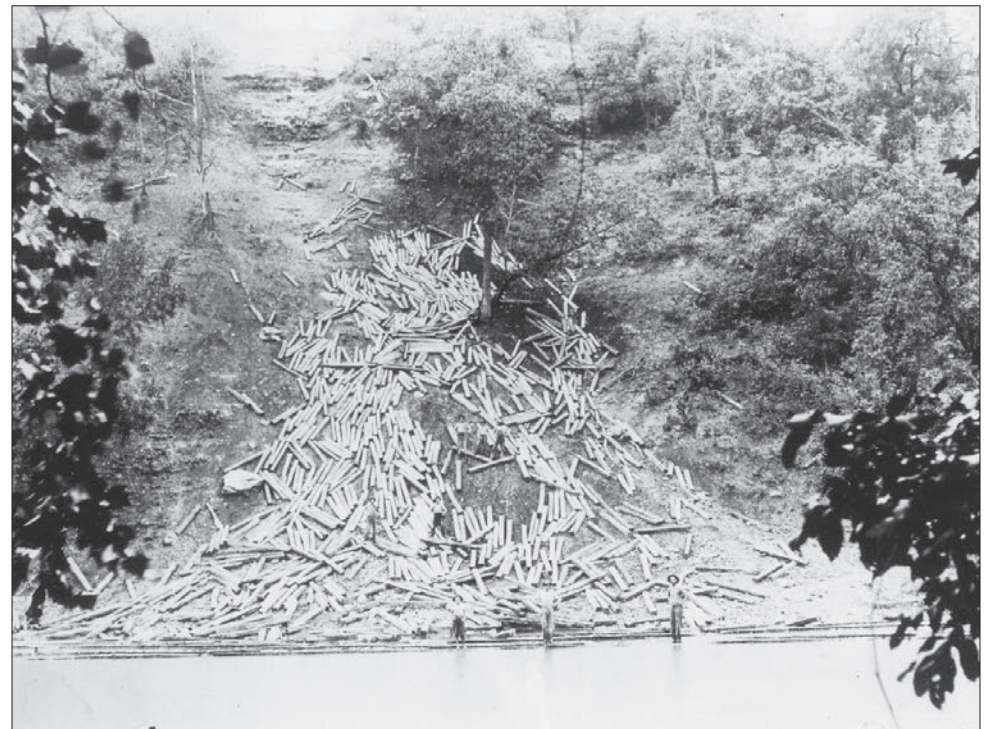
Primm: That would make quite a

splash.

Ramsey: Well, and of course there were guys out there swimming around to get them and nail them into a raft. They would use three saplings about an inch or two in diameter and the bigger saplings were right in the middle. They would have a space between 10 or twelve feet of ties. Now those ties weren't right together. They were about three or four inches apart. Then they would have a space between and tied together with the center sapling so it could bend or curve. There would be three saplings, one on each side and one in the middle. That was for the guiding of it, the turning for the bends in the river.

Primm: How did you feel riding that raft?

Ramsey: Oh, I thought it was fun. I was sorry that it was the first one and the last one I would ever ride on because they said after that the



This was a typical tie slide, located on the Big Piney River near Edanville. Trees would be clear cut from a ridge to the river. Ties, hewn in the timber, would be hauled by horse or mule to the top of the slide and pushed down. Ramsey's tie slide was a bit more sophisticated using a flume-like slide that required less hillside and was less destructive. The State Historical Society of Missouri, John F. Bradbury, Jr. Postcard Collection.

KASASA CASH BACK®

4.00%
CASH BACK
ON EVERYDAY/DEBIT
CARD PURCHASES

EARN UP TO
\$96
CASH BACK
PER YEAR.
\$8.00 PER MONTH

**A checking account that
WORKS FOR YOU:
Kasasa Cash Back®**

Earning rewards is really easy.
Enrollments must be in place and all of the following transactions and activities must post and settle to your KASASA CASH BACK account during each Monthly Qualification Cycle:

- At least 12 debit card purchases
- Be enrolled in and agree to receive e-statements
- Be enrolled in and log into online banking

The Maries County Bank
Pride in our past... Investing in your future.

www.mariescountybank.com | PH# 844.836.9401

*4.000% cash back on up to a total of \$200.00 debit card purchases that post and settle to the account during that cycle period. Account transactions and activities may take one or more days to post and settle to the account and all must do so during the Monthly Qualification Cycle in order to qualify for the account's rewards. The following activities do not count toward earning account rewards: ATM-processed transactions, transfers between accounts, debit card purchases processed by merchants and received by our bank as ATM transactions, non-retail payment transactions and purchases made with debit cards not issued by our bank. Transactions bundled together by merchants and received by our institution as a single transaction count as a single transaction for the purpose of earning account rewards. "Monthly Qualification Cycle" means a period beginning one (1) banking day prior to the first day of the current statement cycle through one (1) banking day prior to the last business day of the current statement cycle. When Kasasa Cash Back qualifications are met during a Monthly Qualification Cycle, you will receive 4.000% cash back on up to a total of \$200.00 debit card purchases that post and settle to the account during that cycle period. A maximum of \$8.00 cash back payments may be earned per Monthly Qualification Cycle. You will receive reimbursements up to \$25.00 for nationwide ATM withdrawal fees incurred within your Kasasa Cash Back account during the Monthly Qualification Cycle in which you qualified. (Maximum of \$4.99 per transaction) When your Kasasa Cash Back account qualifications are not met, no cash back payments are made and ATM withdrawal fees are not refunded. Cash back payments and nationwide ATM withdrawal fee reimbursements will be credited to your Kasasa Cash Back account on the last day of the current statement cycle. Rates, rewards, and bonuses, if any, are variable and may change after account is opened without notice to you. No minimum balance is required to earn or receive the account's rewards. Rewards less than a penny cannot be distributed. Account approval, conditions, qualifications, limits, timeframes, enrollments, log-ons and other requirements apply. \$100.00 minimum deposit is required to open the account. Limit of 1 account product type per social security number. There are no recurring monthly maintenance charges or fees to open or close this account. If the account is closed, you will forfeit any rewards that have not been credited to your account. Advertised information and rewards are based on all account qualifications being met during each cycle period. Contact one of our bank service representatives (or see our website) for additional information, account details, restrictions, reward calculations, processing limitations, specific Monthly Qualification Cycle dates and enrollment instructions.

Kasasa and Kasasa Cash Back are trademarks of Kasasa, Ltd., registered in the U.S.A. | "Take back banking" is a trademark of Kasasa Ltd., registered in the USA

Flo's DINER

Daily Specials Every Day

**Breakfast served until 11am Monday to Friday
Saturday & Sunday 'til Noon**

Open: Monday—Friday 6:00 am to 2:30 pm; Sunday 7:00 am to 2:30 pm

Local Favorites Famous Scuttlebutt 12.49
Three eggs, bacon, ham, sausage, peppers, onions, tomatoes, hash browns and cheese

1019 Old Route 66
St. Robert, Missouri
573-451-2066

Classic Food on a Classic Road

sawmills would be doing it and by that time they were getting trucks that could haul them to the railroad and there might be places on the railroad closer than Jerome. Of course, that was the only railroad that went through here was the St. Louis and San Francisco, called the Frisco Line.

Primm: How many men were on that raft?

Ramsey: I believe there were five. One in the front, one in the back, and two in the center. I believe there was a total of five men. The other,

I don't know what he does, He was probably the cook or something. They usually always had some sort of a boat on the raft that they kept their food supplies, bedding, and things like that.

Primm: Did you ever want to take a longer ride:

Ramsey: Oh, yes, I would have liked to stay on it all day. Of course, I was only five or six years old but to me it was great fun.

Primm: Did your father ride with you?

Ramsey: Oh, yes, he rode with me

and we got out where the water is shallow, kind of a rapid down past Stone Mill and we walked back home. It was quite an experience and the only time. All the old rafters are dead now.

With the forced selling of their land for the construction of Fort Leonard Wood in 1941, most of the Ramsey family moved southeast. Patriarch Monroe and sons Frank and Woodrow bought farms between Naylor and Neelyville in Butler County.

The Pulaski County Democrat reported in the June 26, 1941, issue

that "Bonaparte (Bony) Ramsey is hunting seals for the government in Alaska." Bony was born June 15, 1921, and was 76 years old when he attended the Rolling Heath reunion. He was residing in Suffolk, Virginia.

For much more detail about tie-hacking and rafting, see "Tie-hacker, Tie-rafting, and the Railroad Crosstie Industry at Arlington and Jerome" by John Bradbury, Jr. in the 2005 Old Settlers Gazette or online at <https://www.oldstagecoachstop.org/webgeezzer/Gazette05/tiehacking.pdf>



The front end of a raft floating down the Big Piney on the upper end of the Devils Elbow bend. The rear end of the raft is not yet visible. The State Historical Society of Missouri, John F. Bradbury, Jr. Postcard Collection.

Sho-Me Pest, LLC
Pests & Termites
866-628-PEST
 Commercial Applicators

Toll Free: 866-628-PEST
 Phone: 573-336-7378
www.shomepest.com
 Email: customerservice@shomepest.com

★ COLTON'S
Steak House & Grill

- Choice Hand-cut Steaks
- Ribs, Chicken, Seafood & More
- Homemade Yeast Rolls

CATERING
CURBSIDE TAKE-OUT

ColtonsSteakHouse.com
 318 Marshall Drive • St. Robert
 (573) 451-2686

WELCOME
Judy's Place

Your Neighborhood Beer Garden
Judy's Place
 21754 Teardrop Road
 Devils Elbow

May all who come as guests leave as friends!
 Smokers welcome—Tourists too!