

## SPLITTING POSTS IN THE FREEZING COLD

*J. W. "Bill" Firey, Jr.  
Written in 1991*

One cold winter many years ago, my brother Kenneth and I heard of a fellow who wanted to buy some split fence posts. We were both flat broke and needed the money. I don't remember the man's name but he worked at the post office in Sapulpa, Oklahoma. We went to the post office and talked with him. He said he needed 1600 split posts. The man said, "I will pay \$15 per one-hundred and I want them delivered to my farm." We told him we would take the job and would have the 1600 posts delivered within two weeks' time. We also told him that when the last post was delivered, we wanted the money in full. He said, "That's just fine as I do have the money."

We had around 800 acres of grazing land leased which had a lot of good post oak timber on it. Early the next morning, we saddled up two horses, took what tools we needed and headed out. It was a very cold and cloudy day. The temperature was well below freezing and it stayed that way all day. Up on the ridges were where the good post oak trees were at. We started dropping trees one after another. That old crosscut saw would really sing as we pulled it through those frozen trees. We had to keep working at it to keep warm. When we cut a tree down, we would cut it to post length which was six feet. We were getting two post cuts out of each tree. We worked right up until dark. We must have cut down sixty trees or more that day. It was a cold, hard day for us but we knew all about hard work back then in those years.

Kenneth had a little tractor thing made out of old truck parts. It was a short coupled rig and very powerful. It was bitter cold the next morning, right around zero. We filled the tractor radiator

up with kerosene because we didn't have any antifreeze. We took our tools and headed to our destination, which was about three miles away. With the tractor, we started dragging the logs down close to the road. We stayed right with it until we had all the logs in one big pile. Man, what a pile of logs we had! We either had to build a fire, or start splitting fence posts to keep warm because it was so cold. We decided to split fence posts. We stayed with it until dark. We never had to build a fire all day. We finally called it a day and headed home. At daylight the next morning, we headed out to split more posts.

It was another cold, dark and cloudy day. We drove a car that morning, which was much better. We split posts all day. The logs, being frozen, made for easier splitting. We would start the steel wedge in the frozen log, hit it two or three licks and the log would pop right open. About an hour before dark, we started stacking up the split posts in stacks of one-hundred each. We had a little over 1200 posts. We were really making good time. We again had to work fast to keep warm. By this time it was dark, so we went home. We returned again the next morning. It was colder then blue blazes, somewhere around zero I'm sure. We started splitting our fence posts. Around noon, we began stacking the posts we had split that morning. We had split out 420 posts, twenty more than needed. We just threw them in for good measure. Splitting posts wasn't anything short of hard work. But we had to work like crazy just to keep from freezing in the bitter cold. We went home and got our cars and little two-wheeled trailers. I had an old 1935 model Chevrolet coupe, brother Kenneth had a 1936 Chevrolet coupe. We put fifteen posts in the trunk of each car and fifty post on each two

wheeled trailers, then chained them down good. We made four trips each that afternoon. The next morning at daylight, we started hauling posts. By late afternoon, we had made our last trip. We had sixteen-hundred split posts delivered. The man was well pleased with the posts and paid us \$240 in cash money. That seemed like big bucks to us because we were flat busted. We split the money in half, then headed for home. There are much better ways to make money other than splitting fence posts; that is plain hard work. But we didn't seem to mind it that much. We were pretty rugged guys back then in those days.

Now the years have passed and this was just one of the many things we did in our lifetime together. Brother Kenneth was four years older than me. We worked side by side in the summer's blistering heat and winter's bitter cold. Together, we shared our good and bad times. I sometimes think how nice it would be if we could only go back in life and do some of the things all over once again, but we know this can never be. We cannot turn back the pages of time. Now I don't have my brother, Kenneth, anymore. The angels came for him just a little over three years ago. I miss Kenneth a lot in life. He was a good brother to me, the only one I ever had. Someday in that far away place called heaven, I will meet my brother once again. We won't be walking over the rugged hills of Oklahoma anymore. We will be walking along together on those streets of gold, nevermore to be in the cold, splitting posts.

Now this is how it happened in these hills of Oklahoma long ago when a dollar was hard to come by.