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SUBJECT: Trapping

SOURCE: Leonard Lahti is a native of Herman, Michigan. His grandfather, and father were trappers, and trapping is now "in his blood". Leonard has suffered seven heart attacks and COMMENTS: the doctor has given him strict order not to exert himself. But Leonard straps on his handmade snowshoes, traps slung over his shoulder and "runs" his trapline. He told the doctor that he simply cannot help it. Trapping is a stronger disease than heart disease, he cannot quit now.

I: Last fall?

R: Last fall during the fall season. They had this fur sale last fall in Amasa also.

I: Well, are there two seasons? Two trapping seasons?

R: Oh sure, spring and fall.

I: Oh, when does the fall one start...about?

R: The fall season starts...I think it was September 25th and goes all through October and that's it. That's for mink and muskrat and raccoon and...well then you have your fox and weasel and skunk and what have you...they're all through the year. There's no closed season...and your coyote. But all these others, they're seasonal. Mink and muskrat they got a fall season and then your beaver and otter have a spring season. And now this beaver and otter season that started on the third of March and it's going to extend through the twenty-third of April in most areas. But in Arvon and Keweenaw, well it's...I think it's north of Keweenaw...isn't that toward the lake?

I: Un huh

R: Well, that area will be open until the thirtieth or through the thirtieth.

I: When does a guy usually sell his fall skins then? At the end of the season...right at the end?

R: Yeah, they have a sale December 3rd in Amasa...well actually your season ended on the thirtieth, I think it is, of November. Well, some said right away that well they had to sell because they had taken their vacation and they were broke and it was just like these lumberjacks...exactly the same thing...well we couldn't hold out no longer, we had to go to work. When the lumberjack tried to be organized well they just couldn't stick out that long. So that's why they never were organized.

I: Takes a little money to be organized even...so that people can survive while they're striking.

R: Sure...while they're fighting for their rights.
I: Now, can you describe again what happens during one of these sales? Are the spring sale and the fall sale the same kind of setup?

R: Well, in the spring they have a big activity going. They have all these display booths of different companies.

I: They have had this for a couple years now, right?

R: Well, they had it only the one year now. Last spring they had it for the first time.

I: How did it go before then? What was the spring sale like?

R: Well, we never had these sales before...last spring was the first sale...fur sale in the Upper Peninsula. They had tried it down state...oh and they did try it in Escanaba, the Michigan Trapper's Association, but they couldn't get the...to the first base with it, I guess. There wasn't enough trappers showing interest at the time.

I: So, now you have one sale for the entire Upper Peninsula in the spring and in the fall.

R: Yes and there's some dealers there that deal in hardware, they put up displays...canoes and such, sporting equipment and there's taxidermy displays, there's all kinds of animals, stuffed animals, and basket weaving...they had it last spring...and that's to start a basket from scratch...you take a block of wood and you pound that until it separates those growth rings and you take those strips off and then you make the basket out of that. That's real interesting. Did you ever know how to do that?

...no

R: And there was shotgun reloading demonstrations and they had dog sled rides for children. They had beaver skinning contests.

I: Oh, races to skin beaver?

R: mean

I: I bet some of those guys can do that pretty quick too, hey?

R: Or was it muskrat...I'm not sure which. I didn't go there at all, I was too engrossed with the sale that was going on. Well, there was just all kinds of various displays.

I: Well, years ago how did it go?

R: The selling of the hides?
R: Well, years ago there was some buyers they came right up to the house...
T: To your house?
R: Yeah...to see if you had something to sell.
T: Twice a year they'd come?
R: Yeah
I: Who would usually come from around here?
R: Well, the Perry brothers, they used to come and there was.
I: Where were they from?
R: They were from Autrain.
I: That's quite a ways away.
R: And then there was a down state buyer, he used to come... Rueben Silver was his name, he was from Saginaw. And then there was Nick Josephs and Phil Josephs, they were both from Ishpeming; and there was Marcus from the Copper Country, but I forget his name and really where abouts he was located in the Copper Country.
I: But, they'd come around and they'd find out who had hides.
R: Yeah
I: How did they find out who had hides?
R: Well, the trapper usually knows.
I: Who else is trapping...
R: Yeah, who else is trapping and well sometimes they would work on a commission basis with the trapper...some trapper that knew a lot of trappers, they'd pay him a dime a hide or something just to go along to show him the trappers, see; and even fifty cents a hide...that was mostly for illegal stuff though.
I: Was there a lot of illegal stuff sold?
R: During the depression, yes there was; and the laws were a lot stricter really on the game, you know, that it wasn't...I don't know if we had a beaver season for many many years then. The depression took the beaver population way down, see.
I: Because so many people were trapping to try to get a living, hey?
R: Yeah, that's right. And then regardless, people just have to still survive and when there's no income, that leads into means that aren't always right, you know, you start to violate to try to get a living somehow. So, they trapped the beaver close to extinction in the depression years; but there was an outlet. The Jews they usually have an outlet for everything.

I: Is that who was buying it too?

R: They were Jews, like the Josephs and that Marcus, he was a Jew and Rueben Silver, that was a Jew and then there was Lavelle, he was a Jew...let me think, I'm quite sure.

I: The Jews bought the furs. Have the Jews always bought the furs?

R: The Jews are the main source for that industry, I guess.

I: But they have been...even recently they're involved in buying them from the trappers?

R: Oh yes, always. They're the main source yet even. I don't know if you should quote this.

I: That's okay.

R: I'm just talking...but, now am I getting off the track with you?

I: Okay, well when they...

R: Oh...well how the fur sales used to go? Well, then the spring sale of furs used to be the biggest right at the Department of Conservation. The buyers would come there.

I: Where is that here?

R: In Baraga

I: Right by the Pines there, hey?

R: Well, the sale didn't take place there, it's at the old head-quarters. And the buyers would be there as soon as you sealed your hides, well they had tables there where you could plunk your hides and and they'd quote you a price and there'd be another table if you weren't satisfied and well most of the trappers they would take them right through and then see who gave the most.

I: Where were these buyers usually from? Were they the same buyers?

R: The same buyers...quite a bit so.

I: But you think they had this deal organized where...
R: I think it was all organized

I: Did they talk to each other and know each other...act like they knew each other?

R: They didn't try to act during the sale, but you'd catch 'em talking together and oh there was this Nevala...he's dead now... and there was a Corey...I don't know whether he's dead...he was a buyer, well he was a Finnish guy, this Corey; but usually they are buying for a big outfit, you know. That they just get probably a percent for themselves, but there's the Jew behind it...the money. And then there was...from Duluth there was The Duluth Furs & Hides, that was a Jewish organization, and oh there's a whole list of those that used to come from Duluth or you could ship there.

I: But these buyers were from big companies, eh?

R: Yeah

I: Not for themselves.

R: Then there was companies...years ago it used to be real good when there was really a lot of fur companies. You could ship your furs and you could have them withheld if you weren't satisfied on the price. Well, you could call your furs back and you could quote your price what you wanted for your hides if you had any idea about grading your hides, well usually you came out pretty good, you know. You'd send your hides and you'd put down what you expected...

I: You'd usually send them to Duluth?

R: I used to send to Mass and Stephen. That was in St. Louis, Missouri, and that used to be a very reliable company. And then there was a Shubert Fur Company that was very good, but I forget where it had its headquarters. I think it was in Missouri also. Missouri used to be one of the biggest...

I: Fur centers

R: Fur centers, yeah

I: When this guy...where this guy would come around and buy, how would he try to get the best price from you?

R: Well, first of all when he'd come and he would see your furs, well especially if the buyer was from down state and providing you were selling rats from up here, well he would comment on the small size of rats.

I: Are they smaller up here?

R: Yeah they are smaller rats here. And he'd say that they're
sure not much, you know. Well then he would quote you a price. Well, naturally, you would say that, "all in all that that's way too low", and you wouldn't let 'em go for that price what was quoted. So then he would probably say, "I don't know...how can you get that much"...if you quoted a price that you were aiming for. "Maybe I made a mistake somewhere along the line and we'll go through them and see if I can't find a little more." And then he'd come up a little bit more but he wouldn't come up to what you had asked for...not yet even. Then he might even walk out the door and turn back and say, "well okay, I'll pay that, but I sure can't see it". But he'd take it, but he would sometimes walk out and then come back.

I: You've had 'em...you can remember when a guy would walk out the door?

R: Oh sure, yes. And I just held onto my price, I said that, "well if you want 'em, that's the price".

I: Is that how you'd do it when you named a price, that was it or would you come down?

R: Well sometimes I'd come down, sure. But, one time I had to go up in price. I didn't have the slightest idea what the prices and this happened at the Conservation Department, and here this was right when we hadn't had a open season for many many years and then they opened the season that they had a legal season; and I had only three beaver to sell that spring and a friend of mine from Ishpeming he said that he's heard that the beaver are bringing a good price, so ask for a good price. All I had was one decent hide. One had a big hole in the back...oh about two inches in diameter and it had some kind of a growth on its back and I had to cut it off and then one was just a little dinky hide; so anyway, I wasn't used to getting big money for the hides so, I went to the Department and asked that "well what are they paying for hides?" He said that, "they're paying a good prices", but that's all I could get out of him. So, I thought to myself that if I could get fifty dollars for those darn hides, I'd be doing good. So, anyway, when I went to this first buyer, he quoted a price of seventy-five dollars. So, anyway, I thought if they were seventy-five, they must be worth more. So I said that, "well no, I'm not selling". So, I figured that well, I should get eighty-five dollars for 'em. I went to the next buyer and he said that, "well, he'll give me eighty dollars for them". I said, "nope"..."well, eighty-five"...I said, "nope". No, he asked that, "how much do you want for them?" I said, "that eighty-five dollars"..."Okay"...I said that, "no, I'm not selling...not for eighty-five dollars"..."that I gotta get a hundred dollars for them". So we argued for quite awhile...well it came to ninety-five dollars and a pint of whiskey...a dollar and a half to buy a pint of whiskey...I told him "that I never settled a fur deal yet that I didn't
get a pint of whiskey anyway."

I: Is that right?

R: That was bootlegging...yeah. Anyway, I got ninety-six and a half dollars for them and here I had settled already...and boy they sure laughed at me when I upped the price. I said, "no I'm not selling them for that"..."I gotta get a hundred dollars".

I: So you got twice what you thought you were gonna get.

R: Does it always work like that? Have you had some bad deals too sometimes?

R: Oh, I've had some bad deals...very bad deals especially on the bootleg hides. I swore up and down the last time that I sold bootleg hides that never again will I trap for a Jew any bootleg hides. They got you coming and going. First of all you're dealing with illegal merchandise. You go, say like we went down state to sell, well and these buyers they're in cahoots with the law.

I: Is that right?

R: Oh, you bet they are. There was cops right in front of that place that we didn't dare to go in.

I: How many years ago was this?

R: This was about 1930...now wait a minute...it's about 1941 or 2.

I: There were cops right outside?

R: Cops right guarding that entrance to...he had a drugstore as a blind and anyway, we got there in the middle of the night and we didn't know what to expect. He did say that he had a drugstore. So, naturally the drugstore was closed, but then in the morning we went there and it was a drug store and a pawn shop combined. So, we went there and there was a cop at the door, so we went in there and we said, "is this the place you want those hides?" He said, "yeah, well bring 'em right in". We said, "well Jesus, they're just in gunny sacks, you know, and there's a cop right at the door". "Well, I gotta have some protection, don't I?"

I: He laughed?

R: Yeah..."and bring 'em right in". So. we took his word and
we brought 'em in. Okay, he had promised us eighteen dollars a piece straight through when they're brought there.

I: For a hide?
R: For a hide.
I: Was this beaver?
R: This was beaver and that was a real good price at the time. S anyway when we got 'em into his store and they were illegal hides...a cop right at the door watching over his property, he said, "well, the price took a hell of a drop...I can't pay you that kind of money. You're down state." Even if you would have gotten out of the store they would have had a blockade right there at the bridge. The Conservation would have took the hides and they would have been sold at an auction...he would have bought those hides from the auction. He would have gotten them anyway.

I: Is that what happens?
R: That's what used to happen.
I: Well, the Conservation would get them and they'd have an auction and the fur buyers go there and get them anyway.
R: That's it exactly. So the trapper just would have lost his entire collection of hides. So, you were over the barrel. We got seven dollars a piece for them hides.

I: You were promised eighteen.
R: Yeah, so I never trapped an illegal fur since and I don't intend to.
I: Isn't there anyway you can trap 'em and preserve them?
R: Yeah, nowadays you could, you could keep them froze up, you know, fresh froze for about a year; but after that they might get...I don't know, I never tried keeping. I've had a mink pelt over the winter, but I think they start getting freezer burned.

I: Pretty expensive thing too...buying a freezer and keeping it stuffed with pelts just to...you know...in the long run unless you did a lot of it.
R: Yeah, anyway that pretty much takes care of the
I: Is there still some bootlegging of pelts going on?
R: Not to my knowledge. I don't think that you can find a buyer
that would handle them. It's too much of a risk and.

I: Tighter laws on that now?

R: Yeah, the fines are pretty high and it's not worth it. The money's not in the pelts that used to be.

I: And people don't really have to do it now...to survive.

R: The people don't have to do it. So, I'm kind of happy about that part of it...that there isn't any bootlegging of raw furs.

I: Okay, now this bidding that's going to go on again, is it going to be like this for both the fall and the spring...there's gonna be a big sale?

R: Yeah, un huh.

I: You just take the furs there with you?

R: You take the furs there with you and if you'll have friends that can't make it, well you can take their furs along and have them separate. They'll give you a slot number and you can take it to him or then if you're gonna be at the sale like on Sunday, well you can have his slot number and if he tells you what he expects for the hides, well you can sell it for him. You can just okay the bid...the highest bidder. You're not obligated to sell over there. You can still withdraw your hides. The trapper has full control over his hides no matter what is bid on them, you can still withdraw them...you don't have to sell them.

I: So on Saturday they grade and measure them and on Sunday...oh they give the bids on Saturday too.

R: Nope, they don't...I don't imagine...they might release the bids on bunches, but the public wouldn't know anything about these, not before Sunday when the bidding starts. Then they open up the bids on Sunday.

I: Who's going to have the bids?

R: It's the board that's...

I: That the trappers with have, huh? Or will the fur buyers have the bids?

R: The fur buyer will...they have a box where they drop all these bids just like ballots and then from there they will take these bids and will open up each...each buyer has his own box where they put their bids and then they take the highest bid of each.

I: I know but, there's no way that the fur buyers can find out
what the bids are...

R: No, there's no way that they can find out.
I: Good because I don't trust them anyway.
R: No, I wouldn't either. I've had so much...
I: And about how many buyers will be at this one now?
R: Well, it's hard to say. There's thirty-six or thirty-eight that are invited, but how many will come is hard to say.
I: How many trappers do you think will bring their furs there?
R: Well, now that's a hard question to answer also; but like last spring there was over $5,000 worth of beaver sold.
I: At an average of how much a hide?
R: Yeah, I can...
I: Just roughly you can tell me.

Stop in tape.

I: So what has been the approximate price of an average beaver hide...the last couple of years what have they been getting?
R: I would say that it was probably about...well how would it come now? I had...I sold thirty-six hides there...
I: Thirty-six beaver hides?
R: Yeah...and that came to seven hundred eighty-eight dollars.
I: Roughly twenty...not quite twenty dollars a hide. No...about that...around twenty bucks a hide.
R: I think it averages about eighteen.
I: But has it been around that price for the last couple of years? It might go up a lot too because of inflation.
R: See, it went up already last year. I would say that if you got a fifteen dollar average the year before you were doing good. Say a trapper is lucky he gets all big hides, he's gonna average a lot better.
I: How do they determine the value. Now they measure the length and the width of it?
R: Yes, the length and width and well, they're graded...here they're graded...say that only...extra large...large...medium
or large medium...medium...small...and kits

I: And what?

R: Kits...they're just a little...

I: They grade 'em by the size, huh?

R: Like your...well they call it blanket at the extra large...well the blanket has to be sixty-five inches or over measured length and width.

I: Oh, you measure the length and add the width?

R: Right.

I: And the two of them have to equal sixty-five or over for it to be a blanket.

R: Right. They used to have the super-blanket which they eliminated here and that was seventy-two inches and up and you got more money again for that.

I: So now there's the blanket...what's the next category? They call it large or is there another name for it?

R: I wonder if I have a listing really so that you could go by it.

I: This is for 1966 and here a beaver extra large was eighteen dollars and then it went down...sixteen dollars, fourteen dollars, twelve dollars, seven dollars, five dollars, three dollars and then one dollar.

Stop in tape

I: The muskrat season begins in the fall, hey?

R:

I: Seventeen hundred rats?

R: Yeah...and he's been getting...did he say...two-eighty a piece average.

I: That's pretty good.

R: Something like that anyway.

I: He's pretty good at that, isn't he?

R: Yeah, I guess he is. He must be in order to...of course, when there's lots of rats...it's no problem to catch them. I asked him...I told him when I was trapping well then that well,
"what do you think, that could I make out there?" He said that, "well, it wouldn't take long anyway, that you'd probably make our right away". And he said that if I would come over there to trap with him that he would guarantee about three thousand rats for the season.

I: Are you ever gonna take a run down there?

R: Oh, I don't know. It probably would end me. I'd get so excited that I wouldn't know when to stop.

I: You mean with all those rats?

R: Yeah

Stop in tape.

R: Why change our name from Michigan Trappers Association because the National is a bigger outfit than just the state-wide and we should just follow with the separated with the state name, right?

I: Un huh

R: And have the same name as the

I: Now, why do they want to change it to Michigan Fur Harvesters? You said because...

R: See, there's so many of these anti-trap concerns that they think a trapper is a real cruel individual and in a sense he probably is—to be honest, he probably is more callused about the animals as somebody that always saw them in the parks or zoos, you know, that they're half tame already and they're actually like friendly. Well, they pay regard to them more as pets than anything else...these wild animals. They haven't seen a bobcat even when it's in a trap and it's real vicious...well I'm telling you, there's dirt flying when you go close to it and you don't feel like picking it up and petting it either. But then there are occasions where it's just like a domestic cat...it'll just lay down there and won't tear himself up or anything. But still, a bobcat is a bobcat, you know...you don't feel like starting to release it either. But it can be done and a lot of it has been done now when they took the bounty off of 'em...well the trapper feels, if he's not rewarded, why kill it...let him go on and do his damage which is probably not right, but still it isn't right that the trapper isn't rewarded for his efforts. Like there was...now the sportsmen are starting to see more of the trapper's side after the game is starting to disappear. But there were sportsmen that would go and they'd find the trapper's trap...if they wouldn't do anything else for it, they'd shoot it to bits with a shotgun.

I: The trap?
R: The trap. They hated the trapper because they would catch their dogs probably in the trap...maybe he was out there out of season anyway when that would happen...training his dog. But the trapper had the whole right to be out there and so did the sportsman as far as that goes. The law says that he can be training his dog and use a blank pistol or something but he shouldn't be destroying anybody's property...that's private property, that trap of a trapper. But, they would do that and a lot of these sportsmen they would steal everything out of the trap.

I: Steal whatever pelt or whatever was in it?

R:

I: And probably even steal the trap sometimes.

R: Oh yes, that was so wanted by everybody even if they never made use of it, but they took it anyway. That goes on quite a bit yet.

I: Years ago did that ever happen?

R: Oh yes, probably more so than now. I really think out association has brought a lot of trappers even together, you know, that had sticky fingers. Well now they kind of respect the next guy. See, when they get together at these meetings and they actually get to know each other and they find real nice guys amongst them and, you know, who cares to steal from a friend. And I think this is doing wonders for the trappers...this little association that we have. The only thing we should...this is my personal idea...maybe all the trappers wouldn't all agree with me, but I think that we should work more hand in hand with the sportsman to get a better understanding between the sportsman and the trapper.

I: Sure

R: Because this far it seems like...well they spend like...fighting each other. The trapper hasn't much use for the sportsman because he has been destructive to the trapper and well maybe you could say the same way around then. The trapper when he's gotten fed up with the sportsman, well he's been kind of hard to deal with by the sportsman then. But, if they work together maybe we'd get a lot more done...I'm sure of it...and there would be less...we could work on these laws to go along with the trapper and the sportsman. Like, I have tried to bring this up in many of our meetings. I've said, "that if we tried with the sportsman and brought out the point where it would be more beneficial for the trapper to start the bird season, like say this is...the fall of the year is the best time to trap for predators...when the bird season opens up already, it opens up in...I forget...I think September.

I: I think October...no September...mid September I think.
R: Yeah, September...fifteenth of September...well now it would open up October 15th...that would give an extra month for the predator trapping and he could also...the sportsman would benefit out of it because more predators would be killed...more game would be saved and the trapper would have the benefit of an extra month of trapping without all the dogs being loose."

I: Now it's a pretty nice thing because the people are starting to worry about the amount of partridge because the partridge population has gone down because there's so many foxes around.

R: Yeah...and there's really no reason to kill them when they're the size of a robin...the birds. It's too early...wait a little.

I: Well, back to this changing of the name...it'll provide a better public image of the trapper.

R: Yes, right. Well, it would be that certain...well it would sound that it would be more like certain areas would need harvesting that it wouldn't sound that it goes throughout as it sounds as it fits trapping...it would modify it somewhat that it would be like farming...which it should be providing the conservation is doing their duty. This whole trapping should be exactly like farming if there's...if the laws are made right there shouldn't be over trapping. That's why we have law enforcement officers to see to it that there won't be. Right?

I: Un huh...

R: ...........but there, that's kind of hard to control fully, but if the laws are strengthened, I think that can avoid most of the violation of game laws...and if they're enforced.

I: Yeah...enforced.

R: Well, when a person is caught, well then enforce it and by golly the next guy won't think that it's worth it. That's how I always felt...well since we were out west and they stocked up this one lake...well it had been stocked up two years previous that we went there, well there were four lakes, the Four Mile Basin Lakes, and well in 1937 well your dollar...was still worth a dollar....and, well there was signs posted along the path there at the lakes..."Anyone caught fishing there will have to pay a fine of $300 or 90 days in jail or both and by golly they didn't go fishing out there and they would have enforced that law too. Those game men there, they were real good men. They had exceptions...they favored the guys that lived right in the woods though. They said, "it belongs to them". But, anybody outside...well look out, they really slapped the fine.

Stop in tape.
R: There's a colony of beaver. Well, it's crowded already in its headquarters or whatever you want to call it. Well, they're going to start out seeking for new territory, search for food, and they will come in contact with other beaver. This one colony might be diseased already and they can't find food or the right place to make their home, they keep on looking and they are going to infest a lot of animals. Where they're thinned out, your food has a chance to come back too. Like they eat a lot of roots right from the bottom of their marshes besides your tree barks and they favor just certain areas, the way it looks, they don't make a dam any old place. But, the feed has to be there. Same thing with your coyote and your fox. If they get too abundant in an area, well it isn't that they just kill off the game, but they kill off themselves also and they get diseased well they...the disease spreads from one to another and then you haven't got anything left. You haven't got the game and you haven't got the...

I: Sure, no doubt about that.

Stop in tape.

R: It's no use of setting a trap there, because it just takes about fifteen minutes for a beaver to wring off its foot in a trap. It just goes like a darn old fashioned churn... keeps on churning until there the foot left in the trap.

I: Then they swim away, hey?

R: Then they swim away and I don't believe in that

End of Side A

R: And if you can't get 'em, well that's his hard luck and my gain, you know. And years ago you got a lot of beaver with both front legs missing, toes missing out of the rear legs and they keep on going. It's surprising how they can keep on going with maybe one good leg.

I: They don't need those legs much anyway...it's the tail...

R: The tail and the hind legs...they push themselves along and well then it requires a little knowledge how to trap a beaver with only two legs. When it's got the two legs in an ordinary set, they'll unset that set every time. It'll go and push itself and it won't get caught from the body...it's very seldom I caught only one beaver from the body into a big trap. But, usually there's an offset trap and a bunch of hair in it. But when that starts to appear, well you gotta do something about it. Then you gotta find a steep bank and you make a notch oh about eight inches to ten inches deep in the water and that puts your scent up where it comes a little come to the scent and then put its rear legs down on the trap. You see what I mean?
I: Un huh...you get 'em with the scent,
R: Yeah
I: Is that what you bait the trap with?
R: Well, that's what I use mostly, scent and then sometimes I...
well I still guard that quite a bit, that scent.
I: Oh, you mean that's like a secret?
R: Oh yeah, definitely...that's what I didn't give away, the
scent. A lot of them know it now, but a lot of them don't
know it and they just use popal (???) and that's what I say
I use and lot of places where I've got competition, I put
popal. Not that it means a thing, but just as a decoy...as
a blind yeah, that I'm trapping with popal.
I: Regular beaver scent.
R: Un huh, and it's made right out of the beaver itself.
I: From glands?
R: From glands, yeah
I: Under the arm here?
R: No
I: Like on a squirrel they say when you get a squirrel to eat.
R: Un huh...to take out the glands
I: Is there any glands you have to take out of this beaver to
eat.
R: Oh definitely there is.
I: Where?
R: Didn't you know?
I: No...got him soaking in water and Elaine's gonna cook it this
afternoon.
R: Oh, well you took out the...you probably thought they were
nuts.
I: Art skinned it for me, you know, and it was already gutted
and Elaine just soaked it in water.
R: Oh, he must have taken out the glands.
I: But they are down by the crotch, eh?
R: Yeah
I: They're probably out
R: Well, I'm sure they're out
I: You can see 'em and they look...you can tell they're not meat at all.
R: Yeah, they look like balls, really.
I: Okay
R: And, I'm quite sure that he's taken them out if he gave you the beaver because...or then he would have told you about it because all trappers really know about the glands though they don't know about the scent. Well, I'm giving out the scent right there...that's what we use.
I: Yeah I figured...you probably squeeze it and maybe you boil it a little in order to get a liquid...
R: No, nothing...just squeeze it right into the bottle.
I: And save that?
R: Yeah
Stop in tape.
R: It's nice to meet a fellow trapper on the line
I: Out in the woods?
R: Out in the woods...like we trap the Pascheke (???) from here and we traveled on foot, my dad and I. And then there was a Art Pelto and his wife, they had a camp there and they would trap the same area; and the first time we met, well we were sleeping...well we had made kind of a leanto and we slept there, and the fire had gone down quite a bit anyway...and no it wasn't...we cooked our breakfast and then we took off; but anyway, we were about a quarter of a mile away, I said to my dad I said that "we've got company". He asked that, "well how do you figure that?" I said that, "don't you smell that coffee?" He said, "no he can't smell". My dad had a little trouble with his nose anyway that he couldn't smell to good. I said, "boy, I can smell coffee that there must be somebody at the camp by the dam" because that was a natural place to stop and have coffee. So, we got there and God darn it we looked and there's a man and a woman there that we didn't know. So, anyway we walked over there and we had trapps right on the Camp # Dam...there was a beaver dam there also. And, well, we got to be pretty good friends. We had coffee together there
many times then afterwards and well there was a big beaver
house there. Well, we had really obeyed the law that we
tried to set at least fifty feet away from the house.

I: Is that law still in effect?

R: Yeah it is; but you can set a trap on the dam; but we didn't
...at that time it was fifty feet away from the dam house or
hole that was occupied by a beaver. You had to have your
traps at least fifty feet away. So, we didn't have any traps
on the dam or on the house...well this is a long ways from
nowhere...or was at the time there was no roads then. So,
it was quite safe to put your traps on the dams even that
the game wardens bother it; but there was no need to do that
with our good beaver scent, you know, you could draw them
any place. So, anyway, Art he said, "well, I see that you
have two beaver in your traps there, but I was wondering if
I could set traps here too?" I said "well, certainly you
can help yourself." He said, "would you guys be the type
that would mind if I set traps right on the house?" I said,
"well, it's your chance that if you wanta set them there
well we sure won't squeal, but we didn't want to do that our-
selves." Just in case that somebody would come along. And
I said that "a lot of times all you get is the little ones
right there." So he set traps on the dam and at the house.
He set two traps right on the...you know how the house comes,
well right on the edge of the house on both sides, and then
two or three sets right on the dam. And you know we caught
six beaver out of there and Art said that, "well God darn
it, I can't figure out...I've put all kinds of sticks there
for bait"...but there's a variety of sticks and he said that,
"but I know you're using something else besides popal...that
you must be...I got popal there too and they don't care for
my sticks." Then he said that, "well, you know that coyote
trapper, Popala from Eben Junction?" I said that I'd heard
of him. He said, "I'm related to him" and he said,"I gotta
real good coyote scent, so let's trade scents." I didn't.
I didn't think too much about trapping coyote then, I've
been sorry since that I didn't trade because I think he would
have given the real stuff for coyotes.

I: If you would have liked to trap coyotes, you would have?

R: Yeah, but I didn't think that the coyotes meant all that
much to me as the beaver did. And then at one of our trips
out there and we got together and he said, "he would know a
place where there's a lot of beaver...that we could really
make a killing if you'd go with him...if I'd go with him
with that scent of yours." He said, "that if you can draw
them"...I showed him then,"well I'm gonna put a set here in
the brush here that say that if I was scared that you would
be the type that would take an animal from my traps, I'll
show you what I do." And I walked along the river and I
set a trap in the brush and walked back out of there and
and I put my set there. And the next time out there, I got a beaver out of there and he couldn't believe it. He said "by gosh, that really works wonder that you can hide your traps no matter who's trapping there if you can walk along the river so that you don't leave your track there." Then another thing I had when I got competition that I don't know ...usually you don't have trouble if you know who's competing with you...then you don't have to worry. But, if they happen to travel the line at a different time that you never meet up with them, well I'm always worried about those guys more than if I meet the guy on the line and I can talk to him. Well, he knows that I know that he's working the same line. But, if he's that type that doesn't...he's a sticky finger and he knows that I haven't seen him, well he might feel that "I'm gonna pull my traps and I'll pull everything he's got too".

I: You mean empty the traps?

R: Yeah...so I feel pretty safe if I see the guy...I don't feel that he's going to touch my traps then unless somebody else comes along...then well they might empty them but I wouldn't even think that the guy I met has done it. Well, what I was gonna say was that say this was the river on this side and here's the edge of the bank. Well, I'll make a notch on the bank here and I'll put my trap here and I'll put my scent back of the trap here. Then, I'll place a big rock right along side here which isn't how I normally set where there's no danger of anybody taking the trap. I wire that rock on the chain and when it's a steep bank here a beaver gets in and it'll jump and it'll pull that rock along with it. But then I place a long wire downstream and tie it onto a twig here. When a beaver goes in a trap here they see that there's been a trap there and the thief well he'll see how he must have pulled it out. There's no wires here anymore. He can't even if he's digging for a wire, there's no wire there. The beaver when he gets in a trap and it goes in, well it fights and that rock keeps on rolling and it goes downstream. Well you'll know where your wire is here on the bank...you go and pick up that wire.

I: Beaver's under the water...

R: Yeah

I: ...and you just pull in the beaver like a trout.

R: Yeah, that's right. Well, then I've done that too...where there's not too fast of a current...that it's just real slow moving water...just put the rock...a big rock and no wire at all and just take a fork stick and you can find your beaver from there and it's hard to find.
I: So, you've got two things. You've gotta set your trap to catch the beaver and also set the trap to keep away the dishonest trapper or the dishonest sportsman, whoever.

R: Yeah, that's right. But, like I said, I really think this trappers' association has worked wonders. I haven't heard of hardly any trap lifting or stealing anymore.

I: Since that association developed, you kind of cut down the sticky fingers, huh?

R: Yes, it really has. Well like now you probably noticed the beaver pond right along side the road there.

I: On the right hand side coming this way?

R: Well, it would be on the left hand side coming this way from the highway there's a pond.

I: I saw one on the right...but anyway...

R: Well anyway, I would have never thought of setting a trap there. My brother set a trap there oh a few years ago before the association was formed...anyway he lost the beaver and the trap right away. Well, now there's...I don't know how many fellows is trapping there; but there's so much disturbance there all the time that the beaver don't dare to move. I don't think anybody has gotten a beaver out of there yet. And there certainly is three beaver because they've been seen at one time. I haven't gotten any and neither has two other fellows that's got traps there...they haven't gotten any and they're all pretty good trappers that are in there. Well, when the ice was still in there, my brother he went there and he shoved some popal under the ice...he figured that it'll be quite simple...all you have to do is set your traps and then they're accustomed to the place and they'll come right away. But as soon as we got this...or the trapping season opened and I got traps there, well we got that darn thaw and I hadda pull the traps out of that place when I had just had them one night there; but it never had moved that night. So, now I've got my traps way up stream from there...I don't know there might be something in them now. In fact, if I get one from there I'll let you know...I'll call you up and tell you...but there's lots of traps in there...there's four sets right on the dam.

I: Sometime when you go out...maybe once this year yet I don't know, could I go out with you...just walk around.

R: Well, it's a kind of a hard thing to say this way or that way unless the snow goes away completely. See, we're traveling with snowmobiles and they're long distances yet where we're trapping except that this place right here...I could take a run there with you now even if you want.
I: That's okay...not now; but some other time.

R: And when you're with a partner it's harder to say how he feels even if I feel that...well I feel that I'd like to take you out there and I'd even like to show you how to set a trap for a beaver.

I: Yeah, I'd like to learn all that. Maybe when I retire up here many years from now I might...

R: Well, I'll tell you you might be working where you'd have a chance to do a little bit of trapping and you'll be teaching won't you?

I: Un huh.

R: Well, that isn't such a strenuous job but it can be working on your mind too and that would be relaxation to set a few traps in the evening and get you mind off your...

I: Get in a little exercise snowshoeing up there.

R: And there's always things in life that you kind of feel that you can't afford it unless you earn it, you know, like now with this trapping...you can't rely on that as a means of living anymore but it's a added income if you go out there. Well, I always felt this way that I shouldn't spend some of the money that I earned just on a regular job on something foolish; but if I trapped it, we'd have had to get along without it, right? Well, and if I didn't go trapping we wouldn't have that added income. Well, this went on for many years that I wanted a new gun and I wanted it bad because I never had bought a new gun except one...a twenty-two. So anyway, I was...Oh I had made the price of many guns already and I had mentioned the gun already to the wife and I said that well, "God darn it, I earned the price of many guns and I still don't have a gun. With the trapping we're buying everything else but I never get the gun." She said that well, "why don't you get one...that I haven't been griping anyway...get it." I said,"I know you haven't." So I had this old twenty-five thirty-five Winchester...so I said that well "I'm going to get rid of it". All I could get for it around here was fifteen dollars. And Parkers they advertised years ago that "Let's Swap Guns" and the gun that I wanted was a Model 100 Winchester Automatic. So, I sent my gun out there for an appraisal and I got a letter back stating that they would give me fifty-seven dollars providing I bought that Model 100 Winchester that sold for a hundred and thirty-six dollars I guess it was at the time. Well, anyway then I wanted an extra clip which was four dollars I guess and a sling...well anyway it came that I had to pay fifty-seven dollars...no...I forget what I had to pay. Then I got the gun. Then I told the wife that well, "now since I got the gun, I'm gonna go all the way...I'm gonna get a
scope for it too." So, I got a scope for it too and ordered that from Parkers...that was about forty dollars I think that scope with the mounts. Well, now I got that new gun, then I got another new gun last summer which I didn't care for. I traded my trail bike for it...was a twenty-two two-fifty...a real fast bullet...and sometimes it wouldn't eject a shell. And it happened when I shot at a bear and then it didn't eject the shell and I had to dig it out with the knife. Well, providing that...there's a very slim chance that it'll come at you, but it could when it's wounded. Well, what the heck can you do when you're digging out the shell with a knife. So, I thought I'm gonna get rid of it. So, I traded it for a brand new Savage 308 and a lever action...that's a good kind.

I: Savage Model 99?

Stop in tape.

R: So anyway the wife said that it's the first house...that you go about a half mile and it's the first one there straight ahead. So, when he took off...well he was a little bit liquored up anyway...that's the place right there that he went to come out of there why...and he started going where he should have gone in the first place, well he went in the ditch and he was hung up so bad there. Well, then he came back here and he kind of accused the wife that it was her fault that he went into the ditch...giving the wrong information...the wife she said that he didn't go a half a mile either...that I told you about a half a mile ago you just turn around in the field at that house. So, then anyway he asked if we had a flash light or something so he said to come over there and see. Well, I figured sometimes you can get yourself in trouble too helping if a car is wrecked or something and you go and pull on it...well you're responsible for it if you wreck it. So, first I didn't mention that I had a four-wheel drive at all. So I got there and he was looking for his kids and they were at that (???) place. And I said that, "well I could drive you over to (???) and maybe your kids can help you out of here. And he said, (the whole sentence is incomprehensible). But anyway, it was on ice so solid that it was impossible to push by hand. So, I took him to (???) and (incomprehensible)...they couldn't do anything for it...well anyway then I said I had a four-wheel drive that I don't know whether I should pull it, that maybe I'll pull it apart. So, he said, "well, as long as I get out of here." I said that, "well, we'll get out of here alright but I might pull your bumper off". That he'd better hook on where he wants it pulled at...that I'm not going to hook it on. So, I pulled him out of there and I never charged him anything...and this was in the middle of the might. I know another guy that was asked to pull a guy out and he charged him a hundred bucks.

I: That's kind of not unusual, though, is it?
R: Not usual...no it isn't usual...not for around here, but this
guy came from down state (the whole sentence is incomprehensible
I didn't say anything, but it kind of made me (?) if it is
even down state...that's kind of a price...hundred bucks...just
to pull a car out...not being in that business anyway. But
the same guy he'll do anything for me ...( the whole sentence
is incomprehensible).

I: Well, this guy must have offered you something.

R: Well, he said that he'll give a couple bucks for my brother
so he can be...(the whole sentence is incomprehensible).

I: This guy here...this drunken guy?

R: Yeah...

I: He didn't ask you what he owed you?

R: No, he said that he'll give me a couple bucks and he'll
it up with my brother.

I: In a situation like that after a person...

R: I said that, "it's up to you that you don't owe me anything, but
I'll take it if you want to give it"...(incomprehensible). Well,
then maybe he couldn't...maybe he was in a situation he couldn't
do that.

I: In a situation like that, is it proper for the person who was
helped out of the ditch to at least ask..."well what do I owe
you...anything?" What do you think?

R: Well, I think that they could at least thank you...he didn't
thank me but he did offer me something...I really would have
felt better if he would have just said, "well, that you very
much"...and, you know, sincerely meant it instead of making an
offer to send me money through my brother and not just send it
in the mail.

I: How come he'd send money through your brother? Did he
him?

R: He works in the same place...he works at Celotex.

I: Do you know this (?) very well?

R: I know him well enough...they're young people. He used to be
awfully wild (incomprehensible). He can be so polite, the kid
you can't help but like him to a certain extent and he can get
into your hair so...oh my gosh. I was pulling him...or his car.

Stop in tape.
R: He said that if I want to go anywhere, he'll take me there and well he's a good friend from down state and he came to see me and he's got a camp here and he stayed there for a couple weeks (incomprehensible)...don't be afraid to ask. Well, that's the best (???).

I: An offer like that.

R: Yeah...I feel that way.

Incomprehensible portion deleted.

Stop in tape.

R: The only ones I visit anymore is my brother and usually when there's business even over there then is Walter Koski, I visit, well I've been to Kenny Salo's a couple times recently, but it's been mostly on account of business. But, it's been pretty easy to go because we're really good friends...make a visit out of it at the same time. But if there's no real need to go to visit, well you just don't go...you just stay home and watch TV which is wrong. Years ago when we had to walk...well we couldn't afford gas for the car...well we'd walk and go and visit and now we don't and we have cars. We go for a picnic and fishing and hunting and like that, well the visiting is mostly for people that are...that don't live right in the community that you don't see everyday or every week...we go to Sault Ste. Marie and visit some of our friends there; but lately we've gone downstate to visit friends down there; but the local people we don't go. They seem to get the rotten end of it...not for any reason except that we just don't go to visit much...and we take part in quite a bit of these community doings.

I: Well you see a lot of the people during them, don't you?

R: Yeah...that's right, so there's really no point to go and make a real house visit when you've just seen them...so you just don't visit local people much.

I: There used to be a lot more visiting.

R: There used to be, yes. Well, there was a lot of doings at the hall...that big white building across the railroad tracks there...well that's the (???) Hall...well it's not white anymore, it's kind of a light green. Anyway, you could see the people there; but by gosh, even right direct from the hall we'd go and visit them...those people and we had been with them but it's different now.

I: So it's not just that you're involved in community activities...you were then too. It's just that now you don't visit. I know everyone says this, nearly everyone that I've talked to.
R: Yeah...it's...I blame it on the TV a lot and where it got that way that I...well I'd be going some places and when they had a TV they just couldn't turn it off and they couldn't talk while the TV was on...well I didn't have to go there to watch TV...I could have stayed home to watch TV. So, we just start to get away from visiting when that TV seemed to be more important that the company. So, I started to watch TV at home not solely on account of that because there werea lot of people that would turn it off also when you went there to visit. Oh I don't mind if the TV is on if it isn't that well, listen to this now...listen to this now...and then you can't say anything the whole time you're there. Well, that used to get me...and rubbed me the wrong way.

I: Un huh...sure

R: And they didn't realize what they were doing really. They didn't want to hurt you, but they thought so much of the program that they just couldn't drop it. They had their ear on it all the time and they couldn't visit with you and then when something...well listen now...they weren't interested in what you had to say...they were moreinterested in the TV program. Well, I thought, the heck with it. Well, that is one reason why I quit going to some of my good friends even. They're still good friends if they're just away from the TV; but if they come here and that TV happens to be on well boy they still won't have that much to say...so I turn it off. I says, "well we can always listen to that damn thing, but..."...but I think that's the proper thing to do.

I: Of course. Yeah, I've heard other people say that and you probably have too.

R: Yeah, I have too.

I: I know that's how my parents feel.

R: To turn off the...

I: Yeah, they get mad if they go someplace and the television is on.

R: Yeah, I don't go for that. Well, there's some program that I like to watch and if the other people like to watch that one particular program, well that's alright. If I would ask, I would still want the person to be honest and say that if he wanted to watch it or not. I don't want to keep it on if he doesn't want to watch it...but I'll offer sometimes if it happens to be something I like to see and if it's a good program. I like the Waltons...I like to watch that. I think it's a good show. It's a clean show and has something about it that appeals to me...and that's just about the only show that I really...if somebody were to come and I would ask them, well maybe would you like to watch this, otherwise I'd just turn it off.
I: Do you think there's less cooperation...like helping each other?

R: Oh definitely, there's a lot less now than there used to be. People are...in my opinion the people are getting even in the communities...even in the small communities...they're are getting more distant like in the cities. They don't know their neighbor like they used to. Whatever you did, well a neighbor was right there and you did things together more than what is happening now. Why it is, I don't know. I kind of blame it...well people are too busy...occupied in their jobs and money means the whole world to a lot of people, more than what their friendship would mean which is the wrong way, really; but I'm not saying...I was working six and seven days a week. I didn't like it, but by gosh I was doing that and I didn't feel like visiting anybody. And you don't feel like going to offer a hand either to anybody. So, I can see quite a bit what a person say like the guys that work for Celotex. They're working six and seven days a week and they might work oh two weeks in a row without a day off. When they get that day off they're pretty tired of working...just spend it with the family and maybe take off even that nobody's going to bother...someplace if they have a hideout someplace...at a lake...well they just want to relax there with their own family which is right, I think, that a person should spend some time with his own family and when they have so limited time, well, I don't really blame them for spending it with their family instead of some neighbor.

I: Then the problem is that there is limited time because everyone is involved in doing something...trying to get a buck.

R: That's what I mean.

I: Working for money

R: Yeah, that money...it's a bad thing really although it's good to pay bills with; but that creates a lot of problems in this world. You gotta have it, but that causes a lot of greediness also...greed. People aren't equal enough. I would say that a person...well no person in my estimation will earn two-hundred fifty thousand dollars a year no mater what kind of a job it is, I don't think he earns it. He isn't deserving of a wage like that and then the next guy making three thousand dollars a year...well I don't think that's right. And then that guy that's getting that three thousand dollars a year well he is taxed out of that little bit of earnings anyway. And that guy that makes that two hundred fifty thousand dollars will probably...he goes out of the entire tax bit.

I: That's right.

R: Yeah, like I never could see this where the...like now they
draw for social security up to...I don't know what it is...I think about nine thousand dollars or ten thousand dollars, but not any higher. Why not? Why not draw it right through? Because it's just...well you can stay the low class worker...we'll he'll earn up to ten thousand dollars and that's just about the limit. Well, he's going to pay from every pay check they draw right through the year for his social security and he would need that money for his living and a little bit entertainment more than that guy that's earning that two hundred fifty thousand dollars.

I: Sure.

R: He could afford to pay that tax and still have a good living; but then that would give a good living for the guy that retires that money if all the people that were the big wage earners, well I think that they could make this retirement a heck of a lot better by paying in right through what they earn and they wouldn't suffer one bit.

I: There's no doubt about it. Have you noticed any people around here from this community that as they began working...as they got a job for money, they began to visit less? Well you know, that happened to you, didn't it.

End of tape.
SUBJECT: Trapping Experiences

SOURCE: Leonard Lahti

COMMENTS:

R: Leonard Lahti
R-1: Don Shirley (?)
R-2: Elaine Loukinen
R-4: Art Munktala

R: As I tried to explain, there's dumb buggers.
   It's a good thing there are some because I wouldn't catch any of the smart ones.

I: Finding that place is important though, isn't it?

R: Oh yeah, well that's what I mean...that's half your trapping to find the right place and you set the trap where the darn thing was set when you caught it...every time.

I: But that's a little bit easier said than done maybe

R: Yeah, well there's.

R-1: You know I got 'em on a back leg so I figured that he must have gone all the way. There wasn't a mark on that animal except just...you know he didn't fight in the trap at all...there's just a...

They don't when you have a good place to drown them and I usually...if there isn't a good place, I won't even set a trap. If there's logs and such that they can get ahold of...it's no use putting a trap there even in four feet of water you can get a paw.

I: Get a what?

R: Get a paw of a beaver...an otter won't escape even if you set it on dry land...it won't wring out.

I: Otter won't...can't shake the trap too well.

R: No, unt-unt

I: How come is that? They just don't fight as much?

R-1: They're not strong...I don't think they're as strong an
animal as a beaver.

R: Well, I'll tell you, it's just like a damn windmill that beaver when it's in a trap. It just goes around and around and around and around...I betcha in fifteen minutes...

I: Swimming you mean?

R-l: On the shore

R: It just churns and I'll bet in fifteen minutes it'll wring its leg off.

I: Without drowning.

R: Yeah without drowning.

R-l: Yeah, but you know that one we got...you saw that one was clean.

I: Yeah, that was a good quick...

R-l: That was only a number two trap too...double spring.

R: Yeah, well that's big enough for a front paw anyway

R-l: Was that a front paw, Mike?

I: Believe so.

R: It's got quite long toes and it's got those webs...if you haven't got a good ground set...we've got 'em with one toe and like that, but usually if there's any logs or anything that it can grab ahold, that there goes the toe.

I: Because it can pull itself away from...

R: Yeah, it can pull itself and fight that trap. So, it's real important to just get it just right.

I: When you see a beaver in a trap and it's still alive, it just was caught before you came there, how do you generally kill it.

R: Well generally if there's a chance, I just drowned him.

R-l: How do you do that?

R: Take a forked stick and keep its head underneath...but it's powerful. Before it starts to drowned, well it's gonna try and get out from under that stick...it's a son-of-a-gun to hold.

R-l: Now a muskrat you just give him a little tap between the eyes.
R: And it takes a long time to drowned them then

R-l: Yeah, I know.

I: A beaver?

R-l: To drowned muskrat, that's no good.

I: How long does it take to drowned a beaver?

R: Well, I don't know but it seems that it takes forever; I suppose because it's so powerful and when it starts to run out of air and it wants to get air and it starts to fight, well boy, it's so powerful it seems that it takes forever to drowned and then you can feel it that it's almost to draw in the water and then it goes back again...and it'll do that you can feel it just...

I: You can feel how it's struggling.

R: Un huh, but then after it once draws in well then there's bubbles starting to come too. Then it kind of loses its senses too...as soon as it draws in water well it'll lose its senses.

R-l: How about...do you ever drowned muskrats by hand or do you just plunk them out.

R: I just plunk them, I think.

Stop in tape

R: By golly you know, that would have been the only set we could have gotten for that whole darn area, so we didn't place a trap; but it was the end of the channel...you know how they've got those channels there on that Arnheim swamp there?

R-l: Those ditches in there.

R: Yeah, well then it was...it narrowed down and there was just a little trickle of water and you could see that that was being used by game and there was otter tracks there. And we were quite tempted to put a trap there, but it would have been a lot of trouble.

R-l: Just for one trap?

R: Just for one trap, so we decided it was...

R-l: I'm lucky, I can drive within twenty-yards of this trap.

R: Yeah?
R-l: With the jeep.

Stop in tape.

R: But that poor guy he's got so little bit water and there was no reason for having that little bit water. There was water all around but where his stakes were driven in...well that beaver never would come...not one of them. And he had lots of traps and it's a good place there but we never set a trap there...we let him trap there.

R-l: Does he have tags there on his traps?

R: I never looked.

I: Art told me that you had lost some traps, some Conna Bear traps.

R: Yeah...yeah we lost one Conna Bear and then two number fourteen jumps...and that kind of hurts.

R-l: Can you use those number fourteen jumps for coyote and

R: Oh yeah...they're number one for (???)...that's all they're good for.

R-l: Why do you say that?

R: There's a purpose for each trap...see a jump trap with one spring...it's a one-way trap really. You set it on a trail...you don't know which way that animal will come from, but for the bait, your spring is always placed toward the bait so the animal crouches there is no spring.

R-l: So you always have your spring away from where the animal's gonna come from.

R: And never set your trap crosswise.

I: Why do you call it a jump trap?

R: Well, a jump trap...well it's intended that as it springs it'll give an extra boost and get a higher grip on the animal.

I: I see

R-l: I'll betcha...I'm gonna have to check that one, I'll betcha I got that one maybe set so that animal is gonna...

R: Come over the spring?

R-l: Come over the spring...I don't know, I'd have to check that.
R: And that's why I want to tell everybody the proper way of setting a trap...they might say I'm kind of closed mouth about trapping, but there's certain things sure I'll keep to myself too; but I can't see that somebody will get toes and legs and cripple an animal. I think that he should get it if he does much of that...or he should just stay away altogether.

Right

R: If I can help it, well I'll tell him.

I: They probably just don't know yet how to do it.

R: That's right.

I: No one would.

R: And there are so many that will not tell.

I: Oh, because of the competition.

R: Yeah...they figure well sure if they start to catch animals well there is a chance that he'll follow up on that. He won't get disgusted. A lot of them will get disgusted, you know, if all they get is legs. But still I don't think it's right. And that's where this comes in...this anti-trap people well they say that how animals are tortured in a trap...well there is truth to a certain extent. But a real trapper, he won't torture an animal. And you take a coyote in a trap...I've seen this and a fox...a lot of times that damn thing will be sleeping in a trap. It's not being tortured too much.

R-l: Is that from exhaustion that they're sleeping?

R: I wouldn't think so. I'll show you a coyote trap that I use. It's caught but it's not really...it never breaks a leg in that trap.

R-l: But you put that on a drag, don't you?

R: Un huh

R-l: How do you follow the drag?

R: Oh, it leaves a mark

Does it?

R: Un huh...and it usually doesn't go too far.

T: Is it generally a pole or something that keeps...
R: No, I use a two-prong type drag...I use a pole occasionally.

R-l: But what's the purpose of the drag Leonard?

R: Well, there's a lot of times I sit right along side the road where I can just drive the car and I can see the trap and well when it gets caught...

R-l: It gets back away from the road.

R: Yeah, it gets back away from the road

R-l: Un huh, I can see it then, but...

R: But if there's no danger of anybody taking it, well it's best to stake.

R-l: To stake it taught or put a spring in it.

R: Stake it right short...real short on a chain. The taughter you get it...

R-l: The only real reason for a drag then is for the animal to get out of the way so somebody else doesn't find it.

R: That's right.

R-l: Oh well, then I wouldn't have any need for that because where I'm trapping, it's all my own property...or adjoining property.

R: Did you hear where they brought the bounty off now.

R-l: No, I don't know.

I: That should have been decided last Friday, but I didn't find out.

R: Yeah, I didn't...did you see my article?

I: No...what paper...Mining Gazette?

R: Mining Gazette.

I heard about it...was that...that was you, right?

R: Yeah

I: No, I didn't see it...I don't get the Mining Gazette. No, I'd like to read it.

R: It was really better, but they didn't print all of it because it was too long...it was 460 words and you're not allowed but 300.
R-1: So they cut it down to 300?

R: They didn't cut it...they didn't even publish it and I wrote...or they called up and I asked what the hell's the matter that they didn't publish it...they said it's too long. They're not to apt to publish anything like what I wrote.

in tape

R: Letter that I wrote...they wanta make the trapper a thief and a violator...all the trappers violators like say now, all this bounty it causes fraud...I'll say that. Okay...

I: Does it cause fraud?

R: It may cause to a certain degree...say that on the border of Wisconsin there's no bounty...alright they might trap a coyote even from the Wisconsin side...the Michigan trappers, and they'll bounty it in Michigan or maybe again, they'll get some hides from Wisconsin which they'll bounty. There are individuals that'll do that; but okay, if it's so on the border...

It's ranging there anyway.

R: It'll eat the Michigan game anyway.

I: Of course, a guy could go way into Wisconsin.

R: Anyway, they had so much fraud in our own Conservation Department that I know of, that I just couldn't take it anymore. I wrote that well they make out the trapper as a big crook, you know. That is, does his...practices fraud and there has been known to be fraud in our own Conservation.

I: It's mainly the DNR people though, that are doing this, right?

R: Oh sure...well like there was this one guy...he had horses and he had...well he was higher up in this Conservation and he had power men and all these smaller guys, they were working for him...under him. Well, anyway, he used the Conservation funds for making fences for the horses and the guys were building fences on their Conservation time. Well I don't know who found out about it, but there are a lot of people that are against this Conservation that way it is. It's turned to be a money racket in many ways. It seems that they continually just thinking of the money and not about the game. Like one time at our meeting the price on beaver was way down...was maybe eleven dollars for a blanket. Well, there wasn't all that many beaver; so I brought it up, I said that well when there's no price on the hides that the only one that's making money is the Conservation Department. That you pay a dollar a hide for saving them and you get...and you buy a two dollar license, it's three dollars providing you get
one small beaver and you get a buck and a half for that small beaver and you put yourself in the hole. That let's have a closed season...Rafferty was to that meeting and he said, "You'll never get it...we need the money". So I said, "Is that the right attitude for a game." And I don't think it's the right attitude.

I: He was probably telling you the truth though...he was being honest.

R: Oh yeah, he was honest; but now I don't believe in that really. Kill for no reason, you know, that there's no money for anybody. It's just like taking the damn thing by the tail and throwing it away when we haven't got all that many. And a lot of it...well most of the trappers were throwing the little ones away. I never threw a beaver away no matter how small it was because I figure I killed it, I'll sell the damn thing even if I don't get but fifty cents and I've tanned every one.

I: Just so that you wouldn't kill it for nothing.

R: Yeah

How effective is that limit though...nobody pays any attention to that.

R: No, and they know it. Like now down state, there's no limit as to how many beaver.

Oh?

R: No...and we asked Rafferty, he was at our last meeting again, that how come down state doesn't have a limit and we have here in the UP and they were trying to cut it down to three beaver. He said that, "Well, they're trying it out to see how it'll work that they'll have a shorter season and then your wives and grandmas and brothers and sisters don't have to buy licenses." So they know what's going on. If it'll work they'll try it here too.

A lot of...I know people that have forty beaver...or say they have forty beaver already this year. Whether they do or not, I don't know; but they say they've got 'em...that limit doesn't ever stop anybody; of course, it does make more money for the DNR.

R: Yeah, and they're really happy about it. They know it and, you know, well when Rafferty he called me and he asked what would I think that if they cut the beaver limit down to three. I said, that we allowed you to cut it down to six but if it's cut down to three, close the season...there's no use even opening the season I said..."for one, I won't buy a license"...I said that that's only money for the
conservation and there isn't all that much money in beaver trapping that I'd start to buy that many licenses then that it would work out. See, it would give an extra two dollars more each license they sold; but...

I: It's gone that way with everything, though, look at the deer licenses are...and they're speaking of increasing the small game license and the fishing license...make the wife buy a fishing license. Get more money to feed those secretaries and clerks and...

R: That's right

You know like who is in favor of getting a license for the women though?

T: Who:

Women's Lib

T: Oh yeah?

Yeah...that's the big lobby for it. They say there's no reason why a married woman should be able to fish for nothing and a single woman should have to buy a license. They say that that's discrimination and they're asking that all women buy a fishing license. Now, in my case, I fish maybe fifty-sixty days a year...my wife will fish maybe two days a year. But now she won't fish at all because there's no sense at all in buying a license for just two days.

Stop in tape

And I believe in it, I think that we do need law enforcement if no more from just a threat standpoint.

R: That's exactly what I wrote in my article, I said that we've had the conservation longer than we have had the bounty and we still have the violators also; but I still believe in law enforcement.

R-1: Well I told Snyder that I would never arrest anyone personally; and that many times I won't tell him the information that I know...that I get through my friendships. If I know a friend of mine if violating, I'm gonna tell the guy that I don't do that and I don't approve of it; but if we're out looking...on patrol and we catch one of my friends violating, you know, he's gonna get caught, that's all.

R: Oh yeah.

I: But that's different.
R: Yeah, that's different. You know, I always said this...I've violated my share too. I'm not even trying to hide it; but ...and I've told it to full-fledged game wardens too that I have been a violator and I have violated; but I have said that when I go violating I know I'm doing something wrong. And if I'm caught, I don't hold it against the officer. He's only doing his job...and I don't. I think that providing that he does his job, you know, in an orderly manner.

I: How many people that violate, Leonard would you think really need it for the meat?

R: Nobody now, really. I think that are on relief even get enough so that they wouldn't have to.

R-1: To tell you the truth, you know when I've been on patrol, we've confiscated game and fish and I worked mostly with Snyder and he knows the people that are potential violators from a standpoint of no money, you know...I mean like old people that live out in the woods that don't have any money and I remember that one time we drove way out of our way and walked way out of our way to take a guy some lake trout that we'd gotten out of some nets because as long as the game is killed and it's gotta go to somebody.

I: And he couldn't very well take it for the bad publicity that it might...

R-1: No...you just give it to somebody who is a potential violator from an economic standpoint...not from a thrill standpoint...take away their reason for violating, you know, and the guy appreciates it and they don't violate as a result because they know that the game warden will give them a deer if he gets a road kill or if he gets an illegal one and a lot of those guys depend on it.

I: You mean the conservation officers take care of a few families as far as meat is concerned.

R: Well, I know one time this guy he had, well he claimed that he had twenty-one children, but he had ten and his wife had twenty-one. He had ten with the wife and she had eleven from the previous marriage so he had twenty-one but he had ten children. Well, anyway, he was caught spearing rainbow...Snyder caught him. I don't know...I never talk about these to anybody, but anyway, that guy is dead now...he got killed in a car accident. Well, Snyder didn't take that fish away...he took enough, I guess, just enough for evidence; but he said to go and get that fish tomorrow...but he did arrest him. That's what I heard...that Snyder paid the fine.

R-1: Snyder paid the fine?

R: Un huh
I believe it.

R: Yeah, but he did his duty. He arrested the guy, but he paid the fine and let the guy get the fish.

I: Get the fish that he used as evidence?

R: Un huh... see they had a great big bag of it I guess; so Snyder just took one probably or...

I: That shows me one hell of a lot.

Snyder isn't well liked... mostly because of his position, but he's a very compassionate man... that he's absolute in the way he interprets the laws... if you're breaking the law you are to be arrested. But, if... he won't make compensations... if he feels you are justified he will try to make it up to you in other ways. I know, one time I was out... I just first came to the county and I was out partridge hunting and I'll be damned if I didn't shoot two spruce hens. Dumb on my part, I never should have shot them. But I didn't know they were spruce hens and I was hunting behind a dog and the dog came on point in the woods and I went in and the bird flushed and I shot it... dead... flushed in heavy brush, you know. So, I got these two spruce hens and I came back... I had some partridge too, and I came back and I worked for Snyder's wife. And I stopped in and I said, "Jack, I really feel bad, I shot a couple of those that are protected, I think, I don't know." He said, "Were you hunting out on the plains?" And I said, "Yeah." And he says, "I don't want to see those animals because if I see them you will be arrested and if I caught you on the road you would be arrested; but," he said, "now that you know what they are, I expect that you won't shoot anymore of them," and he says, "now I expect that you just stay away from that area when you're hunting in the future." And that was it. But I went there; because I figured that if I've got it coming, I'll get arrested. I really felt bad because I don't think people should shoot spruce hens... if they're on the protected list they're...

I: I've never even seen one in the woods

Stop in tape

R: And then there's no object in going there... they'll drowned if there's anything...

If I was gonna eat 'em I'd just as soon have 'em.

R: Oh, fresh then.

R-1: That's one reason I was so much in a hurry to clean that one that we got that one night, Mike, because the meat would be so much better.
R: How did you like that?

R-1: Oh, I loved it.

I: I've been living on beaver. I've had about five of 'em so far. I get up in the morning and I throw beaver in the frying pan with my eggs. It makes them medium rare with a little salt and pepper on it and eat it. I like it kind of rare in the morning...and I like it kind of rare in the afternoon too and then we've had with mojaka...we've had it fried. Makes a damn good mojaka.

R: Yeah, that's how I like it best.

I: Get some rutabagas and some potatoes...just like beef mojaka.

R: Yeah?

I: Damn good...in fact I like it a little better than beef...it's so tender.

R: Oh yeah...it is tender.

Stop in tape

I: Has to be done just right, eh?

R: If you've got a good hide, you can demand a good prive. But, if you know that your hide isn't all that good, you can't hardly demand a good price either.

I: Preparation has a lot to it, eh?

R: Un huh

I: Can two people get the same hide and one guy'll get quite a bit more than the other?

R: Oh yeah...yeah, I...well this is several years ago...Bill Karo he brought an otter to me and he had skinned one exactly the same size and everything and he said, "Well, by gosh, how do you skin an otter?" He'd like to see it. "Well," I said, "that's one that takes a lot of time and patience...that's all there's really to it." Well then he said well wouldn't I skin that otter for him. So, anyway, after he went to sell, well he got eight dollars more for the one that I skinned.

I: Than the one that he skinned.

R: Un huh

R-1: Eight dollars! Holy Christ, I didn't realize that.

R: He said that it sure pays off to take a little time. Well,
if it pays to trap it, it sure pays to take care of it after that. That's the hardest thing to catch anywhere. I think it's the hardest animal to catch and trap. You can probably catch one real easy, but then when you are after him for a longer time you find out that by golly they're not all that easy to catch. But, I've caught some in beaver traps just... and that doesn't give me any satisfaction when I get it out of a beaver trap...I didn't mean for it then. It's...but then when I get one when I make a set for the darn thing... you know, it's all together different. When you trap for beaver and you get an otter, you didn't get what you wanted.

in tape.

R: Well normally it's been North wind and East wind, but well normally it should be West...no South.

I: Is that the best trapping wind?

R: Well, toward the spring, you get a lot of South wind and West wind.

I: Early spring you get North wind?

R: Well, now we've had it for a long time... North and Northeast and East.

I: Do you generally catch an animal when it comes from the water to the land or from the land to the water?

R: When it comes...well water animal you get it when it comes on land from the water.

I: Un huh...so you want to place it ideally where the wind is blowing from the water on the land so the animal couldn't get the human scent.

R: Right.

I'm wondering about that human scent. How important that really is. Where this otter was there hadda be all kinds of human scent there.

R: Well, I'll tell you what I have noticed with otter mostly is that if you have a lot of disturbance they'll shy away, but they're...I don't know about the scent so much, but I have seen where they shy away when there's a disturbance unless they're used to it...a lot of people trap them.

in tape. 

R: Well, he'll take the biggest hides and he'll skin 'em and stretch 'em...well he took two of the biggest beaver that we had and he took 'em home and he skinned them, you know, and
They were full of it...you know, little cuts on the hide.

On the hide?

R: Yeah, but not all the way through

I know what you mean because right at the base of the tail on a beaver that's real tight hard fat right there.

R: Yeah. So, I said that can't really do it myself. That I know how it should be done but I don't do it right myself. That I'm not criticizing or anything because I can't do it any better myself even that...he said, "You should try and skin that.....".

I: Do you ever set them up like this one?

R: Yeah...yeah I always hang them up.

R-1: To get started you don't...but once you're started...

R: After you get the hind legs

I: Otter wouldn't taste good, would it

R: I'm afraid not

You want the carcass, Mike, I'll give it to you. Or if Leonard wants it, I'll give it to him too. Do you have any use for a carcass...an otter carcass? Do you...is there anything you can use it for?

R: Well, no I...

I: Feed it to Spook.

Cat food, I suppose.

R: I don't think that a cat would eat it or even a dog.

Stop in tape.

I: Where do you skin your catch?

R: Oh, it depends...if it's a long ways to carry I'll skin it right there and just carry the hide...they're a bugger to carry, you know.

There isn't any easy way to carry a beaver, is there.

R: Unt...un.

Luckily when we got that one...hell we were only two hundred
yards from the house and Mike and I with each of us on a hind leg and it was still plenty...much of a bugger trying to...

R: You wanna hear a funny thing...I had a friend who was down state, you know, they have a farm up here, anyway they came up hunting and well, here they come to this beaver dam and he said that "You know some people say that they're so good to eat" that boy he'd like to try it. Well, I set a trap for him so he could try a little beaver. This was out of season but this was when the bootleg hides were bringing just about as much as you're getting for them now, you know. Well I said that I'd be glad to come and set a trap if I can have the hide. "Oh yeah and I'll go there tomorrow morning and we'll see and if there's something I'll bring him in." So, I set a trap and son-of-a-gun there was a big beaver in there...so he tried carrying it and he couldn't make it very far with it so he went home and he got a wheelbarrow...he had that damn beaver on the wheelbarrow...he pushed it home in that and he said, "boy, I betcha if I'd a met up with a game warden he sure couldn't a helped but laugh watching me push that God darn beaver home with a wheelbarrow."

If I were a game warden, I would just get out of the way... till he got all the way to the road and then get him, you know, let him do it and then not even bother to fine him.

I: Get a picture of him and threaten to publish the picture.

in tape.

R: He had a junk car, you know, made out of a old car tractor, you know. So, it had a little box on the...dump box, you know, so anyway, he came up here with that and he said, "We'll take this that this is good enough to go." Well, we didn't have any lights but we used the headlights you know to drive around. So, we went to Summit Road and he said, "Gol darn, I forgot that the headlights will give us away and these roads are all deadend yet besides. All they have to do is if they see that we're in the way, until we get out," he said. And I said that, "Were in the hell are we gonna hide it if we do get one?" Well he said, "We'll just put it in the back and have you sit right in there with it; and if there's somebody there well all I'll do is that I'll trip that God damn box and leave you and the deer on the road and I'll just keep on going." I said, "Well, what if they see the God darn deer?" "Well, then I'll just say that, Oh, I thought there was something that I drove over...that it was that deer."

R-1: Who me? No, I don't know anything about a deer

R: Oh, he was such a God darn card.

in tape.
R: Here's a funny one...if it is true. These are supposed to be guys from Covington they wanted to go shining on the plains there and well they knew that it was being watched real close by the game warden so they decided that well they're going to outsmart the game wardens but they'll go there anyway and if they get a deer they're going to hang it right on the car door handle and a guy will be standing on the running board...at that time the cars had running boards yet, you know, and if there's a blockade well all he has to do is yank that god darn deer and they just keep on driving ahead and then they haven't got anything illegal...well they can't do anything. So, they went and they shot a deer and they hung it on the door handle and sure enough there was a blockade. So, this guy he got excited that was supposed to pull that deer off and drag it in the woods, well he jumped off and he couldn't yank that God darn deer off. He was left and the guys went ahead and there's that deer hanging on the God darn door handles. So, there was an officer on both sides of the road you know, and the car was crossways on the road. "You guys are under arrest." "Well, Jesus Christ, can't a fellow even drive around this fucking plains no more?" Finally he said, that, "What you got hanging here?" He said, "Son-of-a-bitch!" I guess they could have killed that third guy.

Stop in tape while everybody continues to crack up.

R: These are four inches.

R-1: Without stretching or anything, just poking it in and laying it out taught...without pulling on it.

R: Yeah, so then you bring it back up that four inches, you know, whatever line it overlaps, about four inches. And then you pin two nails on each side and right across where the legs are and, see how it stretches out. And then you take a hold of the center and see if it stretches that much.

I: To the four inches beyond the...

R: No...to that ring where you have those...it's a kind of a funny thing to explain, it's really hard. Well, anyway, well say that this would be a beaver hide...this won't work 'cause it's perfectly round.

R-1: You put the nails opposite of each of the four legs, just out from there and try to hit it on a ring. And then you find that ring by the ring that's four inches up from wherever the nose was and then you follow that ring around and nail right outside of the front legs and the hind legs...

R: Yup...and you hand it from that tip of the nose on a ring and they overlap about four inches, the ring that you figure through. Then you hold and pin it right across from each leg onto that ring, well then it will pull that hide short on (???
see, when it comes up. And then you take it from the middle and you just don't put any nails or anything, just see if it will stretch up to that ring. It's gotta stretch fairly easily to that ring in order that when you put all those nails it'll draw it tight before you can get to the tight ring, just like a banjo.

I: How long do you leave them on the board?
R: Oh, it's better if you have boards to leave them on.

Change to Side B

R: I made...that's made out of a (???) over there.
I: Hacksaw blade on the very
R: Yeah, this is.
I: And you welded that to something else, eh?
R: Yeah, this is a piece of three-eighth inch plywood.
I: And what's this here?
R: Well, this here is a hacksaw blade
I: The whole thing?
R: Yeah

R-l: Industrial hacksaw blade, not one like...
I: Oh, I see, an industrial hacksaw blade...I don't know what an industrial hacksaw blade is that's why I...

R-l: Automatic hacksaw
I: Just welded it to the pipe?
R: Yeah
I: You didn't have to temper it or do anything to it, it's just already tempered, eh?
R: Yeah, that's right.

Stop in tape.
I: You named it what?
R: A secret hole.
I: A secret hole?
Yeah, and I don't think there's too many guys fishing it.

I: You found that many years ago?

R: Oh yeah, I'd get a charge out of my dad. Some days you just don't get fish...they just don't bite. And he would go and he would say that well, "there's no damn fish"...he'd be real disgusted and then he'd go and he'd come and he was...you could just see his step and you'd know when he was coming along that road that when he got fish. He said, "well, there are some left yet".

I: So, that was a hole that your father knew.

R: Oh yeah

I: That's been a hole that's been in the family.

R: Oh yeah, spent a lot of time there.

R-1: Did your father live on this place?

R: Right cross the road. I was born in that house across the road.

I: The one where Heikkinen...(???)

R: Yeah

Stop in tape.

R: And the way they work it, they start out with the highest bid. They throw away all the smaller bids. They'll pick out the highest bid on the lot and then they're going to start bidding on it.

I: Do you think they're still in cahouts over here?

R: Oh definitely...they're not going to pay...see the way last fall, that Hudson Bay guy was buying hides and he was here at the Black Birch Cabins and he was paying a six dollar average for mink and it came close to ten average overnight there in Amasa.

R-2: The next day.

R-1: But one thing, are these guys going to stay around for the whole auction?

R: You mean the...?

R-1: In amasa this time?
R: Oh yeah.

R-1: Because last time, we started out with four buyers, and it was down to three and one guy wasn't even participating very much by the time I first got up. There was one guy'd already gone home and one guy wasn't even bidding.

R: Yeah, the thing was...there's that Hillman. He's a darn good buyer and you won't see him going here at the Department at all. Well, he said that, "I'm not even having any competition...that I'm making money." And still, he was paying the highest. So they couldn't do anything with them...out of the seventeen thousand dollars worth of hides that they sold, Hillman bought over twelve thousand dollars worth of hides alone.

R-1: Did he have a bigger bank role or a better outlet?

I: Probably both more, but at least a bigger bank roll.

R: No, he's buying for himself.

R-1: Oh, no middle man.

R: No, and these others are buying for the middle man.

I: Who is the middle man generally? What does the middle man do?

R: The middle man...

I: Tans?

R: No...no...the middle man doesn't tan. The middle man would be...say that I had a outlet for a big fur broker. I would be buying furs but you could be buying for me. And that's where.

R-2: You'd be the middle man.

R: I'd be the middle man

I: A middle man hires buyers to buy for him?

R: Sure

I: And he sells them to a big fur broker?

R: Right, un huh

I: Name a couple fur brokers.

R: Well, there'd be...I'd say Mass & Stephen & Co.

I: What do they do with the furs?
They probably sell to the foreign countries and they probably have... I don't really know about Mass & Stephen either, but that would be a probably one... Mass & Stephen... and Singer's, there's Frank Singer and...

I: Where is that located?

R: They're mostly in New York.

I: Un hun, Mass & Stephen's in St. Louis, right?

R: St. Louis, yeah, Missouri.

R-2: Well, does Sears Roebuck and...

R: Sears is out of business.

R-2: That's what I thought.

R: They went... Sears was contracting for Mass & Stephen. They were a middle man and I was trapping with a fellow... this was in the fall of the year and we were trapping mink and muskrat, so we got into an argument and he said that Sears was better than Mass & Stephen. I said that, "Well, I'll tell you that you'll find out," I said, "that I'll swear by Mass & Stephen." And we got into such an argument about it that I said, "I'll prove it to you. That we'll send the hides into Sears first and we'll tell them to hold the hides and we'll call them back regardless what they pay, and I'll bet a dollar per hide that we'll get more for them if we send those same hides to Mass & Stephen." Well now, we sent them to Sears and we called them back and they were the same hides and we sent them to Mass & Stephen and we got a dollar more for each mink and a little bit more for each rat. But, was exactly one dollar more on the mink.

Stop in tape.

This next bit of recording will be actual transactions at the fur sale... not the big fur sale, but this will be at the Conservation Department in Baraga. Art Mutkala is going to go over there and he told me that even if they give him a bad price that he doesn't have to sell them there. He just wants to find out about how much they're offering. (R-4: is Art Mutkala).

As there are unidentified persons speaking in this segment, they are indicated with an X: for identification purposes only.

R: At the sale last fall... they were at the White Birch Motel and he was buying mink for six dollars a pelt, an outrage, and when it went to Amasa, it was over nine average.

I: Hudson Bay used that price to get in and cut in early.
X: Well, he does pay good for rats...for the guys...three bucks a piece...

R: Three bucks a piece!

X: ...for rats.

X: Oh that's good...Jesus Christ the prices...

R: Well, maybe it pays to sell the rats, eh?

R-4: I got skins here but the God dang...they aren't very big though.

X: Somebody said the fox pelts were selling for thirty bucks.

R: Yeah, that could be.

X: Fox are way up.

R-4: You don't have to have a license do you for that when you take them off your own land.

R: No

X: I'll call Ronnie Allalo (???)

I: Yeah, he might want to come over and get rid of them here. Would he get a better price for fox at the fur sale?

R: It's hard to say. I think that you won't lose. See there's gonna be six or seven buyers for sure.

X: Fox are good price regardless where you sell them. They're a way up there.

R: Yeah, Oscar Saari was selling coyotes without the scalp and they were shot with a 30.06 and fourteen dollars and fifteen dollars a piece.

R-4: Longhair getting fifteen I heard here.

X: Longhaired fur is pretty good.

R: Yeah, I would think that that they would be a better price on 'em. But then you have to figure your two percent...that isn't too much though, it's two dollars on a hundred.

R-4: Is it? There's one God darn possibility though it'll go late as it is...that they'll wait to award the furs.

R: Yeah, that's a possibility to that too.

R-4: Yeah, that's the way it used to be here, you know.

X: That sale at Amasa?

R: Yeah.
X: When is that...the twenty-eighth and ninth?
R: Yeah, I think that's how it was. I forget already.
R-4: That's Saturday and Sunday.
R: Yeah, Saturday and Sunday.
R-4: That's when they...
I: The last two days of the month.
R: Un huh.
X: You didn't sell that now. What'd he offer you
R-4: I didn't know...I didn't ask him
X: Well, I know I got three small skins here.
R: It would be kind of good to see what he would offer.
R-4: Yeah
R: And then you know if it's worth anything.

Stop in tape.
I: You first...you don't draw a circle.
R-4: I don't, no. I just put about three nails on the tip of the
nose and I pull the tail end on it approximately what I think
it will stretch...I have my knee on that part and I grab ahold
of each side and I stretch that out. That way you have four
points of stretching and then you start stretching...I mean
tacking the nails inbetween each nail.
I: So, you'd nail those four points and then you just.
R-4: And then I nail...well then the next nail comes into the
middle of the longest (???) and say it's on the right lower
part of that behind, you put one there and then you put the
other one on the opposite side higher (???).
I: Is it possible to over-stretch a hide?
R-4: Yeah, it is
I: Does that hurt you on the price?
R-4: Yeah, but you can't over-stretch it without pulling it with
a pair of pliers...you can't pull it hard because of the
nails right there. We have done that...sometimes you get a
thick hide...those hides don't all stretch alike. I want to take a (?) out with a pair of pliers...one guy pulling and the other guy tacking. I, ah, I skinned a beaver one time and it was impossible to stretch that hide...only had three legs on it...my brother got that one...it just made a long narrow hide that's all, you couldn't get a circle no matter what. There was no fat on it to begin with.

I: Leonard does his by that circle method.

R-4: Oh...how does he determine the size of the circle?

I: Oh, he just looks at the hide and estimates it, you know.

R: Well it comes pretty darn close to what you gotta stretch it to.

R-4: If you pick it up by the nose and measure the length of it...how high it hangs on its own...in inches, you put it cross-wise that wide too. You gotta stretch it though to get it.

I: Yeah, I guess you could estimate it pretty close by stretching it as far as you think it'll go, eh?

R-4: Yeah

I: You don't fool with muskrats ever, eh?

R-4: No, I haven't.

I: Jees, for three bucks it's almost worth it, eh?

R-4: It is, but I never seen anybody that knows how to skin a muskrat...that I don't know, it seems to me that it's such a bugger to do. I know a guy that can do that in two or three minutes, you know.

I: Don Shirley can do one in a minute or so...couple minutes. He says there's nothing to it. He thought that beaver was the toughest thing he's ever done though.

R-4: Yeah...wait'll he tackles that otter.

I: He already did. That's what we were doing over at Leonard's yesterday.

R-4: Oh...oh

I: Leonard was showing him how to skin it and put it on a board, you know.

R-4: I'd rather skin a beaver anytime than an otter.
I: When they sell those otters like that on the board, how do... does the fur buyer turn them inside out and look at the fur?

R-4: No...no...by the little bit they can can reach on the back they can tell what it's worth.

I: So they don't look at the quality of the fur at all.

Yeah, they can try to get a little bit from the tail end, they can tell from that about the fur is like.

I: I know that guy judges the quality of those skins real quick. He just looks at 'em and runs his hand on 'em.

Sometimes then the hair gets curled on an otter and they don't like that. It curls and it gets brown. They claim the sun will do that if you leave them in the sun.

I: But jees, it you can get forty - fifty bucks on an otter. you got what...how many otter?

R-4: Two otter...that's all I could get.

I: Two?

I doubt if you'd get that much now...In fact, I doubt it very much.

I: That's some pretty good money