FINNISH FOLKLORE AND SOCIAL CHANGE IN THE GREAT LAKES MINING REGION ORAL HISTORY PROJECT 1972-1978
(Funded in part by the National Endowment For The Humanities)

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July 18, 1973

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School grows--Finnish % almost 50%

Nick was first Finnish school board president

Finns not aggressive enough to get high rank

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1.

Well here we are in Mass, Michigan at the home of Nick Kukkarila for another Oral History interview to record on the folklore and social changes in the Great Lakes Mining Region and recollections of the north country which designates the areas in which this oral history interview is conducted. The history survey is being conducted on the through a national endowment for the humanities grant. I have this format provided for my by the Oral History staff at Suomi. I'll get right into that. The first category is the family background. When did the first member of your family arrive in the Lake Superior Region? Would that be before 1875 or 1900 or when?

R

Well my father was the first and he came to Republic before 1890. In fact they were married around 1890 after my mother came to this country. My father had a business in Ishpeming and from Ishpeming he went to Hancock and he worked for the Northern Book Concern in the office there and from there he came to Mass in 1905 and finally settled in Mass in 1905.

I

Okay why did your father with his family settle in the Lake Superior region? Was it because there was work to be had in the mines or woods or was it to have an opportunity to have his own farm or what would you say was the main reason for his coming here?

R

Well of course my dad came over from Finland just like alot of other people came over here. He always wanted to be a seafaring man but for some reason or the other his father didn't want it and it didn't run in the family so he came to this country and settled momentarily in Pennsylvania, then he came into the Iron Range and Republic area. He was just a small man, not physically built and he did go into business in Ishpeming. In the store business. I guess during the Depression time there, during President Cleveland's time things didn't go too good. So he had a lot of bills owing to him and decided to get out of the grocery business and he had a chance to work for the Book Concern in Hancock. From there he came to Mass and the reason he came was the superintendent of the Mass Mine Mr. Wilcox was looking for a Finnish man to do some clerical work and the Nehr brothers store who were old pioneers had recommended my father. So they got him to come from the Northern Book Concern over here to Mass. This is where he died in Mass.

I

During your lifetime Nick in about how many different places have you resided?

R

Well is that relative to me myself?

I

Yes it is.

R

Well I was born in Ishpeming and then we came to Hancock and then to Mass and I started school here. In about 1905 and then in 1912 I decided to join the Army. I joined the Radar Division, that was the Michigan National Guard combined with the brigade in the Wisconsin National Guard. I was severely wounded on August 28, 1918.
I spent a lot of time in the government hospitals both overseas and in this country. Then I settled in Detroit and stayed in Detroit for several years and then I went sailing on the Great Lakes for 3 years and then from sailing I went into Chicago and worked for the printing concern for about six years. My health became so bad that I was forced to leave there so I came back to Mass. I had various little jobs here and finally settled in the Post Office and worked there for approximately 22 years and retired from there. That was about ten years ago.

Okay that's fine, now without spending too much time on it we'll complete portions of this family tree here you already gave your birth place but could we have your birth date for the records?

I was born on November 12, 1898. In Ishpeming, Michigan.

Did you have brothers and sisters?

Yes, I had 3 brothers and 4 sisters. We had 8 in the family.

Just for a little bit of additional information do you remember what part of Finland your father came from?

My father came from _______________ Finland.

And your mother came from where?

______________ Finland and I noticed they aren't too far apart on the map.

Okay, do you have children?

I have one son and he's a mining engineer in the state of Massachusetts at the present time.

When was he born?

He was born May 28, 1935.

Okay that'll about do it for now on the family tree. Let's move on to the section on the personal skills of you personally and your parents. The instructions here say please circle the number which indicates the year of the formal education? This is for the family members listed on this. Okay let's start off with you. How many years of formal education did you have?

I had one year of high school and then I had to go to work. Then I went to work in the Mass mine and went into the service and after I came out of the service in 1919 and spent some years in the hospitals I took up vocational education from the government. For three years at least.

Was that through correspondence?

No, it was regular school oh like the ex-soldiers get but the disabled soldiers got it after World War II.
I took that training in Detroit in the Detroit Commercial College for about 3 years.

Okay, I forgot to ask where your wife was born?

My wife was born right here in Mass.

She's had quite a bit, she's taught school for 30 years and she a Bachelor's Degree in Elementary Education.

How much formal education did your father have first in Finland and then in this country?

I don't know how much he had in Finland and I don't know how much he had in this country but he was generally employed around books and figures and things like that.

On the job training mostly then.

Yes

Although it wasn't specifically that.

No, but that's what it amounted to.

Did your mother have any special education?

No, I don't think she did.

No formal education.

No, because they were both young when they came to this country.

And you've already mentioned your son.

Yes, he's a Michigan Tech graduate. He was an engineer at White Pine for about six or 7 years.

I know him, his name is Walter

Yes.

In fact I worked for him on conveyor belts. Okay let's look into the variety of personal skills. Which different family members of yours may have had. Okay let's start with yourself. In your course of travels did you learn other languages in addition to Finnish?

No, I had quite a bit of Finnish education, Sunday School and summer school and after confirmation of course that sort of relaxed.

That's one thing we were fortunate in our generation we had those summer schools. Even people who were antagonistic to the church made sure there children went to summer school.
That's one thing that we are fortunate in our generation we had those summer schools. Even people that were antagonistic to the church made sure their kids got to those summer schools.

It's amazing how many of these people that I never saw at Sunday School, or summer schools, or church schools, in fact I believe some of those people are better equipped than I am. I don't know where they got that education. Of course this is a great body of communists. This area was referred to the hot bed of the state of Michigan.

I've heard that

They had their schools. To counter act our Boy Scouts they had what they called their young pioneers. They educated them here at the labor hall here.

Did your wife have any special skills, or craft work?

Well she's been taking up painting as a recreation and she's had quite a bit of education in elementary teaching. She's been down in Illinois and to alot of them short term courses. Most of her stuff has been relative to her professions.

Did your mother have any special skills?

No, I could say she seemed to excell in cooking. When she came from the old country she worked for some German people and didn't know a word of English. She was a wonderful cook. Well we had eight children and she did alot of sewing. Outside of acquiring any skills outside why I don't know that she had any.

Yes, she did weave rugs, we had those looms and she did quite a bit of that.

Even though they didn't own the looms themselves they used to get access to them.

Yes, and I used to even pound that thing once in a while.

Your own skills ran in the direction of what?

Well I'm not mechanically inclined, I'm no good with carpenter tools. My objection in life had I had some sort of education would have to go into some sort of historical research. That's what always has interested me and I have been doing alot of this research here which I enjoy very much.

Any artistic talents in the family or immediate family or your parents?

Well I wouldn't say there was too much artistic talent. I do a little cartooning when the mood comes upon me.
R In a lot of my letters I'll cartoon things just to make it a little more interesting.

I Was anybody in your family particularly interested in track or field or team sports?

R Well I guess we were all good baseball players. My oldest brother a banker in Ohio and he was interested in all the athletics. How about skiing?

R Oh yes, our son is a great skier and I was quite a skier. All of our boys were good skiers. We also did a lot of skating.

I Here comes a part that's very interesting and I like to draw people out on it. This is about medical, home remedies and bleeding, do you recall any home remedies that your parents brought from Finland?

R Well I really don't know what they brought from Finland but there were two remedies that were brought from every household. This really amuses me because we had different friends that were always advocates of mail order houses Montgomery Wards and others were Sears and Roebuck. Because we were wards we used to knock down Sears. Then there were these two patent medicines. One was called Golden Relief and the other was called Wizard Oil. So we'd go into a house and ask well what do you use in your house? Well we use Wizard Oil and we'd say well we're Golden Relief people. If we started to get a little cold my mother would pour a little Golden Relief and we never had a sign on our door for infectious diseases.

I Do you remember the old timers talking about a substance called Hoffman Drops?

R Oh yes, the old lumberjacks used to use them.

I I think the Finns used to call them ________________

R The lumberjacks used to use them because I believe there was liquor in them and when they couldn't get liquor in the dry days they would look around for them drops.

I Okay what about bleeding was there any practice of that art?

R Well we've had a lot of ________________ in this town. I remember one little woman they used to call her ________________. She did this to my mother a few times. They'd make a few cross cuts and then use a cow's horn and draw that blood out. My mother had that done quite often and she always had much relief afterwards.

I Now a days coming into the limelight a lot is this acupuncture

R Yes.

I And we have already several people in our county reporting cures.
Yes, we have people here that go to Doctor Koitunen.

Yes, but before we get out of cupping we have a guy here who used to go work on people with little rubber hammers. We used to call him Doc Yak, although his name was Mustonen. He had been in some kind of employment in the Newberry Institution and had acquired a little bit of knowledge so he came around. I don't think he did much massaging but he had a little rubber hammer and my father was hard of hearing and this gentleman came in. First of all I had to get a dinner plate and then a piece of newspaper and made a cone out of that and he burned that. It left a little liquid and he put that in my father's ear and then he took that little hammer and started pounding all around my father's head. Finally my father got kind of angry because his hearing was just about gone and he became very indignant because he was getting a headache. So he told the guy to take his tools and go away. I know a guy in the country who had a sore back and he took an iron bar and was pounding on it until the guy got so mad he chased him down the road. Well this guy thought he had some supernatural powers because he thought by even talking to you he could do some good. I recall a friend and I went to visit him and this Mustonen had a room in this guy's house. This man was sitting at the table with rubber rings around his fingers, red rubber rings around each finger independently. I said Charlie what's this, have you flipped your lid? He said no, the good Doc put those on to cure a toothache. I was going to go to the dentist and the good doc came in and said you put these on your fingers and keep them spread out like this for two hours and be quiet. So I couldn't wait out the two hours but I saw him a few days later and he said I had to go to the dentist and have the tooth out.

Now this area, and this second generation I'm sure are well acquainted with Mrs. Juntunen's aunt.

Oh yes.

You are.

Yes, she lives in Hancock.

Somewhere in that general area

Then there is a doctor I think is Finnish but I'm not sure called Doctor Bulleh.

That's Doctor Bullen. No, he was in Wakefield.

But he had a product similar to Mrs. Juntunen's

Yes, he did. He had a product that had pitch in it. Have you ever seen his product?

No, but I've seen it advertised
I'll just get you a can as quick as a can. This is a remarkable product. If I have anything serious this is quite the stuff and what I'd use. This was put out by Doc Bullen.

How long ago would you say he died.

I'd say Doc Bullen has been dead at least 12 years.

It was Mrs. Juntunen's salve I think I saw advertised in the bus station.

Yes, my sister from Houghton gave me a jar of that. I've even got inscribed behind here Bullen's salve just so I would know what it is.

Of the skills you listed in the previous question, which ones did you learn directly from your parents. Did your father for example have any hobbies of his own that he passed onto you or did most of the boys go their own way and pick up what they could.

If my father passed anything on to me it was the love of reading history because he read all of our school's history and he could talk by the hour on Finnish history. In fact when his hearing was almost gone and some of the ministers were writing history about the Suomi Synod in the Upper Peninsula around this west end, they used to come and talk with my father. That is something I think I've inherited from my father.

Now in turn do you think any of that rubbed off on your son Walt?

Yes, he's just starting. You know the unfortunate thing is with most of us is we have to get up near 40 or 50 years old before we realize we should be following this up. If I would have gone say when I came back from Detroit in or Chicago in 31 if I would have started delving in this when all the old timers are living I would have had one grand glorious thing out of it but you let them all die off and you relent the idea that you didn't start earlier.

Well there's one thing that I'm really interested, you mentioned that this town was referred to a hot bed of communism at one time. I'm just wondering with those ideas, how great was the tendency among the Finnish people towards moonshining. Now the Italians that was a speciality of theirs.

Well I think in the general class of moonshiners, I think we were very low. I used to drink a little moonshine myself in those days. Of course we didn't know everything that was going on. There were a few people that were very outward in their booze making, they didn't try to hide it at all. But I think we were very low throughout the county in Finnish moonshiners. There might have been a lot of guys drinking moonshine but making it would be against the law. It would make them an outlaw or whatever you care to call it.
Now going along another line, I heard during the Depression, of course you can only recall and I can the Depression of the early thirties, there was a great deal of game law violation going on among all nationalities.

Oh yes.

I even heard one of the old vertical mine shafts in White Pine would freezeup in the winter time from rain and melting snow going down there and it would form an enormous cake of ice and in the summer time that was their community locker.

Oh yes, we had a lot of things violated.

Well the game wardens themselves were inclined to look the other way as long as the people needed the food for themselves.

Yes, that's right. I think now with the meat shortage we're going to have the same thing all over again.

Imagine now what they raised that fine to. A $500 maximum.

It should be

Of course you always find those cases where people say we're hard up and can't afford to buy meat. Well nobody can. You can have money and you can't buy meat.

Yes.

There just isn't the game, now I haven't seen one dead deer on the highway this year. Of course I don't do much driving.

Well I was President of the Sportman's Club for about 20 years and I'm interested in conservation. I'm the type of man when I get interested in an organization I give it 100%. I went on all kinds of trips with the conservation people into the Porcupines. We studied deer yards and went to Seney to see what they were doing over there.

Well someday I want to talk to you at length about the controversy about the deer. The pros and cons of that and whether the loss of game is due to poaching or a combination of things.

Yes, that could be a good thing to talk about. I'm well versed on that subject.

Okay we'll look forward to a session on that sometime in the future. America has sometimes been described as a melting pot in the many nationalities and respective cultures. In this section of the survey we are interested in finding out to what degree you your parents or your children have preserved an interest in the language, culture, folkways and so forth of your own ethnic group? Would you say that your parents were moderately active or very active or not active at all in ethnic group efforts of different kinds?
I Were your parents active in any Finnish groups such as the church or temperance societies or any other endeavor?

R Well yes, my father was a very staunch church man and he also was a very strong temperance man. In fact he was one of the organizers up around the Ishpeming area and Republic in temperence work. Of course my mother was also very active in church activities. In the old days in this community it took a long time to get people interested in something that was for the good of the community. In the olden days, there was nothing The church worked for their own benefit, temperence worked for their benefit and outside of that there was nothing else.

Did your father and mother belong to any social societies or fraternal organizations for example, Kaleva Lodge.

R Well my mother was very active in that and my father was impeded from some of these activities because of his hearing. He was strictly church and temperence and that's as far as he went. We never belonged to the Kaleva's or the Macabee's or the Modern Woodmen.

I Then your father wasn't active in any historical societies at all?

R No, because there was no such historical societies around here at that time.

I Were either your father or your mother musically inclined?

R No, I don't think they were.

I We've already brought it out that they were concerned with their religious organization which was the Finnish Luthern Church.

R Yes.

I There were no charitable organizations at that time that people would have belonged to was there?

R No, I don't think there were any. If there was something charitable it was through the church perhaps donations to the missionary work. Even to helping the people of the community. Now this of course were talking about my parents aren't we?

I Yes.

R Now things took kind of a turn in my generation.

Okay please indicate to what degree you or your spouse you have been active in this organization of ethnic origin. Well we've already covered this because we've considered the social, historical and fraternal and musical. Along with musical did mass, now I'm speaking of your knowledge of the community, in the first decade or so every community seemed to have a Finnish band?
Yes, we had a Finnish band in Mass. In fact any bands outside of the highschool bands now were way back then.

You said you have been active in historical projects, but I don't understand, have you been working more as an individual than with a group?

I belong to the Ontonagon County Historical Society. I still do alot of it on my own. I've written alot of articles for the Ontonagon Herald and the Mining Gazette and sports magazines particularly on conservation.

Did your parents encourage you to be active in the ethnic organizations which we have discussed?

Well they certainly insisted that we be active in anything relative to the church. Up until the times of their deaths things hadn't changed radically until like I mentioned a little while ago until my generation started to take hold of these things.

I'm sure that you have been proud to be a part of the ethnic groups which we have mentioned and you have participated.

Yes, I'm very proud, and I've enjoyed it and hope to continue to enjoy it.

I sure hope that that will rub off to the extent of reaching your grandchildren someday.

Yes, I do hope so and I can see it already, I have four grandchildren. The oldest one is probably 12 or 14 years old and he says he wants me to draw maps of these different roads around here and what mines operated around here, which is a stupendious job and I don't know if I'm qualified to do it. I'll furnish the maps anyway.

Do you feel an interest in ethnic identity dying out or is there hope that that interest will continue?

I think it will continue, among us Finns we are very slow to grasp things. We are very slow to do things. We never had a man at the mine who was the captain, we had one shift boss that I can recall. We never had anyone on the school board who was a Finn and I was the first Finn to be President of the school board.

I saw that alot of times, now if a Finn had the gumption to stick his neck out for a political office all the opposition and this was largely Swedish in our area, all they would have to do is go to someone else and ask well what do you think of that guy, do you think he's qualified to oversee the highways? What do you want a guy like that in there for? They would prime the pumps for this sort of jealous streak in his own ethnic group. In our county the people were predominately Finnish yet it was run by the Swedes.

We had one man, Isaac Nehr and I don't know how many years he was Township Clerk.
Still it went along time before we starting to get Finnish Supervisors and then of course they've predominated ever since. Another thing is the Masonic Lodge. It's very interesting what I'm going to tell you about the Masonic Lodge. I belong to the Rockland Lodge and we moved it to Mass but we still had to go by the name Rockland Lodge. I knew as a kid that many Finns tried to get into the Lodge but there never was a lodge until a man by the name of Henry Myllajala who was our supervisor and they were the first ones to be accepted. I had an opportunity to go through a lot of those old records and I could see time after time where some of more prominent Finns were disqualified, they never even passed the committee to get on the floor to be voted on.

It came to me now the item I forgot a little while ago, it was regarding theatrical groups and productions by local groups. Something more than the Christmas plays and Cantatas put on by the church. Did the temperence societies put on any theatrical or Finnish plays?

Well the temperence society was quite active at one time but not to that extent but we did have groups that did. After the strike that's when this communism thing started to spurn and they had their halls, elegant halls, which two of them burned down. They were great and their kids became our prime actors in highschool because they were in these plays and were brought up around these plays. Until then our sports club put on plays as a money making scheme.

That was a great deal of fun, a bunch of us kids started on our own at the local farm hall and we sure put on some humdingers. I remember one we had two Finnish bootleggers who disguised themselves as Chinese. One of these Chinamen went to copy a sign that was in town and that turned out to be a doctor's shingle. They were using the Chinese Laundry as a front for their moonshining operation. In the end the still blew up and we even had that worked out just fine. We had three or four guys pumping cigarettes when it came time for the still explosion. Then when the explosion was going to happen another four or five guys busted paper bags. They waved that smoke onto the stage and it just billowed out there.

I recall that they did put on some of those little skits. I've been to several of them and they pretty much wrote the script themselves.

The next question is do you think the public schools is placing enough emphasis on ethnic groups like your own. Do you think the schools are giving any consideration to that nowadays.

Well I don't know how much the schools are giving but I know Michigan State has been very active in trying to find out what's becoming of our kids after graduation. Whether I'm answering your question properly I don't know. When I was on the school board it was pretty much like it always was. We had an old time superintendent and you couldn't change his ways no matter how you tried.
I think there's a little resurgence of interest in the ethnic heritage of the area. For instance here's another thing. The churches should place more emphasis on preserving the language of ethnic minded members. That's already gone by the board and you could never reinstate that.

R That's too far gone, now you have your confirmation in English and so on and everything is English.

I And the world Lutheran Church of America, that's a consolidation of all of the churches.

R And nationalities.

I Interest in ethnic customs is not subject and will have little bearing on future history, and education of the people in this area. That's true more and more we will find just the same though.

R Don't you think with all these vast amount of people going to Finland and coming back with these stories that it's sort of reviving our interest. There's more interest in this town today because it's surprising how many people are going to Finland. Now my wife was there three years ago and she's there again. That's been repeated by many many people here. They come back with their stories and we're starting to think more about the Finns that were here like my father and that generation.

I Which of the following has been greatly influenced by your ethnic background? You said your mother worked for a German family so she is involved in two tangents there in food.

R The Finnish and the German. Now dress. Well it's been a great many years since you can tell from the way people dress the nationality they are.

R Right.

I Celebration of holidays and ethnic events. What do you remember in that way? Most people of Finnish origin had these ____________ picnics with the bonfire for cooking.

R Yes, our church was great for picnics I don't recall having the ____________ picnic or any bonfires but the temperence society was great for picnics. They were the ones who promoted the picnics to the extent that they even had athletic events at the picnics.

I You already indicated before that you inherited from your father your interest in newspapers and all historical and ethnic lines and so forth. Your interest in music, drama, and art, even though you may not go very deep in that you still have considerable interest in that.

R Oh yes
Particularly when it's in relation to Finland, and how Finland has influenced the music of our country. Do you recall any specific ethnic customs that were observed by your family with respect to birth and baptism? One thing that comes to my mind is they say that the old time Finn is born in the sauna and when he dies he's taken to the sauna for his last bath there. Do you recall any such instances where the midwife would come to the home and the sauna would be warm and the woman would be ready to give birth and it would be in the sauna there with the midwife?

Well I'd actually have to say I do not recall but the midwifery was sure going on.

I see

Alot of this stuff because we had the big rural area there was almost like it was going on out of state. You would just get the general gossip and alot of that stuff is just coming to the front now. I've learned more things about our Finnish people in these last ten years than I've known before.

Here's something that's been typical of the European cultures all the way through and that's when they come to this country they still have a tendency to exercise iron discipline on their children. Children were made to understand and the father of the household was the boss. And if you disobeyed him it meant a trip to the woodshed.

You don't see that in town, that's died off, the children are on their own. When they get up into the seventh or eighth grade they seemed to have lost their discipline.

What religious festivals of ethnic nature do you recall? Was there anything special?

Well they've had the burning of the mortgage but nothing too great

Christmas season the cantatas?

Yes. It just depended who the pastor was here.

Okay are there any particular festivals or national holidays observances that you've passed onto your children or grandchildren?

Would that be just Finnish events?

Well it has become more ethnic in these holidays hasn't it?

Oh yes, very much so. We don't have much of a scattering of many nationalities here. At one time we had alot of Italians here. Their gone, there isn't an Italian in town. We had cousin jacks and we still have them around here but you take like the community of Mass, I would say 96 or 97% Finnish.
Whereas if you go across the Bluff into Greenland the Finns aren't so prominent as they are here.

Okay you already indicated that your father had very little trouble if any in coping with the English language.

He got along very well, he could write a good English letter.

And he worked in a store

Yes. All the people he was doing the business for is another case where there were very few Finns. Your superintendents, your paymaster, your clerks, there were very few Finns at all.

You would further say there has been no difficulty in your case or other family members of getting along with other nationalities?

Well I can recall one thing with my father and I wouldn't say hate being a Christian man but the Irish people he just didn't like them.

Those division lines disappear and they get along. The only thing they have different is their names.

That's right.

You can tell what ethnic origin they are from by their names.

Yes.

I can't go into this too much but Richard Koski from the Firesteel Road, he was very active in the co-op wasn't he?

He was a deputy sheriff in the moonshine days and he could smell moonshine a mile away.

There's a fellow who had a mixed personality and a mixed heritage to pass on.

Yes.

I found him quite interesting. I interviewed him last year. Okay let us go on to political involvements, I don't remember if you said you were involved in political involvements here in Mass or not.

Well actually I was on the school board and president of the school board for a few years. I was Secretary of the Park Commission which was a township function but outside of that I have not been a political figure. I have worked with politicians in the Republican party. I went around with the candidates. You know it's always easier to have a candidate walk into a house and have somebody introduce him than to have him blow his horn.
R I'd do it for him. Like the guy who was running for sheriff.

I Okay let's go into another area here, during the local copper and iron strikes, do you think the people of the community worked together to overcome their hardships or were there no decisive changes between their relationships as compared to when they were working. Did those strikes stir up a great deal of conflict of opinion?

R It raised a great conflict. In fact it disrupted our Finnish people togetherness to a great extent because we went into this labor groups which we used to call socialists at that time and they had their hall and they took away alcot of good people from our church. They had entertainment Sunday nights and a lot of those people drifted away completely but a lot of those people are coming back. They're starting to come back now.

I During the great Depression how did the people react here? Was there a great deal of violation of game laws and things like that?

R I know there was a great deal and a lot of it went way beyond just trying to furnish for your own needs. In fact one day when I was on a little survey with some conservation people we came across six or seven deer that had been slaughtered and just the rear saddle taken off and the rest of it just left there to feed the predators.

I What is your opinion Nick about the future of the area particularly now with tourism? Do you think or what is the importance or do you think tourism is our best economic hope in this area?

R I don't think we have one thing we can depend on, I think we are going to have to get our copper mines going again? I don't think tourism reaches enough people. It takes the gasoline, the groceries, and the taverns and that's all.

I And something else has changes too because before they would come here and buy all their supplies now they haul a big trailer.

R They bring it right along with.

I So it comes down to robbing Peter to pay Paul.

R That's right. Actually the guy who makes out is the guy who sells gasoline and the guy who sells booze.

I Yes.

R The restaurants do a little business in the summertime.

I So you still feel the mining industry will still come back.

R Yes, I think we still have the product here.
Do you think interest in ethnic traditions will increase or decrease?

Well I can't see where there would be any great change in it myself.

Do you think more people will settle in the area now?

Yes, we have more new people here. My wife says it's astounding in the last two years at school from the rooster the kids that used to predominate the Finnish people probably out of a class of 30 there wouldn't be 3 or 4 names that weren't Finnish. Now they are coming in because people are afraid of Detroit in particular and they are coming here. They come here and they are buying up our farms and the hunters are buying a lot of our farming area. I don't think we'll ever farm like we did at one time because these farms are going to these hunters.

You appear to be quite happy living in this area, you have what you want right?

This is my area, I would never go back into the cities again. I had Chicago and Detroit. Being retired and even if I wasn't retired I would never want to leave these areas I love the country.

Going back to your youth, what did you do for entertainment? Did you find that most people went to the movies during the week or on Saturdays?

Well we did have movies here and a lot of people attended those movies.

Was there a lot of participation in young people's, or old people's or mixed group dances?

Well I don't think they did much folk dancing, it was the usual stuff that comes along with the ages.

Did the people in the community at large take a great deal of interest in outdoor sports?

Yes, I think we were a very sports minded community. We won two state championships in our basketball and they were mostly with Finnish players.

Have you ever recalled any interest in meeting the train coming in?

Yes, actually it was a comical situation and I was in the postoffice at the time. When they start running with the diesel engines, it used to come in the St. Paul depot about 11 o'clock in the evening. There would be 50 or 60 cars out there. One of the mail clerks had to come to town because we had some trouble with the mail and he said how come you have this surge of cars at the depot to meet that train? Gee no matter which way you turn there's cars out there and people who came out to see the train.

What would you say your town is known for in the way of tales. Would you say it has a lot of good ghost stories, folk tales, lumberjack tales or life in the mine tales?
Well I think there's been a general mixture of all that and I think we've been very fortunate. One time I was the speaker at the Ontonagon Historical Society and they wanted a local man, a man from the county to speak about the county. They wanted me because I have written so many articles for the Ontonagon Herald. So I said how about me talking about old characters? They would only allow us one hour and I had twelve sheets of reference notes. So I red checked all those that I thought I could get through in an hour. So I was no where near finished in that hour but it was very entertaining.

Were these real live characters? Or ficticious ones?

No these were all real live characters and unfortunately I couldn't get into the Finnish characters very much because they had such names as __________. It would mean nothing to translate it and wouldn't bring back that interest in these people but there was plenty on the other people.

Well Nick I feel that we've just barely gotten started and the tape is ended.
S: Mr. Lukkarila, how long or how old would you say the history of this area is for schools?

L: Well, I would say, I could very safely say we had schools here more than 100 years ago. And it all operated under a township school system. And while in Mass our school history started around 1900 but the township history had been going on much longer. Perhaps a 115 years ago. I have seen school books that had been dated 1875 which was in the jurisdiction of the Greenland township Schools Board and about 1900 we had 5 schools in the jurisdiction. One was called the Belt School which is now Lake Mine, for what it's worth. We had the Grove School in Greenland. We had the Mass School in Mass. We had the Orama School in the Old Mass, and the Ridge School in the Ridge Location. About that time we had a High school in Mass City. We had a high school in Greenland, faculties for each and in the 1904 report we had 10 women teaching and 2 men who were the superintendents of the school although at that time they were called the principals in all the secretaries minutes.

S: What kind of preparation did the teachers have to have?

L: Some of them had a very good background because some came later on. Of course as time progressed educational requirements were much greater. But at this time I don't know where some of those people went to school because it seemed like they graduated this year from high school and pretty soon they're teaching. They might have had the county normal. I know they had it in Ontonogon later on but whether it existed at that time or not I don't know. They did a fairly good job. I will get back to these 10 female teachers and 2 males. The total payroll for a 10-month school year was $6600. At that time, in 1904, the female teachers were paid $50 a month which was the equivalent of $500 a year and the men teachers were paid $800 a year, $80 a month. So the total payroll for one school year was $6600.

S: Were the women allowed to be married when they taught?

L: Yes, we had married teachers, in fact myself, I had a married teacher in the 3rd grade, no in the 2nd grade, the 5th grade, and 6th grade. In fact some of them repeated. You know, like the 2nd grade teacher I had again in the 5th. Oh, and the 4th grade teacher was a married woman, Mrs. Brown. I had her in the 4th grade and then I had her again in the 6th grade. Alltolled from the year 1898, when these records are available,
since they're available, we have had 236 people teach in this system in either Lake Mine, or Mass or Greenland and these two schools, Ridge and Ogama, were more or less given up by that time. So 236 different people have taught here at various times. Originally when you started out you had one group. They were mostly old maids or they became old maids anyway. They would exchange. One year one would be in Mass, the other would be in Greenland and the other in Belt and so on. But gradually we started getting teachers from the outside and we had some very good teachers. Simply because some of these older teachers when they had gone to school, well I think they had Marquette then, but some of them went to even the lower peninsula even to school and they would bring friends. Ordinarily they did not stay very long here because the schools didn't have everything. They had outside lavatories and when they boarded out somewhere the same situation prevailed and well, things were inconvenient for them who had been living under better conditions so sometimes they'd quit in the middle of a year. Some stuck for many years and I would say that most of the teachers I encountered through the first eight grades were pretty capable, good teachers.

S: How many grades were there

L: Well we had the high school. Starting with the 1st grade we went right up to the 12th. Maybe there were only 3 or 4 students in the entire high school. That's why the merger came in about 1910 to combine to make one high school and that was in Greenland. Our kids, well in fact in 1914 I had to go to Greenland. That's the one year I was in this high school. The buses and horses pulled us over there and on stormy days when the roads were blocked we'd have to push the bus to help the horses out. And sometimes we'd just be in an open dray. You know, just had the open platform and of course, there'd be a lot of hooting and hollering, throwing kids off the bus. We carried our lunches in old lard pails, the old silver leaf lard pails. By the time we got to Greenland what ever was in that bucket was froze and of course by the time we got to luncheon, our buckets were hung with our clothes in the cloak room, why they'd be thawed out. I recall one time one vagrant there he went through that cloak room and switched everybody's dinner bucket. We'd have them under our coats and oh the consternation at lunch hour! "This isn't my bucket!" I remember one kid there from the country said, "Well what's happened to my old lady. My sandwiches are wrapped up in a cloth." He said there's generally a newspaper around them. So pretty soon one of the high school teachers said, "Hey, does anyone have my bucket?" And so Bill had eaten half the sandwich and he said, "Miss Walker, maybe this is your bucket because my mother never made sandwiches and had them wrapped up in cloth."

S: There ain't a kindergarten
L: No. The first kindergarten in Mass, I attended that kindergarten.

S: And how old were you?

L: Well I don't recall. We came from Hancock in March of 1905 and I started in the hall. So I probably was 6 years old when I started school here. It was an odd situation because when I got in the 2nd grade I started meeting boys that had never been in kindergarten and I said, "Where have you guys been?" One of them said, "Well we didn't have kindergarten when we went to Chart Class." The 1st grade had everything in it, A Class, B Class, C Class, and C-1. And from C-1 they'd go to C and so on. Some of those kids spent at least 3 years in 1st grade. So then I caught up with them in 2nd grade.

S: So they were much older than you.

L: Well some of them were. They had to be a little older, a lot of them. And some were about my age. We ran pretty close to being the same age. But some were a little older. Some of those guys started school in 1903 where I started school in the fall of 1905 and I mean they had spent that time in the 1st grade.

S: Can you remember some of the things you studied in 1st grade for instance?

L: Well, I don't know if I could remember what I studied but I'm sure in some of these books there would be some of the things we studied. I can always remember Sears Reader as one book. Now I will mention this. The very first teacher that taught in a school that was built by the School Board was in 1899 and the School Board allowed her to pick out her own text books to start out with. I looked into her book. I don't understand her assignments too well, but she had chosen some books which I'll mention here. And this was when school had started October 16, 1899, and ended the first term it's marked here, February 9, 1900. And under Reading comes Sears 4th Reader and then there's a bunch of figures 3, 7, 9, 40, 41, that might have been page numbers. Oh I see there's Sears Reader 1 and Sears Reader 2. But then there's a notation "Ten Nights in a Bar Room" and "Evangeline", and then some more Sears 3rd Reader. Then they had Grammar, Regent Kellog's Arithmetic, Sheldon's Complete, Sheldon's Elementary, Student's Intellectual. And Numbers, it says, Combinations from 1-26. Geography, Friars for Beginners and Friars Complete. History was Barnes and that's all that she had.

S: This is 3rd grade?

L: Well some kids were 13 some were 11, some were 8, some were 9,
Now then she has behind the year--there is 6th grade, 5th, 4th, 3rd, (listed various grade levels)

S: These were all is one class room though?

L: Yes, they are all together. Then a whole bunch of those were first grades but she taught them all. But this wasn't the class that had 56 in it.

S: Was it a one room school house?

L: Well, where this particular person had taught was not a one-room school. It later was sold to the Catholic Church as a church. But I remember I've been in that building after it was a church, and as a church it was all one room. There might have been a little vestibule or there might have been a cloak room, but that was the first school that was built. It was built for $954 and sold to the Catholic Church a few years later for $400. Then they started building in town here. They started thinking about plans for a school in Mass, a large school. That school was I think completed in 1900 or 1901. They rented buildings. The building where I went to kindergarten was an old store building and the 1st floor was kindergarten and then later on I went to 2nd grade upstairs of that building. It was owned by a man. Charlie Hulta owned that building. He got $20 a month rent for the entire building which was pretty good for those days.

S: But usually then a student wouldn't pass from grade to grade; he would stay with the same teacher in the same room?

L: Well they'd stay in the same class and no doubt in the same room, but there could have been a change of teachers.

S: Oh then there could have been more than one teacher in one room.

L: I might as well mention here that when these first schools were started and when looking over the roster of names in this Miss Gibson's book there were no Finnish names. There's an Anderson, but I knew that Anderson was not a Finn. And I knew there were Petersons later on who were Swedes. So there weren't very many Finnish children around here. And then when you do find some of these books in the next several years teachers made notations that none of these children spoke English when they came to school which made it difficult for her. But they were all willing and tried hard and of course they developed in time. But when a teacher had so many students it was almost impossible to give personal attention so some kids were left behind.

S: Could there have been several different languages spoken in one class?
Oh yes we had quite a few Italians in Mass at that time, but the majority were what we called Cousin Jacks or they came from English families. Well I say they may have been just a little more proficient with the English language but when they didn't pronounce the letter H like in the word house was always ouse. But if you had a man and you said "How hold is he?" They'd add the H where it was not necessary. So I don't know. They're hard to understand when they use that language. And all those kids talked just like their fathers who came from Cornwall, England. And the reason they settled here is because they worked in tin mines and perhaps some copper mines in England. They became the bosses in the mine. Now just to get back to Finnish people in school. Then other people started coming. The Finnish families were moving in. Still the percentage of Finns was in the minority by far. I even have the percentages some where. (The recorder was stopped while he got the figures.) I chose the year 1912 to create a few percentages of Finnish children relative to the total number of students in our school system. 1912 was more or less a banner year when we were reaching our height of our population. The entire roster of school children under the Greenland Township School District Supervision was 853 children. Of that number 417 were of Finnish parentage or in percentage approximately 49%. Now that was a great gain from the year 1904 and so then that same average probably was only about half. Of course it steadily increased because Finns were moving in here. Mines were working very well up to and right through WW I. And also farmers were starting to pursue the agricultural industry. They started buying up the land and started farming and most of them had large families. Then further on I mentioned that we had had 236 teachers here and of that were 36 Finnish teachers or 16%. And they wouldn't even have been that high but we had a lot of rural schools being opened up and most of these Finnish kids were teaching out there in the rural areas. My brother taught out there. My brother, Walter, taught out there for several years. He went to Marquette I guess for a year or a term and then was qualified to teach out there in those farming countries. Out of that 36 teachers only about 12 of them taught in the town schools either Mass or Greenland and the rest were out in the country. So 5% taught in town of that group of teachers and 11% were out in the rural areas—that's of that 16% of Finnish teachers. I think that's interesting because the Finns were not aggressive. They were not aggressive at all. They didn't strive to be anything at all. Like in our township government there'd probably be a Finn—or in the school boards. Fortunately we had a Finn there in 1903. We had a fellow Otto Fasonen. He was on the school board and stayed on for quite a few years. But in the entire history of our school board I think it was in the middle 40's before a Finnish person was president of the school board. And that happened to be me. I'm not saying it because it was me but I was the first Finnish president of the school board here. We'd had members but I
think there were only two Finns that ever served as president. The same thing in the mines. The foremen were all Cousin Jacks and I can only recall one shift boss that was a Finnish man and never a mining captain. The mining captain, he was I guess in those days, his actual title would have been superintendent but they called him captain. And they would make an annual or perhaps semi-annual inspection underground. But never do I know until in White Pine, after White Pine became such a powerful mining force, that a Finnish man ever attained the superintendency and he was John Heivala. And of course in the White Pine mine they have had a lot of Finns. My son was mining engineer in White Pine. But the turn over of engineers is great. They are just there for a few years and then gone.

S: Would it be the reason that the Finns weren't aggressive, though because they didn't know the language?

L: Well that could have been the reason. The young came directly from Finland and then when you'd get a few nucleus of Finns in here why they brought their relatives. They had no way of learning the English language. They got along at home, I mean, their relatives were here. It was no problem to live here. Perhaps in the mines they might have had difficulties but there were always Finns there to interpret for them.

S: Well in the schools when the children didn't speak English, Finnish was spoken at home or other languages, what did the teachers do with children that didn't understand what they were saying?

L: Well, I think they tried a number of things. Generally there would be other Finnish children who would be more proficient. They'd get a kid from higher classes to do a little interpreting because none of those teachers were Finnish in those days. I think somewhere in one of these (books) I have when the first Finnish girls graduated from our school and started teaching. I should have that here.

S: But even if they did speak Finnish they didn't use Finnish when they taught, did they? They forced the children to use English.

L: Oh yes they did not allow you to. Well, we'll say, which I saw happen, that they'd get someone from the 3rd or 4th or 5th grade. They had to communicate in Finnish to explain to the child what the teacher wanted. But the small children learned pretty quick and they were able to pick it up pretty early.

S: And I imagine the school children were the ones that taught their parents English too at home.
L: Yes. Now the first teachers that we had, Finnish girls that taught, Signa Pasonen, Sylvia Makima, Rachel Toivonen, they were the first girls that graduated and remained in the system.

S: Were the graduating classes very large?

L: No they weren't very large. That's why we had to get a merger so that they could—you know maintaining two high school faculties was expensive. You couldn't do it for one or two children. Going through all these old school records or school minutes there's a printed document to show just how many were attending each year and finally it came down to three schools: Lake Mine, Mass and Greenland. There's wonderful leafllets when they reviewed the school books. Why they had some auditor come in and audit the books and he would create the pamphlet that would carry all this information. You know a set of financial statements also as to what had transpired during that year.

S: Were there any laws that required children to attend school?

L: Well looking at these old books I can see boys, generally boys left school. That's all it says "left school". That's all it says. No reason why they left school and some of them never came back. If there was a law it was not enforced. I think the truant officer became effective many years later—that they had truant officers. And if a kid didn't come to school the super would report to the truant officer and it was his business to go and find out why he didn't come to school. Then I don't know what the penalty was if they didn't send them. Well a lot of the kids were working at 14 years old in the mine. There was no restriction in those days in the mine how old you were. At least they took them to work. My son was up in Canada when he was a senior and they made a trip of the various mines. They went to some gold mines, some copper or every kind of minerals they had. There was a lot of Indian boys, young boys working in the mines, that shouldn't, that wouldn't be able to work in the U.S. in a mine. Whether they camouflaged them or not I don't know.

S: So really it was up to the parents whether they sent their children to school?

L: Yes, very much so. And like the farmers perhaps the had a good husky boy. To them he was more valuable clearing land perhaps than they thought getting an education. And most of those Finnish people didn't have much education themselves so they didn't take a concern. I think then that people who had gone to school for a while and had families, they realized the value of an education and they insisted on their children going through high school.
S: Could you say then that girls probably had more of an education than boys? That they studied longer?

L: Well, I wouldn't be surprised if they did because the boys were more apt to go to work. I went to work after. I never even finished one year. We had our difficulties. I was having a lot of trouble with my eyes and stuff. I didn't have no glasses and no way of getting them so I asked my father if I couldn't quit school and go to work and so the other kids could go through school.

S: This was in what grade?

L: First year in high school, freshman. I didn't complete that first year. I went to work when I was 16 at the mine. Some boys were working there at 15 years old. I know one, two boys who were working at 13 years old. They were working down in the mine.

S: But it gave them enough of an education then to know how to read and do other things.

L: Yes sure. You know I think in many ways if a kid gets a good education and this is purely my own thinking, through the first eight grades he has attained pretty much education to help him so he doesn't have to be a laborer all his life. At least I wasn't a laborer. Of course after I came out of the army I went to school. I was able to further my education. But at least if you can read and write it's a wonderful thing. You know, fluently speak English and spell and write, you have a pretty good foundation to start out. Of course nowadays if you don't have that, even a high school diploma, they don't even consider you. They expect that much. I know some kids that have gone through high school that could have just as well quit school in the 8th grade, who didn't pursue any further or go to college. But they had their diploma and it was all that they needed. That high school diploma.

S: Would we say that the goal of the teacher then was to teach the students how to read and write?

L: Well basically in the beginning they were satisfied if they could teach these kids to read and write. I mean they might in the 3rd or 4th grade they just have to do a little more than just read or write. But I think they derived a lot of satisfaction. I remember when I went through that first grade and learned to read. You didn't learn that much in kindergarten and that was that first year they had and I guess they really didn't know what they would give the kids. I think we drew pictures and often when I go and pick Elma up I visit the kindergarten and its really wonderful what the kids are doing. Like in the 1st grade what they're doing we didn't
do those kinds of things until we were in the 3rd grade. But still the Mass schools had a very high standard because often people moved from here. Well I know a family moved to Marquette County and the kids immediately, my classmates, they were immediately boosted one class ahead, one grade ahead. So evidently they were doing a pretty good job no matter what happened.

S: Thank you, Mr. Lukkarila. I appreciate the opportunity of interviewing you on such interesting history.
Date: July 13, 1973
Interviewer: Marybeth Stadius
Interviewee: Mr. Nick Lukkarila, Mass, Michigan
Topic: Famous old figures in Mass
Location: The Lukkarila home in Mass

S: Mr. Lukkarila, you have been a resident in Mass for a long time. When did you first come?

L: My family moved into Mass in March of the year 1905 coming to Mass from Hancock, Michigan when my father was employed at the Book Concern. My father procured a job in the Mass Mining Company as a bookkeeper. He preceded us here by several months and then the family moved into Mass.

S: Can you tell me a little bit about your early years in Mass?

L: Yes, when we came to Mass the town was pretty much in the wild wood. It was nothing unusual to see a bear cross the street. Deer roamed around almost like they were cattle. They weren't fenced in in those days. The population was not as great as it turned out to be in perhaps in 1910, 1915, and there were quite a few Finnish people here. There were a number of Italian people here and the Cousin Jacks, who were the people who came from Cornwall in England and a few Irishmen here and there.

S: Were you one of the first Finnish families that came?

L: No, we weren't one of the very first Finnish families. I would say that there were at least 45 or 50 Finnish families settled here when we came here, who had come here at the turn of the century.

S: What were they primarily doing? What kind of work?

L: Most of the people were employed at the mines, at the copper mines. We had a number of copper mines here and they were running full force at that time. Some followed the agricultural pursuits and some worked out in the woods as lumberjacks. But the bulk of them were employed by the mining companies.

S: What did you father do

L: My father was the time keeper at the Mass Consolidated Mining Company.

S: How many children were in your family?

L: We had eight children. To my recollection I can not remember
when the eight children were ever together at one time. My
sister got married early and moved away from here and so two
children were born here while she was gone and when she'd
return on trips my oldest brother was gone and that's how
it went all the time. We could never get the whole group
together at one time, the eight children.

S: Were you born in Mass?

L: No, I was born in Ishpeming, November 12, 1898.

S: And how old were you when you moved here?

L: I started school in Mass so evidently I was passed 5 or 6 years
old when I started school.

S: Well you've been here for many years. I imagine you knew many
figures that play a big part in the history of this area.

L: Yes, most of those people who concern me are those characters
the old characters about town. For some reason all the stories
and anecdotes about these people seem to appeal to me more
than some of the more vital things.

S: Maybe you could tell us about some.

L: Well, there was a number of Finnish characters here if I care
to recite a few of them. Such as Herra Barkkila, he was a
man about town. Herra being part of his nickname just meant
that he was a man who liked to dress up and was really a man
about town.

Then we have a man called Vallesmanni. Vallesmanni was a, I
think he was a bandleader. In fact we had several of them and
he was a very nice gentleman.

Then we had another gentleman we called Littu-Nok:'a Eereli
because he had sort of a flat nose and he was a good enough
gentleman.

Baseli Hanres came in here and the reason they called him
Baseli was on account of bascillus. He doctored mostly to
the women and he was very much afraid of germs and very
careful about not imparting germs to anybody. I think he
was a masseur to a great extent.

Then we had Hai-tuuni Vili. He was another man about town.
He dressed well and he was not a drinking man and well liked
by everybody.

Ratiseva Kassu comes from the other extreme. He was always
chattering all the time and sort of an evil person all the
way around. He didn't care much about the laws of the land
and certainly did 't ave any religious tendencies in any manner at all.

S: Would you say he was a criminal?

L: No he was not a criminal although he got into little altercations with the law such as a man picked up for being drunk on the streets or creating a disturbance.

S: Oh, yes

L: Well we had Seppa Daavetti. He was quite a character. They used to call him sometimes Russian Dave and he lived in a shack near the Ontonagon River. He made his own harness for the horses. He made his own clothing and lived off the land. He had a couple of dogs there and two horses. They were about his closest companions all the time. He did make his periodical trips to town to buy the few groceries he needed.

Well Helsinkin Jussi again was one of these carefree gentlemen who certainly didn't harm anybody nor did he cause any trouble. Why they called him Helsinkin Jussi I don't know but that was because he did speak alot about Helsinki, Finland.

And Kukko Jussi was sort of a prophet. He was prophesizing all the time. He could quote to any part of the Bible at all. He used to entertain the lumberjacks in some of these taverns just with the Biblical stories. They used to try and cross him up sometime but they were never able to stick him on anything at all.

Kello Kassu was a fellow that wore watches. He had a bunch of cheap watches that he sold to the lumberjacks and traded them and he never tried to take advantage of these Jacks. He gave the dollars worth of material for the dollar they save him. He had two brothers, one was a great big lumber jack, and his brother was on the other extreme, very short—one was called Iso Toysa and the other was called Fikku Toysa. They were a couple of character lumberjacks who spent everything they earned as fast as they earned it.

Piru Kassu was a guy that had learned alot about cattle in Finland. And when anyone had sick cattle why they had to hunt him up and most of the time they had to sober him up to get him on his job.

And there's a couple of characters here, one was called John Birklund and he was sort of a prophet—he was prophesizing something all the time. And as a sideline he was a photographer. Whether he finished his own pictures or not but he did take very good pictures of the Temperance Society—praised it—the church picnics—different organizations and lodges who had picnics, he took very good pictures of them and I recall at one
time when my mother sent me over to his house with a pasty. He lived only a few doors from us and when I went in there why he was having some sort of a lunch and there were four or five chickens on the table and when I walked in the door-
way he said, "Look at those chickens." He said, "They
want to see if I'm eating better food than they are." Well,
he was very pleased to get the pasty, of course, and I don't
know how much of that the chickens got but...

S: Are any of those photographs still around?
L: Yes, there are some, I have some myself.
S: Ok
L: So then, we had another character in town. He had served a
few months in the Newberry State Hospital as an orderly and
somehow or other he got the idea that he could start doctoring.
He moved in here and I recall one time when he came here to
minister aid to my father's ears -- he was hard of hearing and
the first thing I had to do was to take a newspaper and make
a cone out of it and burn it and there was a little bitty oil
came out of that or some substance. And he took that and
rubbed and inserted that with a toothpick into my father's
ear. Then out of his little suitcases he took out a rubber
hammer and started pounding my father's head all around so my
father got all dizzy. My father got so mad at him and chased
him out of the house. He was known to go to farmers who had
rheumatism or arthritis and he was equipped with an iron bar
and he'd start lambasting their back with it to the sore spots.
One farmer chased him halfway back to town with a shot gun--
you know cause he thought he was going to kill him.

S: Did any of his cures ever work?
L: Not that we know of. In fact, he had manufactured a pill and
on the bottle I think I read "at least 50 cures from these
pills". These pills were called Almen, and in fact he told
me one time that he had an x-ray machine that they had given
to him at Newberry. Then he started to x-ray people. I
looked at that, he showed me that machine at his place. It
was just a wreck of an old machine -- only about 25% of it was
there. Finally he had decided he wanted to go sailing on the
Lakes because I had been sailing for three years and he came
over to the house. I asked him how much experience he had in
sailing and he said, "Well, I was a cabin boy across the
English Channel about three trips." I said, "Well, that
doesn't really make a 'lake' sailor out of you because the
conditions are so vastly different." I said, "What position
would you like to have if you went sailing?" I was to take
him along that next spring. "Well," he said, "I would like
to be the captain of the ship." I said, "On those three trip
experience, you want to be a captain. Those captains had to
serve thirty years. They’ve got to know the Great Lakes. They got to know the harbors and rivers and canals and channels. And you don’t learn that in a few days.” Well, that discouraged him and of course I wasn’t intent on taking him along with me, anyway.

So just to get off that one and get on to a few women that were here. We had a woman that was a "diskari"--a diskari was a hired girl. That’s what the Finnish girls had to do when they came to this country was to be employed by somebody and very often they went to a non-Finnish family and it was very good for them because they learned a lot and they learned to speak a little English.

S: Did they do mostly then housework?

L: Yes, mostly housework and whatever cooking. But this "Bisketti Hilita"--you know that bisketti of course is a biscuit--and she learned how to make biscuits pretty good and she created quite a reputation on that so that became her name--"Bisketti Hilita".

Then we had another lady called "Iso Iita". She was also hired girl, great big tall girl and she served at various places but she didn’t live very long. She became deceased.

Then we had "Pikku Emma" who was a masseur and if she had to rub a man’s back she would never do that unless the wife was present. She came to my mother quite a few times.

Then Venho Kreeta was a lady spinster who operated a boarding house and in Finnish they used to call the "poika-talo", you know because generally they were single men who...

S: Who worked in the mine?

L: Yes, they worked in the mine and they boarded there. She fed them and washed their clothes and things like that. But Mushroom Minnie of course was not a Finn, she was an Irish girl. She was Minnie Shannon and she had sort of what we would call a "joint" out in the woods, out there somewhere where she peddled some homebrew and stuff to the lumberjacks.

And nearby was a fellow called Mushroom Bill, he was quite a character. He often came to the post office and the first thing he would say is "I’m Mushroom Bill from Quincy Hill, I never worked and I never will." He served overseas in the Rainbow Division and we often spoke about our experiences. I was with the Radar Division and we fought together in many battles.

Then we had a family here called Soderman and the old fellow was called Tuffa and his wife was Tummu. Tuffa was quite a
character and we used to sleigh ride by his house. We used to call this hill Butcher's Hill because there was a butcher-shop near this hill. Somebody, I don't know where the name Timber-link the Trapper came but that's what they used to call him--Timber-link the Trapper. And we'd go by his house and holler out, "Timber-link the Trapper, Timberlink the Trapper," and pretty soon he'd come out with his ax and he'd chase us all over town. I don't think he'd ever hit any of us. And his wife Tummi was quite a pipe smoker. She had an old corn cob and that was always in her mouth. They tell me that she never cut her toe nails. So the guy next door was a carpenter and so she asked him, well her husband asked Simi if he'd cut her toe nails so he went there to see what they were like. And they were just like horns that grew way out many inches. So the only way he cut them was with a hack saw.

S: Oh my goodness

L: I recall once making a cartoon of her in a saw horse, you know a "renku" and she was there and Mr. Simi was on hand clipping her toe nails--that's a true story, my mother told me that.

Well then we had a couple, an Italian couple, Candy Mary and Candy John and they had an Italian candy store, a confectionery. He was an easy going Italian while Candy Mary was just the opposite. She was tart and crabby and always chasing us kids around. See, Candy John was a great man to celebrate the 4th of July or the 5th or 6th or it didn't matter if it was day or night. And he'd just be out there on that high porch hollering, "For-chew-lie (4th of July), five cents a piece". Finally poor John became ill and died. They had his body right in the store, right in front of the candy case. And of course the big thrill for us kids was to reach right over the casket and give Candy Mary the pennies to give us some candy from behind the casket there in the showcase.

And we had Haywire Dick who was, he worked out in the woods and drove what you call a tote team. A tote team was what hauled supplies from town into the camp and every trip he made to town he'd come back with a few bales of hay. So the owner of the camp, Forkle Francis told him, "Well, Dick, we don't need all that hay." "Oh, Forkle, we don't need the hay but we need the haywire." He always wants to get the hay to get the hay wire.

And now I'll see if I can find something more about these. Silver Fred was the German fellow that was several miles north from here. His last name was Wohshezel and there was a little silver found up in the Forcupine Mountains and he was quite sure that on his homestead was silver so he got a couple of guys to start mining. And three boys used to hang around Silver Creek quite a bit. He's a great big Dutchman so he starts telling these boys that when my ship comes in
I'm going to send all you boys to Germany. This boy is going to be a chemist, this one's going to be an artist and the third one's going to be an engineer. The ship never did come in but just to relate what happened to all these things that he was going to have these boys do. The chemist became a moonshiner, the artist—he just drew low wages from a lumbercamp and the engineer became a section boss. But Fred's mine didn't turn out. I've been out there several times. It's just filling up with rock—like all the rest of the old cronies he finally passed away.

Silent John was a lumberjack that never spoke, very seldom... No, he could talk but he just wouldn't talk. And his name was John Jenkins. But he never talked. They say that when he became inebriated why he would say a few words, but no one knows why he maintained that silence. He was a good worker—never wore socks—worked out there in the winter with high-cut boots and no socks. How he was able to do it, I don't know.

S: He never married?

L: Then we come to Crazy Henry. Crazy Henry was a man who became so addicted to the alcoholic drinks that it softened his brain to do a lot of foolish things, tried to hang himself once on a bedpost. His right name was Nordgren and he was a tall stately, erect man but his eyes were about three quarters closed and we'd often wonder when we'd see him walking how he could see where he was going. During World War I Henry sort of straightened out a little bit and worked for a while, but I guess work was too much for him and he died.

Cordwood Bill was a fellow that was out here in the national forest—had a little cabin there—and he came from Seenee. And he had a very good command of the English language. Nobody really knew too much about his background but he was the filthiest man and camp that I had ever been in. Even the skunks would bypass the place, they wouldn't even stop at Silver, Silver... what would I call that place. Cordwood Bill, his right name was Clator, he was supposed to have come from Seenee. But I was amazed at his wonderful command of the English language and in fact some people have said that he pursued the law at sometime, as a lawyer not as a refugee.

Poker Dick was quite a guy, as the name implied that about all he did in lumbercamp was try to create poker games and he was a good player.

Whiskey Joe was a man that, that had been a pretty good man in his day and for some reason or other he started to drink a lot. And I can recall at our hunting camp sometimes he was shacking out near where our hunting camp was, and I saw him one morning at about 6:30 and he was going past our camp and
he had two dead rabbits that had been run over on the road
about two miles away. So I said, "Well, what are you doing
with all those? What are you doing out so early for?" He
said, "Boy, you don't get out so early, the crows are going
to get those dead rabbits." He lived on those rabbits that
he picked off the road, you know, there's so many in that
every night you could pick a whole bunch of them when cars
run over them.

Big Tom was a huge man. He was the first Village Marshall,
he was also the fire chief and it was his business to get men
out to the fire. And generally after they got through with
the fire some innkeeper would take them in there and feed
them allot of free drinks and being a fire laddie why old Tom
would arrest them for indulging in too much fire water.

Big Erick was a lumberjack also and he was not an ordinary
lumberjack. He was a proprietor of a large lumbering concern
and very soft-hearted man and he always got all... any
lumberjack that was in trouble, he was willing to hand out
a buck or two.

Now that takes care of about most of the old characters
around here. Oh, I must talk about "Doc" Scott. Doc Scott
was a medical sort; he had one arm that was off below the
elbow and the shoulder. We always kid--we all thought he lost
that in the Civil War. But I found out later on he didn't.
He was a hard drinking man, too, but he was always dressed
up within a celluloid collar and a stiff done shirt, filthy
of course and that string tie and derby. And every day he'd
come to town. He was down in what we called Lower Mass and
had a little shack and he had an office there. We kids that
used to go swimming at the brick yards, we used to go in his
office when he wasn't there because it was never locked up
and he had a stove in there some old tools, but he administered
to the lumberjacks. He'd make his relay to the lumbercamps
and it didn't matter to Doc whether he was administering to
a horse or to a man but he was administering. And he finally
froze to death in his little log cabin. He used to come from
swimming sometimes we'd meet up with the Doc. He had a good
big stump, pine stump that he used to have his ring of
bologna and a box of crackers and we always tried to get there
when we knew he was eating there about 1:30 in the afternoon.
So we always tried to get there. And he had buck teeth, you
know, they were protruding. And we'd sometimes pick apples
just to see if he could bite the core out without disturbing
too much of the skin. But he used to tell us allot of stories
about his experience as a doctor and he finally got in trouble
with the law--I guess he had tried an abortion on somebody
and went to jail for it. And when he came back he didn't live
long when he was found froze to death in his cabin.

I t ked most of th char. I d to t
to them. The only thing I didn't know those days that I should have gone into details, you know, and made—that was just a kid—this thing didn't come out to me until I came back to Mass, you know, in about 1931 and I became interested in all these things and I started making notes.

S: And by that time many of them were gone.

L: Oh yes, many of them were gone. Oh yes, and there were of course a lot of other non-descript characters around here that it doesn't even pay to relate anything about it. In school I was always interested in history, it was my favorite subject and I can recall sometimes the teachers would tell me that don't recite—do you memorize your history lessons? I said no, that I read them over once or twice but because you're interested, why I suppose I had a good memory for...

S: For dates and facts?

L: Dates and things just like my father (Jafet Lukkarila). He could speak dates, in fact he could become so tiresome at church Sunday School programs when he'd start talking about dates, people began falling asleep. But I became interested in these old characters because I thought that it would be something to talk about and I found out since then that it has been really worth while talking about these people because there's nobody who has written a history about this town. There are lots of people of this present generation that have never even heard of a lot of these guys. And our Chamber of Commerce and different people have asked me to write little booklet on these gentlemen and the history of this community, the mines, the schools and so on. Course, I've always had it in my noodle that I would someday sit down and compile a history with what ever information I have and perhaps it's the only information around now because all these old-timers are all dead and I don't think anybody ever bothered to write up anything or take down their names. In fact, I talk to most people about such people like Whiskey Joe or Mushroom Bill, why they ask, "Well, who are they?" After all, I'll be 75 years old on November 12, 1973, and rapidly becoming one of the old timers in town.

In fact, in my class in school there are four of us left and we've all been here approximately at the same time. In fact, there are two of them who have come here at the turn of the century. For any information that people come looking for, why the guys accept that, from the restaurants, from the garages and from taverns and they always send them up here. You'd be surprised how many people come up here and they say, "Well, they told me we were inspired about some interesting things here and they said well, you'd better go up and see Lukkarila." The other guys aren't as deeply interested as I am in it. (Other side of tape.)
I understand you have a group that gets together, some old-timers, and you recall certain things you recall from the old days. I'm sure there are some humorous stories that you remember.

Yes, we have a place where we meet generally on a Friday night and occasionally on a Tuesday evening. We named this place Sawdust Lodge because it is an old carpenter shop and the owner is a carpenter. We have no particular reason for calling it Sawdust Lodge but there is a lot of sawdust on the ground.

Are you all about the same age?

No, we're not. There are several of us who are much older than some of the youngest because there's not too many of us old-timers left around here who would discuss these things. But the younger ones, one of them particularly, his father came here before the Civil War and homesteaded property in what we call the Caledonia country and this boy's grandfather relayed a lot of incidents that happened when he came here. And of course I have even listened to this old gentleman tell some of those stories. So we get to discussing a lot of things at Sawdust Lodge and we take it for what it's worth. A man tells us something and we assume it's something that happened in this part of the country and some of these anecdotes may sound incredible but nevertheless that's how they have been told to us and we can't authenticate them no more than anyone else can.

How often do you meet?

Generally on a Friday night and now recently we've been meeting even on a Tuesday night. I don't know why we are meeting twice a week now when we're running short of material. It wasn't twice a week before, but nonetheless we get there and it didn't bother us. We don't every night talk about old days, not the entire evening. But most every evening something crops up because somebody thinks of something. I'll think up a lot of things and I'll bring it up that night just for a point of discussion. Sometimes we have recorded these little meetings and I think we should have recorded most of them. That would have given us a good historical picture of this area which would comprise the Greenland Township of course Mass and Greenland. Some of the stories are quite humorous. Now I'll just relate a few of them.

Perhaps I should start out, first of all, with my own story so that you can judge the case by knowing my character. I went into the war, in World War I, on May the 7th, 1917. A bunch of us guys were about 18 years old and we decided to enlist. We always talked about joining the navy when we were kids and then when the war came along we joined the infantry.
which was about the worst department to get into. Well, anyway, we got into action and on August 29, 1918, I was severely wounded at a very big battle called Gervigny. I was hit in the head by a piece of German high explosive, which was really a big shell broken into fragments and it took the top of my helmet off and left quite a big scar on my head. There I lay on the battlefield with my brains oozing out. There was no use in slapping some dirty muddy brains in my head so they left them out. After the war I went to Detroit and walking around stupid along Woodward Avenue. I'd meet a friend once in a while, one of my war buddies, and he'd say why don't you go up Woodward Avenue. There's a brain store over there and get yourself a set of brains. I said oh I don't believe you and he said yes go ahead and he gave me an address of one. I went there and here in front of my face there were all kinds of big jugs on the shelf. Here was English brains--$8.75, a jug full of Scotch--$9.00, Italian--$7.75, Pollock--$6.95. Then on the end of the shelf there was a little vial, 2-3 inches high with a sign on it, "Finnish brains, $15.00". So I said, "Clerk, how come a little bunch of brains like that costs $15 and they're Finnish brains, too?" He said, "You'd be surprised how many Finns we have to kill to get that amount of brains."

S: Oh dear

So I did. I had to settle for brains. He said, "Why don't you make a choice." So I didn't know, but having been in the army I thought maybe Armenian brains would be good. That's what I've been blessed with, Armenian brains. So if I'm a little bit out of order on these things it's merely because I'm possessed of Armenian brains. So you have to take my stories for what they're worth.

I'll start out with these two Cousin Jacks who were goofing off in the mine. They were kind of lazy and weren't interested in production. The captain was making an inspection and he came to where these two Cousin Jacks were working. Of course, as he came there they had their sad stories to tell and the captain listened politely. And after he was about to leave he said, "Well, boys, patience and perseverance will do the job." So after he left one of those Cousin Jacks said to the other one, "Patience and Perserverence must be those two Finlanders working up in the other slope. He's going to have them here to take our job away."

Now I'm going to talk about my classmates who worked in a grocery store. The manager told him, "They're going to play lots of jokes on you and you're going to have to be careful all the time." One day a guy came in and he wanted to get a bucket or bag of shorts. Shorts was a sort of residue after they ground up the wheat and they used to feed it to the hogs. So this man said, "Boy, give me a bag of shorts for my hogs."
The boy said, "Ah, ha, here's one of those smart guys." He said, "Mister, we don't have any shorts for your hogs, but we have got brassieres for your cows."

I remember when we were in the 5th or 6th grade we had a teacher who was quite a bug on good health and keeping your body healthy. She mentioned about these noblemen in Rome who swam the Tiber River three times before breakfast. So the dumbest one in class asked why they didn't swim four times so they could get back to their breakfast?

My mother had quite a system to determine when we needed a new pair of pants or britches or whatever you want to call them. The test was quite a severe test. She would place a dime on a hard bottom chair and we'd sit on it. If we could tell if it was heads or tails that was on top by sitting on it we would get a new pair of pants.

You know, an old shacker lived out in the country with his wife and they were very dumb. They didn't have much schooling and they didn't get to town very often. None of the conveniences of living were at their camp. One day old John was out carousing in the woods and came across a mirror that some surveyors had dropped and he looked in there and said, "Boy, that sure is an ugly man in this picture I found now." He constantly kept looking at it and several times his wife caught him and said, "What do you have there?" "Oh nothing, nothing." So she decided that she would watch him sometime and see where he hides it. So one night she saw him hide it under some boxes. So after he fell to sleep she went to look for it and she found it and she lit a candle and said, "My, so that's the old hog that you've been hanging around with all these days!" Her own picture in the mirror!

Now we're going to talk about the time the wind blew out the candle. At this time it was the custom for each family to entertain the preacher who came from Hancock on the weekend to preach. Each one had to have a shot at housing him for the night, serving him supper Saturday evening and breakfast and dinner Sunday. We'd already had our turn, it was taken up but nevertheless we were forced to take this preacher particularly for dinner because the lady of the house had gotten sick and my mother happened to have five pork chops and there were three of us that were going to eat at the table with the preacher. The window was open and suddenly a gust of wind blew out the lamp and my mother dashed to get a flash-light. She did pick up one pretty soon and when she flashed the light on the table and there was the minister's hand over the pork chops with three forks sticking into it.

I remember once when an old gentlemen came into town there was a great big brown bear. Oh it was a monstrous bear. He came up the street and stopped at the mining company boarding
house. He stopped right across the street from there. Of course us kids used to hang around and ask him a lot of questions and he told us, he said, "You kids go take collection from those boarders and you make the bear climb the pole." There was an old power pole, the mining company had their own power system. And some of their chief workers went up in the camps and cut them. So we went out and got a collection, I think 35c, so we sent that bear up the pole. "Now, boys, go back there and get a collection to see the bear come down the pole. So we ran up there and said that now the man wants money to see the bear come down. So some Cousin Jack said, "Oh, he'll come down, he'll come down when he gets 'angry."

Well, let's see now, where are we going to be here? I must mention the level-headed Finn. That's the boy who chews snuff and you see the juice run out of the corners of his mouth. That's the level-headed Finn.

Urho was a good worker in the mine. He told the boss one day, "I got boy John. He good worker, too." The foreman said, "Well, bring him around." So the Urho and John, father and son, worked for a couple of years together and then Urho told the boss, "I got boy home, Toivo. He's as good as Urho (should be John) and I together." Boss said, "Send him here and you two guys don't have to come to work anymore if he does your work."

S: How did you first hear these kinds of stories? From your father or around town?

L: No, my father was not a great man for telling stories. He was very direct. He just gave commands, although he never laid a hand on any of us. But it seemed to me that any time we'd done something wrong he'd say, "Well, I warned you." I remember one time we were monkeying around with a baseball on Saturday afternoon. He said, "Boys, come in and learn your Catechism lessons." We said, "Oh, we'll be in after a while." And just about the time he got into the house, Bang! The ball went through the window. Then he came out and said, "If you had listened to me this thing would never have happened." But he had sort of dry wit, too. But his greatest interest was in the church and church activities and temperance. He was a great temperance leader, in the temperance movement, right after he came from the old country.

S: The Temperance movement was big one in this area

L: Oh yes. They had the Temperance Society here. It was called Vehreä Ruusu. But my father had already been in the temperance movement way back in Republic right after he came. I recall him once saying that when he came to this country he went to Pennsylvania and worked on the railroad and the boarders used to do a lot of drinking. So they gave him a bottle of beer and it tasted so bad that he made up his mind that he"
never going to drink that. Then he became interested in the temperance movement. I never heard the man swear, I never saw him smoke, and I never saw him take a drink.

S: So where did you hear the stories, from people in town?

L: Well, some of us boys were interested and we'd try to get around. We'd ask people like these Finnish boarders. They used to like to tell stories and some of our older brothers. We had little games. We used to meet out in the woods--the wild west. In those days we had a comic that was all about the cowboys, the wild west, Young Wild West, and Cheyenne Charlie, and Hop La the Chinese cook. So the big boys, our older brothers; they had wild west group and then we had a junior group. Of course the guy that was Young Wild West was the main cog in the whole thing. My brother was Cheyenne Charlie, so in our group I was Cheyenne Charlie. A fellow called Dave Pasonen was Wild West in the big gang so his brother Kacky Jack was the Wild West in ours. The big thing was always to get the Chinese cook, Hop La. You always could find a guy you really didn't want in the organization but we always had to have a Hop La so some undesirable guy got to be that.

S: Then these characters that you mentioned did the children actually call them by that name to their face?

L: Well we had a shack out in the woods and we used to address each other as well, Cheyenne Charlie or Young Wild West or Hop La. But at home of course you would have been foreign to people with those kind of names. My father didn't approve of comics although there was no pornography in those days. We used to like to look at them but we had to sneak them in the house. I guess every house had one or two under the mattress. But if he found them, he'd destroy them.

S: Well, the local characters that had the names that you mentioned, the nicknames, did the children call them by those names?

L: Well, most of these guys were single men, not family men. Well, they were mostly drinkers and they'd kid each other with those names. Of course, I wasn't in the saloons or anything like that but that's what we did as kids but whether everyone did or not I don't know. But like Crazy Henry, we'd meet him on the street and say, "Hello, Crazy Henry."

S: And they didn't mind it?

L: No, they didn't care. They might cuss at you a little bit but we wanted them to chase us.

S: I imagine then that the saloons were a big place where stories were spun.
L: Yes, and comparing a saloon to a tavern, I think the saloon was by far in as much as I don't approve of either, but if I had to have a choice which was going to exist I would say the saloon. Because women didn't go in a saloon and children weren't allowed near the saloons even. Today you can see them come in, women and children, of course their kids aren't supposed to be there but in these small towns the barkeepers don't care. They know they might just be tourists stopped for a few minutes and the kids have a bottle of pop. But they're not supposed to be in there. And it was strictly a men's club, I think, in these days. The only time a woman went in a saloon was to get her husband home before he spent all the money.

S: I imagine that this was the only way men could get together for a social life. They were miners and...

L: Yes, and lumberjacks. Lumberjacks would work all winter in the woods and they'd come into town and in a week they'd be broke and then they'd go back in the woods and start their summer logging. They didn't hang on to their money.

S: Did the saloons resemble the kind of things we see in old westerns?

L: I would say very much so. They had the long bars and the foot rails and the chairs. Very much the same as you see out in the western movies. And I think the atmosphere, too. You know, in those days people, even as kids, I remember carrying a pistol going out in the night. Everybody had pistols. You could hear shooting although there wasn't much killing. I can just recall two or three murders when I was a kid and they were stabings and Finns. Both the victim and the assailant were in both cases were Finns.

S: And what were the causes?

L: Oh, just arguments in the saloon.

S: When they were intoxicated?

L: Yes, when they were intoxicated. The puko is the Finnish weapon. We had gangs in this town at one time—rowdies, all these guys from Finland, single men. They would go along in a group and practically control the town. When we had a night marshall they would follow him up and down the street. You know, he had to go out and turn keys in certain clocks to prove he had been on his route. They would follow him all night long and we had an Irish cop here, Big Jim O'Brien, a big husky man, and he said, "I'll tame those Finns." So he started his work on a Saturday night and this gang, Big Vic's gang, followed him. Every time he'd stop they'd stop. They never said a word to him but they followed him all night long. They never molested him or never pushed him off the sidewalk and it got on his nerves so he never came back to
work any more. That was enough for him. It got on his nerves. He knew that wouldn't keep up. Sooner or later something was going to happen. Then we had a Frenchman came in here and he got some semblance of law and order. The Finns were no good at that because most of the time they'd be drinking with the guys. Except one guy, he shot into a bunch of those guys and hit a guy in the leg. And of course there was a lot case about it and he was dismissed from the night marshal's job.

As far as fire deptents were concerned, in those days we had bucket brigades—like that bucket that we looked at—wooden buckets. There was no water, no hydrants or anything like that. You'd go to the jail and get out all the blankets and if there was a house in close proximity to the house that was burning, you'd go and wet these blankets and then hang them there in case the wind blows. That's the only time that the jail blankets would get washed. Of course we had lots of fires, almost every Saturday night. The only signal that there was a fire in town was a fire house bell. And it seemed like that would wake everybody up. Right now I wouldn't hear it if I was two blocks away, but then people would go running down the street hollering, "Fire, fire, fire!" They'd stand around and watch building after building burn up. They had a fire department but just these buckets and if you didn't have water well the bucket was no good.

S: What caused the fires?

L: Well we had an old gentleman that came into this town from Canada. He was from Scotland originally. When they started building the Mass Kning the Mass Mining organized the Mass Township Corporation to tell their property to the people, whoever wanted to buy it. This old gentleman, T. M. Scott, he was the manager of the Mass City Township Corporation. He himself got a lot of property and built a lot of property. Well then I suppose eventually he probably wanted out from this part of the country and all these buildings started to burn. There was a time you couldn't buy fire insurance for your property in Mass because every so many days buildings would go up. The last big fire we had before we had our fire department organized, I think 17 buildings burned. Which is about the most I can remember. There was nothing we could do.

S: Is it just carelessness though for the start of the fires?

L: The way I understand it some woman had left a hot iron when she was ironing clothes. She must have laid it down and forgot about it and went outside. The big house went up.

S: And then with the wood structures.... There was lots of arson too was there?

L: Well when one building after the other went up they suspected arson but arson is a very tough thing to prove anywhere.
Because we've had many cases and I've appealed to the State Police. You see, the State Police are our fire marshalls and I appealed to them. They told me don't try to convict anyone of arson unless you saw them start the fire because they said they had many cases they thought were fool-proof. They had all the, everything there. For instance they had a fire up in Ironwood years ago. A man had a big candle and he had set it going. And when it reached a certain level it would ignite things and by that time he was in probably pretty near in Minneapolis. So they couldn't convict him because he wasn't even in town. But I know our Upper Peninsula fire marshall stopped in the Post Office and he said he had iron cled case against this fellow in Ironwood. He had every bit of evidence except that someone didn't take a picture of him starting the fire and two days later he came back dragging his heels, and he said he lost the case. That it's got to be so solid against.

S: The evidence.

L: Yes.

S: You were connected with the fire department then for a long time?

L: Yes, I was chief for 14 years and I can remember when we had more fires in Kass then the rest of the country together and there were eight other departments in the county. And we had more fires than the rest of them put together.

S: What kind of equipment did you have?

L: Well, we got to depend on the high pressure system because we don't have hydrants. But we have three trucks in our department. One truck can pump water, and it can suck water, spring water for the fire. And we just purchased a new one recently and it's very good. We're well protected. We have mutual aid fire departments between Kass, Rockland, and Greenlawland and Ontonogan. So we help each other at no cost to the community who's having the fire. We've always had a pretty good well-trained force.

S: Do you have any humorous stories from your days in the fire department?

L: Well, there was some humorous sides to some of these fires. I recall one fire that we went to that when I was up on the roof I heard this man up in the attic say, "If you don't get down off of that roof in two minutes, I'm going to start shooting through the roof." And he was actually decented. And I said, "Well, you get down and let those firemen in." But he couldn't so we broke in. I was concerned about his mother who was an 85 year old woman. He had beat her up pretty bad just a month ago. I was thinking that he would try to
cover up something with that. Of course, this was not humorous but it was an incident. About the most humorous thing that occurred to me while I was fire chief was when I was asked to speak to the 4th and 5th grade at our elementary school in Mass to talk about fire hazards and being careful around fire and false alarms. So I asked this teacher to have these children think up questions to ask me because I didn't know if I could get down to their level. I spoke to a lot of people about fire protection, fire hazards, etc. to get down to a 4th or 5th grade level, I didn't know if I could do that. A lot of the terminology would be too much for them, so I thought if they asked questions I could answer likewise. So when I went into that classroom, those kids were just as quiet as can be and I said, "I'm going to ask you children the first question, then you can start asking me." So I asked them, "Do you know why firemen wear red suspenders?" A bunch of hands went up and one little girl was almost frantic as if she really knew. So I said, "Now tell us why firemen wear red suspenders." So she said, "Just because they can't buy blue ones."

S: I want to thank you for speaking with me this afternoon, Mr. Lukkarila. It's been really interesting.