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I We are talking with Jack McMahon today at his home at the Franklin Mine location and today is August 8, 1973. Jack we'd like to begin by asking you a little bit about your parents and even your grandparents. We're interested in finding out who in the McMahon clan was the first to come to America?

R Well both of my parents were born here and my grandfather McMahon brought his family over as did my grandfather Sullivan. I would think the reason the McMahon family came here was because of a family agreement. There were several members of my grandfather's family that landed in New York and they scattered throughout the country. I think there were four of them. One group stayed in the east, one group went out into Utah and the third went to California and my dad's family came here. With my mother's people it was because of fishing. They had been fishing people in Ireland and they thought it would be an ideal spot for it. However they did no fishing when they got here. My grandfather went into the mining and he worked on the surface. They call it the rock crusher up in the shaft houses and that's where he spent his life until he was injured. He raised his family here.

I This was your grandfather Sullivan.

R Yes.

I Did grandfather McMahon also work in the mines?

R Yes, he did, he was killed in the mine. Not killed in the sense that he was killed outright, but he died shortly after being injured. In those days there was a lot of unsafe production and the idea was production and apparently they did have the related value that we place on lifes today. That apparently was true in all mining communities.

I Now what years were these when the grandfathers were here?

R About 1879. In that era about 79 to 82. Then they were employed until the turn of the century. Grandfather McMahon passed away before Sullivan and I never did know him. But I do remember my Grandfather Sullivan. He was a big man and the injury was to his leg so it shortened him up in his stature. He wore a beautiful white beard and he was a very kind and gentle man and that's the way I remember him. That was just when I was a real tiny youngster because he died when I was six.

I Was there a sizeable contingence of Irish folks about that time, did they come as a larger waive of immigrants?

R Yes, and truthfully the Irish came into the Copper Country mainly because of railroads. They migrated toward the railroad work. They followed the various companies as they were developing. I know in Ontonagon and Greenland many of the people came right in with the Chicago and Northwestern Railroad right into the Copper Country. They stayed eventually when the building was complete and got work wherever they could.
Well the era of the railroad up here began—when in the mid-1870's?

I think even before that because I remember hearing about down by McKeever and that was in 1869 and that was the lumbering end of it. They were cutting off the pine and that was done about 110 years ago and that was the highlight of the lumbering industry.

Was there any attempt in your grandfather's time to organize labor?

Yes, to some extent, but they never got very far. The mining communities—and I speak of them throughout the United States—management was as strong then as labor is now. They used what they called a black list and if you ever got on the black list you got no employment in the mining communities. Often times you didn't get any in other endeavors, lumbering or anything where there was a tie in of some sort. Often times, mining, railroading and lumbering were all tied together. There were definite attempts and here in the Copper Country the real outbreak was in 1913. They had to call in the National Guard and the area was patrolled for a year and a half or two years. I don't remember that because I was born in 1916 but from my parents speaking of it and the terror involved in that time. The tactics the Gestapo used and people were afraid to leave their homes. Of course nobody went out at night and they also had a curfew. They had to be in at 9 o'clock and people just didn't go.

Are you referring mainly to the company?

Yes, they were strike breakers that the company brought in, they brought in gunmen. They had free rein. The company had hired them as such and they were out on the streets at any hour and they seemed to enjoy terrorizing because I remember my mother especially talking about them shooting their guns off. There was one killing that I remember now, the rest might just be hearsay I don't know. They imported labor and they were under the supervision of the goons and they actually went underground with the guns strapped to them as such. This kept the strikers away.

So the strike of 1913 really involved industrial warfare?

Pretty much so, yes. Of course there was no—-- of course there never is in a strike they are drawn out for a long extent.

Is there one single factor above all others that you would say attributed to the breaking of the strike? Why the strike failed from the union's point of view.

Well money certainly, because it was costing the company a great deal of money. The imported labor had to be paid more, the gunmen were naturally paid a great deal more. I think they were getting a hundred dollars a week and board and room which was a great deal of money in those days. I would think financially the company got to a point where they just couldn't stand it anymore and had to abandon their tactics to that extent.
And perhaps the strikers too, having no income, were more willing to go back to work. They did go back to work under some change in conditions, but not a great deal. They weren’t as much interested in money as they were safety conditions, especially hours, they used to have an eleven and 13 hour shift. On the night shift you worked 13 hours and on the day shift you worked 11 hours. They were working for $2.50 a day which was a big wage really. Many of the men working in the lumber camps only worked for a dollar a day.

The financial crunch was heavy on all concerned.

That’s right.

Regarding the ethnic structure in the mining structure your own grandparents, or grandfathers were involved in the mining phase either as surface workers or underground workers, were shift bosses or mine managers, any of them of Irish decent?

Oh yes, alot of them were because they figured that if one of their own ethnic groups were bosses they could control them better. The one that stands out in my mind was captain Gerry O’Neil. He was a very dignified man and had the ability more of being a politician than a mining captain. I knew him in his later years and not when he was actually working. But you could see where he’d have the ability to control men. However the majority of the control here in the Copper Country were Welsh. They were Welsh miners brought in for the purpose of running the mines here. There are still alot of Welsh descendants and the overall control was English. And there were some Irish and as they went down through they followed the idea of ethnic control by their own. Not a great many but there were some.

One of the great features of this area is the great diversity of the ethnic groups.

That to me is what makes the Copper Country. We solved our racial question years and years ago. There were some awfully bad times with different groups coming in. Little stories you hear about different groups coming but really this is what makes the Copper Country what it is. In any mining community I think you would find this to be very true. I remember colored people here, not many, but a few. There were Chinese and some Japanese.

Mexicans?

Well Mexicans were brought in in about 1920 or 21. The company was trying to overcome reluctance on the part of the people who were here and this was because of money. The people thought it was time to get a boost in income which I thought in my reflection was right. Then they brought in the Mexican labor which was cheap labor. Mexican labor was brought in just like your labor today is brought in for apple orchards. What do you call them.

Migrant workers.
Yes. Migrant workers. They stayed here for 6 or 7 years but not many of them. Many of them went back to Mexico. Perhaps they made enough money in that time to be wealthy. A few of the families stayed here. There was one of the families that stayed here and his name was Francisco Madero. Some time in later years a Madero was President of Mexico. I often wondered if it was the same man, he had the same name.

Really, that's something.

Yes, it could have been.

Well to go back to your grandparents for a minute, one of the things we're interested is the church life of the immigrants. Were they active locally in the Catholic church?

Oh very much so, the original group that came here, there was no church. There was a church in Houghton and one in Hancock. But the hill people wanted to form their own parish and there were enough of them to do it. So down here just off of the main highway above the Quincy Mining Company offices the Swedish people had built a church. I think there was some arrangement with the mining company for land and maybe even materials. The different religions used to hold their services all in the same building. It's been torn down now. But the Catholics made arrangements with the Swedish people to hold their Sunday services there. I suppose you could call that the church of all faiths.

That's very interesting, I've never heard of that kind of ecumenical cooperation.

Yes, that went on for quite a while, I could think over a period of some years, approximately ten, before they could get permission to build and permission to get a priest into their own parish. Then Our Lady of Mount Carmel was built in probably 1906 or 07 and then there was a priest here from Germany and his name was Father Krone. I always remember my uncle saying that it only cost the church eight cents for the plans for the rectory and the church. The Father Krone was a German right from Germany and he had a great deal of ability as a greatmany Germans do and he bought a pad of paper similar to the one you have here and a couple of pencils and a ruler. He drew the plans for the whole works and that's what it cost the church. Architectural fees, eight cents.

That's amazing. Did the parish serve as kind of a social center for the immigrant families as well as a worship center?

Oh very much, it also tended to bring all of the different groups together. At one time the Irish were the predominant factor here in Quincy but that didn't extend into too great a time. I would think that the Italian people may have been the next biggest group here. Then not too long after that, the Finnish and the Swedish and Norwegian people.
They started out to be farmers with the idea to work farms in the summertime and miners in the winter.

And that's what they did, like the Vittons they were farmers.

Did your grandparents and other folks in the area preserve some of the old world customs.

No, I would think that amazingly so they tended to become Americans in a sense that and I'm thinking about the United States today and how it developed very rapidly. They did carry over old way cooking, dress habits to a certain extent and also their idiosyncrasies in speech if you wish to call them that, they were carried over but they seem to go right along with the changes as they came along. I always thought of the immigrants as amazing people. They had a lot of courage. They left everything that they love and knew and some of them at an elderly age. It must have been very difficult for them to do. They were strong people, they had to be. It's one of the things about the Copper Country now, most of the people living here now, being descendants of these immigrants are usually just as strong as their own rights. This is true if you live in the Copper Country. You have to be to remain here. You have to be to sustain yourself in the working world and the living conditions. Look 7 months of winter. There aren't many people who can adjust to this. And yet it's a beautiful way of life. You know yourself if you have any difficulty at home—a death or something—you can always count on your neighbors to pitch right in and help. They just do it, you don't have to ask when you need help.

So you would see this particular region as carrying on the rugged individualism of the frontier sort of?

Oh yes, sure. I think the people of the Copper Country are very moral minded and they also aren't afraid to work. Labor to the man in the copper country and hours don't mean anything. The younger generation is accepting what is being given to them though they are changing some of this but some of this is being carried over. There was an expression that anybody in the Copper Country could get a job anytime they wanted just by saying they were from the Copper Country and literally this was true because I experienced this myself when I was 17 years old. I stood at an employment line at Burroughs Adding Machine Company and this man was going down the line and when he got me I found out what he was doing, he was asking where you were from? And everyone in a while he'd pull someone out of the line. I said I was from the Copper Country and he pulled me out of the line and put me in a different line and I got a job that afternoon. I didn't want the job, I was just attempting to see what could happen. I was trying to see if at 17 I could get a job and I did, it was during the school break during the summer.
And this was true, people from the Copper Country could get jobs that way. All of us up here were taught to do everything to sustain life. And it didn't matter what it was, you could relate it to plumbing, carpentry or electricity, or farming. As a youngster I worked underground in a sense that I was a electrician's helper. I would carry his tools around for him and help him. I did that two summers. This was an experience in itself. The labor laws being what they are, is bugaboo with me, the law of 14 years and older trying to protect a youngster. My goodness some of our youngsters at 14 years of age have the strength and height and ability to do a man's job. But this is a different subject completely and we won't get into that.

Well you mentioned the ability of various people to contend with various things up here and you mentioned long winters. In your recollection were there any particularly serious winters or natural calamities that people had to cope with. I know that well not the most recent winter but the previous two were bad but thinking back into the earlier times in the early twenties and thirties were there any real serious winters or epidemics or anything like this that people really had to cope with?

Well of course they talk about the flu epidemic but I don't really remember that. There were two epidemics in 16 right after the European war and then again in 19 and 22. The winters being as severe as they were and the equipment that we have now didn't exist in those days. They used horse and cutters on top of the snow and if that got too deep then they used skis, and showshoes. Of course the doctors weren't equipped with knowledge and medically as they are now either. They had the black plague back then where people just died literally by the hundreds. As far as the severity of winters is concerned the winter of 1929 is the worst winter we ever had here. The roads were all closed coming into the towns up here. The snow was so deep coming in between the rockpiles which of course created the drifts that the road and the railroad were under the snow. They actually had to tunnel through, so when the train came through they had to have flagmen there so when the train came they could stop. I've never seen a drift like that since. I've never seen any like that. I remember the men had to go and shovel the snow off the roof so the church wouldn't cave in. Those on the roof threw it up to those on the snowbank and those in turn through it over. The streetcars were just about completing their operations at that time and they themselves couldn't always get through.

Well there were hard times financially and weatherwise but I'm sure there were some good times so I'm curious as to what your grandparents and your parents and other Irish folk in the area what did they like to do?

Well individually, I suppose the Irish were always known as being great drinkers.

There were a lot of saloons then?
Oh yes, apparently a great many of them were run by the Irish. The names that were familiar right here on the buildings in Calumet and Houghton. The family end of it had church related picnics and evening gatherings, parties, they were always trying to raise a little extra money to further some project. The church on the hill has truthfully never been completed. The church as we use it now was supposed to have been the basement. Unfortunately one of the priests was talked into investing the savings that they had in Chilean bonds and they disappeared and so naturally the money did too. The entertainment was great in those days and of course we didn't seem to have the interruptions and time always wasn't so much of a factor in those days. You got together with other families. It was a great thing for maybe, oh, half a dozen families to plan to go together to go to Lake Annie. Some walked and some rode with horses and of course enormous lunches were packed. This went on all through the summer season. Then in the winter the women were quite active amongst themselves, they always had something going. They would plan their little parties, maybe a card party or something. There was a great deal of visiting back and forth. I can remember in my own home there was probably never an evening that some neighbor didn't drop in. My father and mother were both very outgoing people. Their home was a place of real comfort. My dad was maybe a little bit ahead of his time. I always speak of this instance. We had a bathroom in our home, a complete bath before most people ever thought of putting a bath in the house.

Is that right?

Yes.

Was your dad a master carpenter mechanic type?

No actually he was a buyer and clerk in a large store here. He worked for this one concern all of his life. But he had developed the ability of being able to do all of this and he did this himself. Naturally as a buyer anything new that came in he was shown it and he would become interested. I know referring to my Grandfather Sullivan they still didn't have a bathroom in their house. My dad wanted to put one in but I don't know why they didn't.

Okay, you mentioned your dad, let's try and zero in a bit, what year was he born?

In 1896.

Your dad and your mother grew up in this vicinity, met and got married I would gather.

Yes, well as I told you my dad worked for the store.

You were saying your mother was one of the original women libbers.
Yes, she and three other girls graduated from Houghton High School and they were the first ones to go to work for Michigan Bell here. They went in as telephone operators. I don't remember the number of years she was employed by the telephone company, perhaps 3 or 4. But had an office here and she went to work as a secretary for the boss there. Then they decided they were going to move their offices to Duluth because apparently they decided there was more need for it up in the Iron Range area. So my mother went along with them and became the office manager in the Duluth Office. It was at that time that my dad was going with her and tried to convince her to give it up and come home to marry him. So from both sides I got this, they were people who had the ability.

Right. How many children did your folks have?

There were six of us, two boys and four girls.

Have all of the children remained in the Copper Country?

No there are only the two of us, myself and Ileen who is my youngest sister. She's married to Bob Haas in Houghton.

I see.

But our family has been around the world and back. I have a brother who is up in Minneapolis, he worked for a Brewery company all of his life. He went up there with the Phiffer Brewery and he's still there. I have another sister who lives in White Bear Lake in Minnesota. I have a sister in Jerome, Arizona and a sister in Saginaw.

Okay, you mentioned that you were born in 1916 right?

Yes.

Okay, I guess I'll come right out and ask you this, were you born in a hospital or were you born at home?

Yes, I was born in the old St. Joseph Hospital and so was my sister Ileen but the other four children were born at home. There was a Mrs. Matson a great big beautiful woman who was the midwife. She had all the abilities and there were no problems whatsoever.

Yes, that's one thing that we've uncovered as we've talked the practice of midwifery and a number of very fine individuals like Mrs. Matson.

You know she was so clean that she used to shine literally, When you're a child you get impressions and they stick with you all through your life. She actually shown when she came through that door. There wasn't a thing about her that wasn't clean. I think this reflected morally too.
She was that type of a person inside. Do you ever get that impression inside someone from talking to them?

Yes.

Well I've tried to develop that in my life and I've had a great opportunity to do it. There was also another woman and her name was Angelena Lazzari and she with Mrs. Matson used to take over the household when my mother was expecting one of us. So between the two of them we kept pretty well straight.

Well in terms of health care and personal attention this certainly was a good supplement to the existing hospital, company and independent doctors who were around.

I think it had to be that way and the doctors realized this because they depended upon these people who were there, these ladies who were midwives and they perhaps even encouraged them to do this.

Did they receive any special training?

No, I think this was a hometraining thing. It may have been that the doctors talking to them stressed cleanliness, hygiene for what it was worth, but these people through their own experience knew what to do. I never do remember anyone talking about any individual who was a midwife who wasn't clean. It didn't matter what nationality they were, they were all the same.

Jack, where did you go to school?

Well I started out in the Franklin School which is north or east of us, they had eight grades and we went through the eight grades. Then the Depression came and my parents didn't have enough money to send us to the high school for the ninth grade so they sent us to the Lower Pewabic School. We spent the tenth and eleventh grades there and went back to the high school for the twelfth.

Was there a bus to take you to these schools?

Oh no, we walked.

You walked.

Yes. A busindividual ifyou were a farm person and lived six or seven miles away. They had a little sleigh, covered over with a little stove and a team of horses but if you lived within two or three miles from school, there was no thought of transportation. In fact we would have thought they were crazy if we had to ride to school. In fact often times when we went to Hancock often times we used to come home for lunch it was nothing to run up the hill for lunch for the hour and run right back down again. It was just natural that's all.
How would you assess your educational experience in terms of teaching, opportunities available in Franklin and other schools.

Well I would think they were all pretty good. Again they didn't look at a clock and there was no such thought as anything other than their life was a teacher's life. They did the best they could and naturally there were some that weren't so good and others that were extremely good.

Do you remember some of your finer teachers?

Oh yes, Honey McManiman who taught me in the very beginning was very excellent with children. She still is, she's still handling children today. There was a Mrs. Valarias from Lake Linden who came here to teach and she was good. She showed us a little different aspect of life. An appreciation of art, music and drama to some extent in those early years. Mr. Clifford who was the principal of the school was a person who was dedicated to the United States and this helped the whole school. We had pageants and summer programs and flag raising days and so on. I had a real good basic education as far as the country and thought was concerned. I remember in High School Larry Tormala was a math teacher and I thought he was fine. Spike Maum was our coach and he was a big strong strapping man. Of course we all looked up to him. You have to as you go through life have someone you look up to as an idol I suppose.

Sure

I think the outstanding woman in my mind was Elizabeth. She had more ability to bring a person out of himself and teach them the beauty of education if I can use that word than any teacher that I've ever had. There's only one other person who stood out in my mind and that was in later years. I did take some college courses. Some at Tech here, some at the University of Detroit and some at the University of Chicago. This individual taught me more about Math and how to use Math than I ever learned at school. He was a man that I worked with in construction.

Is that right?

Yes

Jack you were going through school in the twenties, and of course the terms are used, the roaring twenties, the flapper era, the prohibition time and so on, was there any of the prohibition shenanigans going on this part.

Very much so, and there again it was the ethnic groups. Well these people were lead into bootlegging in sort of a natural way. Many of these groups especially the Southern France and the Italian people, any of these people from the southern areas, where wine was acceptable on their table, with their meal, they considered it a part of the meal
Even the children did that in those days. If you went to a home to visit you were expected to have a small glass of wine with your meal. Well when prohibition came along and often times out of misunderstanding or ignorance but there was no real meaning to be a bootlegger but someone would know they would have wine and offer them a price. Well naturally wages being what they were, none of them were making a fortune and they were all glad to make an extra dollar or two. From that they grew into bootleggers. Many of them went beyond that, I mean they went to the extent they were breaking the law and became criminals and knew it and continued to be bootleggers. Names are immaterial in this but there were many who were bootleggers and many who went to jail and spent five to ten years in jail. Many skipped the country and broke their bond. This was just a natural outgrowth.

Were the law enforcement very strict?

Yes, they were but it was sort of a periodic deal though. I think from my knowledge now that it was known that where all of these places were and from time-to-time they would knock off a certain place. The law was fairly strict up here and there were a lot of Federal agents who came up here too. I remember one time they said there were about twenty agents who went through Lake Linden and Hubbell and arrested all in one night half a dozen or so. The blind pig aspect could have been in the man's own basement, or a garage out in the country somewhere and these were knocked off from time-to-time. It might have been a form of control too. Not necessarily from the standpoint that they were breaking the law but they were infringing on somebody's territory who was already breaking the law.

Well you finished your highschool years right as the Depression was breaking I imagine.

Just coming out of it

How did the Depression affect the local area? More specifically I mean your parents and neighbors?

Well my dad died the first year of the Depression and he died literally I would think from a broken heart. We all were taught to handle money and were taught that saving was a good thing. We were taught that if we earned a little bit of money we were to deposit it for a future use whether it be an education or whatever. When the Depression hit many of the industries like the store where he was employed closed down. It just couldn't sustain itself anymore. My dad for about two years did odd jobs and even these were thinning out because nobody had any money to pay. He closed out several stores because they either folded up or went bankrupt. Then for about a year there was no income whatsoever. He had to ask us for whatever monies we had. Of course when I say us I mean the three older ones because we were the only ones who had any money. I think that I had something like $2800 saved in the Building and Loan and it all had to go to maintain the family.
I think this really broke his heart although he did die of a heart attack. He had gotten a job with the county as a county road foreman under the WPA offices. He was working on that at the time of his death. He died downtown in a hall and this is where he passed away.

Let's see I think you said 1896 so he was a fairly young man then when died.

Only 48

I Only 48.

Yes.

Did the picking up the slack fall upon you and your brothers?

Well it fell upon me because I was the only one who was of any age who could do anything. I was supposed to go into college that fall but naturally couldn't because I had to earn a living for the family. I had been working in the summer on a summer program on the national youth administration, NYA as they called it and Roy Bettinson who was the office manager of Quincy Mining Company was my immediate supervisor left his job and he recommended that I be given his job as a supervisor. So at 19 I became a Supervisor of the NYA and I was paid $92.00 a month plus the travel. They used to give us a cent a mile or two cents a mile. That's what I did for seven years and the salary was finally increased to $125.00 and then I became County wide supervisor. The man who was in charge of it, Joe Brand, became ill and had to go to St. Louis. For over a year or so they put me in his place and I got $250.00. But even this wasn't enough to keep the family together. I was trying to educate them all and sustain them and maintain the home and that. So I had an offer from a man in Chicago to come to Chicago to work for the U. S. Steel. I would then be able to get up to about $350 a month. So I went to see about it and I went down to work for US Steel. I stayed working with them until the war came along. The Draft Board wouldn't release me so I had to come back here to be inducted. I went into the army and spent four years in the army and then into construction in Detroit. I spent a number of years there and decided I didn't like the city so I came back here and met my now mother-in-law and she was interested in developing this property she was going to buy at Copper Harbor so I went to work with her and started going with my now wife. We built the harbor and married my wife, ran the place for twenty-four years.

Now what place are you speaking of?

McGinty's Resort

Well during the course of running the harbor you met I'm sure alot of interesting folks who came into the area. What did you like most about running McGinty's resort?
Well the people mostly. People that you've met and the friendships that you've made. We have any number of people who still come to us at our home. We've been told many times that we're missed at Copper Harbor, in a sense that we were leaders of the community. Being the Supervisor people kind of have a tendency to look up to you and come to you with their problems. But again just the people who came along to us. We made some nice friendships. You know in a resort area you have some terrific advantages. People are relaxed. They're away from all the pressures of the world. They have a certain amount of money earmarked to be spent so they're not worrying about the financial end of it. I'll tell you there's one thing about the Copper Country that appeared very quickly in my mind. The Copper Country is the greatest leveler of people. People have come into the Copper Country with and I'll use the expression hotshot, they thought they could lick the whole world and were going to change everything. I'll make you a bet that if they live here for five to six years, that they're going to still have their ambitions, but they're not going to be a hotshot anymore. They found that they've run into a bunch of chiefs who were just as big a hot shot as they are. So they have to level off and plane off and develop from that standpoint.

But again getting back to these people, they came from all walks of life naturally. They came from all of the areas in the United States. One man I remember came from Honolulu and he was interesting in a sense. He had been a manufacturer of implements on the islands over there. He had been captured by the Japanese over there and when he got out the Japanese people had rebuilt his factory and finally after his factory was redeveloped and working he sold out. He told me he sold out for seven and a half million dollars. He told me this later in a conversation. He and his wife came to the mainland here and he bought all the clothing that they thought they might need and a new Cadillac car and they started out to see the whole United States because they've never seen it. They had spent their whole life over in the islands. I learned along time in the resort business that dress and make of car don't mean a thing. A man could be a pauper and drive a Cadillac car. So this man came in and asked for a quiet cabin with light housekeeping facilities. I showed him several and he picked one that he thought he wanted. He never asked about price or anything. He used to come into the restaurant and just sign the check and when he left he came into the office the night before and said I'm leaving now Mac, my wife and I are moving on. We like it here and we might come back but for the time being we decided to move. He said just make out my bill. So I did and I think the bill amounted to somewhere in the neighborhood of $450, for the cottage and his meals and whatever else we had done for him. He came in with a wad of bills and I have never seen anything like it before. He looked at the bill and grunted a few times and laid the amount that was due on the counter and then he took a $500 dollar bill and laid it on top of it and he said you split this among the help that are at the resort. He said give everybody their fair share. Now he's the only one who ever did that. There were others who tipped but not the way he did it.
Of course that naturally stood out.

Wow

We had a lady named Mrs. Harrington. She and her husband and her four little children. They came to the harbor because of hay fever. Many of the people who come to the Copper Country come because of that. But they were farmers from south center Illinois, one of the richest farming areas in the whole world. Their friendship led me to visit them and see the area. Her husband passed away in Copper Harbor and they came back to visit us every year after that. Now she was an outstanding woman. She took over where he left off and he was a very strong and outgoing individual. He ran his own business and she just didn't have any knowledge of it but she was able to pick up and educate her family and run her farms and everything.

Now there was a couple named Bill and Effie Johnson. They were born in Calumet, part of the Johnson family that's in the banking business in Calumet. They had numerous relatives, I never knew anyone who had so many. In fact I named the center street of our resort Johnson Avenue. Just because of Bill and Effie. They were really wonderful. They never had any children but he worked for Ford Motor in Detroit. After Bill retired he had half his stomach removed and lived another eight or nine years after that. But they were really our host and hostess here. They knew everyone and talked to everyone. We had a real friendly resort.

There was a man called Carl Reneker and his wife. Mrs. Reneker is the producer of the children's books that are being used in the grade schools today.

You were the Supervisor of what township?

Of Grant Township, the largest township in Michigan and the most northerly

As Supervisor what were some of the projects that you became involved with?

Well one of the things that we did was develop the Marina and the entranceway down at Lac la Belle. There was about a half a million dollars that was eventually spent there. It had to be dredged and reopened and new breakwaters put in. Then they put lights and telephone in there too. That was one of the projects and then we had a marina in Copper Harbor that was developed down in the west end of the bay. We opened many roads and had many of them blacktopped. We went along with the Health and Sanitation facilities in dumping and brought those under control. We attempted a water project in Copper Harbor which we didn't get very far with because of the water formation underground. The cost of putting pipe down in solid rock to keep it from freezing would be tremendous. I think it was $15.00 a foot or something like that.
One of the things we did do, was a man named Jacob Anderson who had been a Supervisor previous to me, who lived in Lac la Belle and had a home in Laurium for the winter, whose whole family had grown up and lived in Keweenaw all their lives. He and I took the tax role and went through it for a period of about five years and brought it up to what we thought was an equitable situation. Something that's very interesting, we used to have an appeal from the land owners in Keweenaw and that is a lot of C & H land mostly, they were the largest with the Goodwin Lumber Division. After we equalized our tax role and did it on a state equalized basis, we never had any complaints. They would come in each year and ask us for a listing of what we had done and that's it. This may have followed the leader after that but there was never another time when the protested. We had individual protests but never from the mining companies.

You've had some very interesting observations to make about people's attitudes, and self reliance, how would you assess the level of political involvement. Are people interested in politics?

No unfortunately not to the extent that they should be and I could demonstrate that by saying I studied taxes before I got into this. I do this whenever I get into something I have to know all about it or I just don't feel that I can accomplish it. So I got all the books that I could and I went to the State Tax people and worked with them and I worked with Walter Kettenbier who is an amazing man here in Houghton County. I came up with enough knowledge so I could present the facts and figures as they might be. On three different occasions, one at Copper Harbor, I sent out letters to every individuals who were a resident in Grant Township inviting them to come to our restaurant at the resort for free cake and coffee and I would answer then any tax question they might ask. I would explain at the same time what we were doing. Three people showed up with personal protests. I was asked to give a little talk at a church gathering of some 150 men one night and I even brought my tax roles so I could show them. This was out of the area but it could still be illustrated. The blackboard and chalk was all set up for it.

Okay, we were talking about two occasions that you were trying to brief people on this tax situation. Was there a third one also?

Yes, that was with a larger group in Houghton. They were anticipating an increase. The State Tax Commission had come in and did a survey in order to bring them up to what they considered state equalized. I don't know whether it was my presentation or what but taxes and talking about them can be dull unless you really understand them. The group as a whole were very polite and some of them were extremely interested. I got a better reception there than anywhere else and this fact might also enter into it, most of them were college people better educated. They had a basic knowledge of what they were working with and wanted to know more about the State Tax commission. But actually that wasn't a good deal either because about half of them got up and left before the presentation was over.
Interest is on an individual basis and people like to talk about what's happening to them only if it reflects money to them. They have no basic knowledge about the whole process, they don't want to know about, they want to be ignorant. I have an expression that I've used all my life in the copper country. This is in reference to politics and we call bar room politics. The bartender has more control over the politics in the copper country than the people themselves do. This is in reflection of what he's talking about. Here's another thing in the villages and towns, we have some good men in politics, they've dedicated their whole lives to it. We also have a great many people in politics who have been there for what they can get out of it. It's a real shame because we have a strong enough group here in the copper country as individuals who could really benefit. I say this because it's always mixed so someone always knows what's going on. Otherwise it could be all one way and all the other way. I don't think there's any definition of party in the Copper Country. Our area is too small in itself and in order to accomplish we have to work together. So it doesn't make a bit of difference whether you're a Democrat or Republican. I found this from a standpoint as a Supervisor. As the specialist chairman of the Keweenaw County Board of Supervisors when I went to Lansing I wasn't a Democrat or a Republican and all the people down there it made no difference to them. I got help from as many Republicans when I was in Lansing as I did Democrats. I don't think they think of us as being Democrat or Republican. We're just the Upper Peninsula.

I see.

The party isn't that strong up here.

That's interesting to hear that, I think national elections at least the presidential ones, up to the time of Roosevelt, the Copper Country went Republican.

Well yes and no, and I'll use Keweenaw County as an example. There's a Judge Kezelein Keweenaw County who has been judge of probate for years out there and he was Mr. Democrat of Keweenaw County. Keweenaw County definitely voted Republican even in Democratic times. There was only one year they voted entirely Democratic and that was for Roosevelt. And yet at the same time Joe Kezelein running on the Democratic ticket, got more votes than anyone else. Now this is a reflection of what we were speaking about as far as party was concerned.

So the people vote the man more than the party.

I would think so. I think they tend to do this on a national scale too. I don't mean there aren't avid Democrats and Republicans which there are. There is also party up here which is good on a national scale. There has to be, we have to have that type of government.

In the Keweenaw County group did you ever run across groups that would be called radicals or communists?
Oh yes, there definitely were groups. as a matter of fact we knew who they were, what their names were and what the association was and all else. Part of this was a carry over but some of them were quite strong. The names again I won't mention.

Sure, I understand but I was just interested if there was such an organization?

Oh yes. You can take Mass City which at one time was a Communist town and still is. I mean they follow the party line right down to the line. At one time there was a real strong group in Hancock, but that group has disipated now because we hear very little about them. Most of them have scattered and some have died off and the families have grown up and they just kind of scattered away.

Sure.

I think in Mass City or in the little town in Keweenaw that we have more of a carry over than we would in Houghton or Hancock.

Yes, we were mentioning this strike of 13 and 14 earlier, during that time, the Finnish Socialists had a paper there in Hancock and we were very active. I'm wondering if the Radicals have really gone more into the rural areas?

Yes, it's a carryover. And thereto that was reflected from splintered groups from the various churches. That's why back in 1928, 27, and up in the 30's, in the Depression years where many of your social churches split up and the reason for the split is just what we're talking about. You know the Finnish people grew up with them and can understand a little of their language, I don't know if this is true with all nationalities, but with the Finnish people you have three definite groups. You've got the religious groups which are real strong, who perhaps are a little fanatical to an extent.

Yes

Then you have the inbetween group who go to church once in a great while they go to a church supper or picnic and then you have the non believers who believe in nothing but their self. I would think that this last group is who we were speaking about.

Was this just the Finnish nationalities, or was this all nationalities?

No, all nationalities, had some activity in it. This was somewhat of a misunderstanding again and going back to when the Communist party got so strong in Michigan. There again the original idea we talked about again the black balled idea, there was a list made up, the original list. As a matter of fact I read the original list, it was brought to me, I asked for it and got it through one of the Senators, of all the names that were on it and knowing many of the people personally, they were so disgruntled of prices, proper wages for labor, they were down traughtened because they weren't able to do the things they thought they should be doing for their families.
Sure.

They were so disgusted at that time that they actually signed the petitions, for getting the Communist party on the ballot in Michigan. They weren't Communists, they were Americans. They weren't Communists, they were Americans protesting the way the United States was being run.

This was in the thirties right?

Oh yes, and that's where this list came from. A lot of those people on that list were blackballed and they should never have been. They were no more Communists than you and I sitting here. We have our own beliefs and thoughts, but we weren't Communists. I'm not a Communist now and neither are you.

That's right.

You might have thoughts and tendencies along certain lines, but the hard core Communism existed here and it still does to some extent. Part of that group was the labor group that just closed down the mining operation in Calumet. Part of that is still out there in Keweenaw. In the lower part of Calumet, in the lower part Centennial and in the south east side, they made it known that they were going to close the mine down and they are hard core Communists. Their leader was educated in Russia. I grew up with him and knew him. I talked with him and understood him. At least I thought I did.

That individual from the thirties was here from the thirties and up to the present time wasn't he?

Right. When we were children growing up we had a baseball diamond where we used to play ball together and we all had our own little teams and he was on the Coburntown team. After the game was over and tempers had cooled down we used to sit around and shoot the breeze a little bit. He disappeared all of a sudden and word had it that he was in Russia and at that time he was only about 17 or 18 years of age. He was gone from this area for a long time. We found out later that he had come back and gone into the Utah area where they were striking. He had been given his training and eventually came back to the Copper Country. I sat in conversation with him and he said he would close every mine in the Copper Country and he did.

My goodness

He had enough power with his goon squads and some of them are still here, to be able to frighten those men in Calumet to give away their birthright, they gave away their natural bargaining powers by allowing their committee, to represent them. About eighty percent of those men, never wanted that. Unfortunately those things carry through. I had a neighbor here who committed suicide, he felt so bad because he didn't have gumption enough to stand up at the meeting and ask for a secret ballot.
R  It just drove him right out of his mind.

I  Those things happen sometime

R  Yes, those things happen

I  I guess before we even got into this last discussion here I was going to ask you're opinion as sort of a general question regarding the mining up here. In the early major strike of 13 and 14, on the company's side the charge was that the strike was really caused by the agitators that came in and stirred up the men, that conditions were really good and sound and then the people on the other side said well the men were not getting decent wages and so on. Is this a situation where both sides were kind of to blame?

R  Oh yes, and to explain this, I think lack of education often times tends to separate people to completely. It's natural yet at the same time it's wrong. Understanding comes from many things, working together and living together, certainly but on the otherhand, a groups sit over here and they know exactly what they are doing. They are trained for it. They're educated people, but the group that they represent don't have that type of training or understanding. They listen to what the leader says or what the group leader says and they believe in it whole heartedly. It's just like if you read something in the newspaper, I would think that from talking to you here, you don't believe everything you hear in the newspaper. You'd be nuts if you did. It's a report so you make up you're own mind, you separate fact from fiction, it's the same with a television show. You make your own decision, this is the great silent majority. Thank god for that, but the same thing with management, they're not connected with what's going on below. It filters up to them, but not enough of that does and therefore they're not connected with it. So the two groups when they sit at the table, the management and the leaders of the labor end of it, they're so far apart that they can't even begin to get together. They should be able to sit right down and talk as gentlemen.

I  Sure

R  There's no reason that they can't. I would think that the time is coming in this country and it's already apparant with the laws that were just passed that you continue to work and arbitrate. Then you eventually arrive at a solution. This makes more sense because no one ever gains from a strike.

I  That's for sure. How do you assess the future of mining in the area?

R  The Copper Country has a great future as far as mining is concerned with the modern methods. It's interesting, when I was a youngster there was a professor who came up from the University of Michigan.
His entire project for the summer under a grant was to study the area in the Copper Country as far as it extended to the west and east and south and to get sort of an overall picture of what the mining portrayed here. At that time and this goes back about 32 or 34 years ago, he gave me a report because I was connected with it, I drove him around. They asked for someone to volunteer and I did. He in his report and I'll condense it, he said that about four percent of the range had been mined and about ten percent of the range was known. In his report at that time, the ten percent that was known, under those mining conditions that existed then, they could have gone on for a hundred years. So I would think there's an awful lot of ore deposit in the copper country that isn't even touched. Of course it's difficult to get out. The labor costs being what they are. The cost of everything, the equipment and so on. The mines have to go to such depths and through such rock to get to it. Of course there's no copper in the whole world that matches this copper. It has a very small percent of silver and native copper is about 97.7% pure. All you do is knock the rock off of it and you can go to work with it. So I think they wouldn't be spending the money going around surveying it like they are if there wasn't something of interest here. I'm sure that with my experience of being supervisor and working with the mining people they know and understand more about the mineral deposits here that has ever been published and that's unfortunate because the law says if it's a known deposit and even though you're not using it you still have to pay taxes so they just don't report it.

I

Sure.

R

But I would think it has a great future. I would think it's going to be a better future in relation to the area than it ever was in the past. There will be no mining control such as we knew. The Copper Country is really arriving in it's own.

I

I'd like to shift gears here a little bit and ask you you work as customs inspector, could you explain a little bit what that's about?

R

Well I'm called a WAE employee, I work when called for. I'm on a 24 hour and 7 day a week call. As far as customs are concerned, any of the things that are allowed to be done for inspection I'm allowed to do. Immigration does put certain restrictions on me. Several that are outstanding, are I'm not allowed to handle without special permission a plane load of people that represent more than eight. I'm not allowed to take care of Canadian youngsters who go to school here, they have to go through Duluth or Soo Sault Marie. The Soo is my headquarters. Because they are traveling on what is called a 194 and this is a special permit and if they leave the country it has to be taken away from them and a new one issued so immigration wants to handle that in their main headquarters. There are other restrictions but nothing major beyond those two main ones. I handle everything that comes in. Actually there are no cars but all boat traffic, pleasure craft, all the planes that come in, commercial and a great many private flights. I also do handle coastal steamers out of Canada. They bring in salt and limestone, and coal occasionally.
Once in a while they come through with a part load of what and part of something else and those have to be inspected too. It's a very interesting job and I have two reasons that I took the job, one was because it gave me an entirely different line of thought. I had been ill for quite a while and coming out of it I needed something that would take me out of general routine and give me a change. Also with all the various government services I worked in, I had about fourteen years of retirement build up and no way to extend up on it. So with this job it's extended a little bit. Really the only extension is the time against what they consider overtime that gets credited to retirement and not the regular.

Because I don't have a salary, I just get paid as I work.

Charges are kind of interesting because a private plane coming in all that I charge them for is mileage. These are of course all regulatory. If they came in on a Sunday or a holiday they would be charged $25.00. That same private plane and that would include all of the charges including mileage. If a commercial plane comes in during a regular work week, I charge them mileage plus the number of hours I spent and it's usually two hours from the time I leave the office until the time I get back I'm supposed to charge for that time so their charged around $11.60. If a commercial plane were to come in on a Sunday, it would cost them about $75.00. I don't get much Sunday or holiday traffic.

Jack are there any subjects that we didn't discuss that you'd like to. That you feel would be important to mention.

Well one thing that's quite interesting to me is people have always come back to the Copper Country. With the situation being as bad as it is in the city, Chicago and Detroit, especially Detroit where the majority of our people have gone to live, it's more than interesting to see them coming back. Some of then quite early in life. They retire and sell everything that they have. Apparently they've build up enough equity that they can come back and they're coming back here and buying up everything that's here. If it's a frog pond or a farm back out in the country and especially lake shore property. Our lake shore property has jumped in value as much as 5,000%. And I don't think I'm exaggerating because property that you could have bought for $150 or $200 twenty years ago, it's selling for five and six and seven thousand dollars today. Actually there's no more lake shore property to be had right now. Resale and a few spots that individuals have with the idea of reselling them. One of the things that's really interesting is this new law that's been created by Joe Mack and Rusty Hellman in that the mining companies, the large land holding owners, now can sell individual pieces of property from their main holdings without having to go under the Platt law. In other words if you had a piece of property no matter how big it was and you sold 3 pieces of it, you were all right but the minute you sold the fourth piece you became subject to the law.
R If you sold the 4th piece and didn’t plat then the people from the Attorney General’s office can come in and plat your land and charge you for it. Just take for instance the Quincy Mining Company if they were to layout and have everything platted it would cost them millions of dollars. They couldn’t afford to do it.

I That’s right.

R It’s been a real hold back on land sale. This area that we are in right now would have been the suburb of Hancock without any doubt in my mind that I could have bought this property. See I don’t own this property I rent it or lease it for $25.00 a year or is it $35.00 now. So of course we have a year to year lease here then. Now maybe under this, the Quincy Mining Company may decide to sell. Everyone of us up here would be more than happy to buy our land. But Mr. Todd never wanted to give up.

I He’s a man we should interview for this project.

R That’s right. He should be interviewed because he’d be quite interesting. Actually he’d be quite interesting from the mining company standpoint.

I Did he ever spend any extended periods of time here?

R Oh yes. There was a Mr. Blackburn and Charlie Lawton that I remember as running the Quincy Mining Company office. Lawton was in charge and Blackburn was his assistant. He was a very easy going man where Mr. Lawton was a very overbearing person. But Todd would come up and stay at the Douglass House or the Scott Hotel and spend a month or a couple months at a time. He came rather quietly and went rather quietly in those days. He’s come back since a number of times and stayed short periods but he’s quite happy apparently where he’s at. You know that’s one of the interesting things too all the monies that have been developed here in the Copper Country and history will show you that Pittsburgh Steel was built on Copper Country money. The Boston towns, many of those were built on Copper Country money. Of course this is the bad feature about holding companies that are away from here, the money goes out of here.

You know the Copper Country was so wealthy at one time that between the people who lived on College Avenue in Houghton, and School Avenue which is 41 in Calumet where all those big homes are they controlled in 1917 about 1/7 of the world’s wealth. This is how much money that was being produced out of the Copper Country. Of course the Copper Country supported the Civil War. It supported it through it’s mining venture but also through the monies that were sent into it. The Michigan Regiments were numerous. I think there were six or seven regiments that were in the Civil War. Mining companies are a boom and burst as such and I think in this company the economy can be better regulated. It’s just like our lumbering industry there are one or two lumberers yet who aren’t following our laws or natural laws. They go through and slash an area down where there’s nothing but
Well regrowth in the Copper is only about two percent a year in natural growth. If they cut an acre plant an acre. I've often thought how do you stockpile. You can dig it out and set it there and there it's stockpiled. You know the Copper Country has the greatest stock pile of copper in the world.

That's right

And we've got lowgrade copper here to an extent that's never been touched. Just because there's so much highgrade. All of this ties in and this is why I think the Copper Country has such a great future. I think also because Jalkanen at Tech or Suomi I mean and the people over at Tech also, they've given up their whole lives to being here. Men of great ability who could have gone anywhere in this world. And look at Detroit and Northern, maintaining their mainoffice here and they could have gone to Detroit or anywhere. But the people of the Copper Country have to come up to this to realize this. and you know the drawback and I'm going to refer to the city council in Hancock to example this. I've had a lot to do with them in the last couple of years, you know the business street in Hancock as many business streets in any town support the town. Literally they do.

Sure.

They support it with taxes, there's never a church group or society or business group that doesn't go to the businessmen for a donation.

That's right.

They all do.