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SUBJECT: Settling the land, early logging activities of Finnish farmers, and the history of Finnish logging and sawmill operations up to the present.

SOURCE: Reuben Niemisto - (1930 - ) Finnish, born in Pelkie, Michigan in the local area called "Pine Creek". Independent logger and sawmill operator in Keweenaw Bay (U. S. 41)

COMMENTS:

Interviewer: Allan Lavery (Student of M. Loukinen, Social Science Department at Michigan Technological University, Feb. '74)

I: Where did your parents migrate from...when they came to Pelkie?

R: ...from Calumet during the Copper Country strike. Originally they came here from Finland and they were lured by the copper mining boom in Calumet, you know. But previous to that he had worked on the farm as a boy in Finland and I think he was attracted to the land and necessity created the need to move when there was no work in Calumet so they came over here then and started logging...well farming first of all.

I: Was the land cleared when he moved out here?

R: Well, no...no, I think this was a homestead. This particular piece of land was homesteaded by Champaynes and my father then of course bought it from a land agent. See, they apparently left the homestead and then he bought it from...I think it was Jasper or somebody...some land agent that he bought the original four forties. There was a little clearing here...there wasn't a house but I think there was an old barn which is located where our present barn is. But the type of work in the woods to sustain himself 'til they got some cattle and some land cleared. Clearing would take place in the spring and early summer and fall. Clear a few acres...as they got a little more land I suppose they increased their herd, you know, in an effort to try and get themselves sustained, but this took a long time so I suppose this lead to his interest in logging. First of all I believe he used to haul logs. See, there used to be a logging trail right...the Pine Creek is located directly east of us here about two-hundred and fifty feet and they had a sleigh trail from this area that they called Turunen's Camps which would be directly south of here. They used to haul logs to Pelkie where they used to load 'em on the Mineral Range Railroad...had a great big siding there and a log yard. They didn't have a sawmill there to my knowledge. But, I don't know how many years he did this but then they had a big sawmill in Alston and had a few forties of land...I don't know leased or purchased or something that he used to have...log every winter oh for several years. Probably had three or four horses and I think about four or five men...local people that was cuttin. He was hauling for the Alston Mill and I think this went on
until close to 1930. By that time got a little land cleared so that he was able to increase the herd by about...oh I suppose by fifteen - eighteen cows. I don't never remember him working in the woods, you know. All the while I was growing up he was a farmer, see. Well, let's see this would be...I can remember oh to about 1930 and previous to that he did whatever logging he did in the woods.

I: What kind of trees did he cut?

R: What kind of trees...well I believe...I think they cut hardwood until they cut both hardwoods and softwoods. These areas that he was cutting, I think they had been previously cut by some logger, but they used to take very select trees. Of course, he just cut what was left. I think they cut about...I don't know...fourteen forties or something...I heard them talk. I really don't...I'm not that...it was so vague and uninteresting to me at the time that I didn't pay much attention.

I: Do you know where the logs were going at that time?

R: Yeah, to the Alston Mill. They used to have a great big band-mill in Alston. Was located right directly east of where the present tavern is located if you've ever been there. They had a...that was a big big mill. I think it burned out oh sometime in the early thirties.

I: Do you know where the lumber that was cut at the mill went?

R: I have no idea. I think it used to...oh it used to go to shoe factories. They used to press a lot of shoes lasts...you know, heels, heel stock and I remember people that worked there talking about sorting lumber for heel stock and so on, you know, they made shoes and so on. But I would guess that it went down to Milwaukee and Chicago area.

I: Who owned this land? Do you know who owned this land before your father bought it?

R: Well, it was homesteaded by I think the Champaynes...to my knowledge...as far as I can understand.

I: Who were the Champaynes?

R: Well, they were...see the French people settled this area before the Finns did...they homesteaded most of this area. But I don't know of any of the family around here anymore. They must have moved out...died off.

I: And they built that barn that was there?

R: There was an old log barn that my folks used for a few years and I think they were able to keep about six - eight cows in there.
So where their productivity outgrew the capacity of the barn then he built another barn out of logs himself which we tore down a few years ago that he was about to keep oh about twenty-three cows in there; and that was built out of logs...cedar logs. They were...you know this area must have been rather wet...must have had a lot of cedar because I remember him telling me that he could go to the neighbors without walking on the ground on these windfall logs...cedar logs so they harvest them...hew 'em and that's what they made the barn with. That's what they made the first two rooms with of this house. In fact this house...these two rooms are cedar logs.

I: Underneath?
R: Un huh

I: What did he live in before he started living in this house?
R: Before they lived in this house...I think they stayed with the neighbors for awhile. They ah...you know that's vague...I really don't know where they lived. There was that old grainery there, but I don't know. But I think that they must have stayed at some neighbors for awhile. It didn't take long to build a log house. You know, they used to have these building bees...I mean there were a few people around already and I suppose they helped one another enough to get established. But I think I remember him talking about commuting from Calumet here, so he probably stayed here by himself for awhile until such a time that there were facilities enough to bring the family down here.

I: Did he stay here throughout the winter?
R: Well, do you mean during the building or after they settled...when do you mean?

During the building.

R: I don't think it took that long. I would guess that he moved here in the spring and by fall they were able to move in and start...I'm trying to recollect what I've heard, you know...but I'm sure that they moved in...he came here in April and by fall the place was ready for occupancy.

I: Did he raise any crops?
R: Well, I think they had one or two cows. See, they even used to have cattle in Calumet, so apparently they must have brought whatever...they had a cow or two from over there and they used to cut a lot of hay...well they must have some old logging roads or trails and they used to cut hay with a scythe and harvest it. During the early early logging, you know, they'd harvest the hay...timothy hay grew real abundantly in any open area, and they'd
harvest that and bring it in...food for the horse until they got enough of their own land cleared. I think there was a couple three acres here when he moved...come in. According to the original homestead agreement they had to make certain kind of improvements on 'em, so I assume that they must have had some land cleared when they had a barn here...maybe four - five acres even.

I: Was he raising the cattle for his own use or was he making a profit on it?

R: For milk...well, what happened in early times...well they were separating the milk at that time see, and Bridgman-Russell had a creamery in let's see...Houghton or Hancock I think and they would take this cream in a can...they would separate it here at home and take the cream twice a week...that's to Pelkie and they would load it into a box car and then it would go to Hancock then. Of course, the skim milk was fed to the calves then...very very nutritious feed for the calves. So, I suppose they must have raised their own beef which was a by-product of the milk.

I: Do you suppose that was enough to make a living on?

R: Well, I don't think it was enough to make a living because they had to depend on winter employment to build a little nest-egg I suppose...buy some more equipment. I don't think you could make any capital expenditures on a few cows and the cream income they had.

I: Then this winter employment was logging?

R: Yeah...first as a teamster, you know, hauling logs and then in later years as I explained, the cutting. They had four or five men that they...I think they employed. I think he was in partners with one man and they employed about three - four men.

I: Who did he work for as a teamster?

R: Turunen...yeah Turunen used to cut quite a lot of timber here in the twenties...yeah early twenties actually I guess.

I: Did he live in a camp all winter?

R: Ah...no...I think during the time he was hauling logs I think he used to keep the horses here because it was only about another mile south where it was the logging area was. I don't think that he stayed in camp.

I: If he had lived farther away...?

R: I suppose, yeah, right.
I: When were you born?
R: 1925...in December.
I: When was the house that you're living in now built...did you say built by your father?
R: Well, yeah...these two rooms...it was a two-room deal with two rooms upstairs. This house I assume was built somewhere around 1914 at the time...pretty close to the time the time...the time that they moved here and then they made it...they enlarged it in 1928 I guess...they added the rest of the front. I assume that that was the time that it was completed pretty well because I don't ever remember seeing this house without siding, you know I don't recall the log house at all...the original two rooms or four rooms.
I: Where did he get the lumber to build the house?
R: Well, the logs were built...he picked those cedar logs like I mentioned earlier that it was just full of them...wind falls, so cedar doesn't rot so they just cut 'em up and hewed 'em and then I suppose they cut some lumber. And they used to have what they call a cooperative thrashing company here and they also had a portable sawmill and they would saw logs or lumber for whoever would need it. They'd...people'd cut their logs and they would move the sawmill to the site and saw lumber. That's the way most of the people got their lumber for their homes.
I: What did the cooperative ask in return for this?
R: Well, I think a...just a very minimum fee just to offset the cost of the machinery and I think that the...well of course, everybody had some help or they'd trade off help. They probably had one man with the sawmill that you hadda pay wages to...he was a skilled man to saw the lumber.
I: What was a portable sawmill like then?
R: What was it like? Well, it was a three-buck affair. They could saw logs with it...they didn't have any (???) flows or anything, they shoveled the saw and they had a fifteen-thirty International gas tractor that would turn the sawmill...turn the husk. That was really the only moving part on 'em, you know, they had no belt feet on 'em, you know, everything was operated from the manual you know.
I: How was it carried around?
R: Oh, it was in sections. Oh, they would bolt it together. I mean, maybe about two or three sections they'd have timbers underneath these...the track and so on and of course these timbers
would interlock then notch I suppose and then bolted together. They leveled her off and dig a pit under the saw and they were in business. It didn't take 'em long to saw.

I: Did they pull it on a railroad?

R: No, it was moved with a wagon or a horse or a dray...I think they pulled it behind that tractor because this tractor was a wheel tractor. I think they may have had a steam engine before that. I don't recall. They must have but I'm not familiar with that at all...some kind of a water lowboy or something.

I: How large was the sawmill? How big of a log could it

R: Oh, they could cut a good-sized log because most of the logs that were cut in those days were even...you know hemlock was fairly large. I suppose they had a fifty-inch circular or better...fifty-two inch circular. They could cut good-sized logs and they cut 'em oh I think eighteen feet long with that and you'd have to have three bunks, you know, to hold the logs in place.

I: Bunks? What is that?

R: Bunks are what the log sets on, you know, and then you have your locking devices and they were all hand operated.

I: Could you describe to me how a logging camp was organized when your father was a teamster? Or did you ever work in a logging camp?

R: No...I...nope, not the original what they called the big-time logging camps where they had eighty men or so. But they used to have...you mean the layout of a logging camp, is that what you're interested in knowing or what?

I: Yes, if you know what life was like; what the working hours were and the living conditions.

R: Well, I have visited...I didn't visit any of these original camps but probably a take-off on one of these. I remember going to Matt Oja's camps...he used to log in the thirties over here...he probably described (???) or maybe you've already got those descriptions.

I: No, he wasn't remembering very well that day.

R: Oh...well they used to, first of all you hadda have a cook camp, you know, that was a building in itself where the cook used to have these long tables...I don't know, three - four rows of tables...three rows, and it was a long building, I would say about twenty - twenty-five feet wide and quite long, maybe sixty feet long made out of rough lumber, you know, just, you know, tar paper on the outside and of course the cook, he lived there...he hadda little nook in the corner where he lived. And they hadda...and then they also had what they called sleeping quarters for the men's quarters which was another building.
And they had double bunks on both sides and I think they were...you know, two double bunks, one over the other and a great big stove in about the middle of the thing...yeah and they hang their socks to dry after work. Wooden floors, of course, and they had, of course, a big horse barn. At that time there was still dragging the logs out with horses; but they were hauling, as I recall, they were hauling logs with trucks. This was a Ford Motor Company logging job that I...I was just a kid. They hauled with these little Ford single axle Ford trucks. They put two thousand feet on 'em. They had a horse barn, then they had a blacksmith shop of course, where they hadda fix all these tongs that were twisting and breaking and then, of course, they hadda office with a clerk. The clerk and the walker, as they called him, he was the boss. Matt Turunen was the boss for Matt Oja when he was logging.

I: They called the boss the walker?
R: Yeah...and he used to be the...
I: Why?
R: I don't know why...and well, let's see, I'm trying to think of other buildings that were involved. That's about as much as I recall as far as the physical structure of the thing. Working hours...I don't think they worked an extraordinary long day...maybe I suppose an eight-hour day at that time as I recall. They used to have fall gangs, you know, they used to cut the logs with these crosscuts, two men to a crew, and then they'd have a skidding crew with teams of horses...I would probably...I suppose they had one or two teams in each cross-haul gang. A cross-haul gang or a jammer gang is where they load them. They drag these logs under a kind of a gin-pull affair...a jammer they call it and then the trucks would come and they would raise the logs on this jammer into the trucks and I would guess that they had two or three teams to each crew...skidding crew. Do you understand?

I: Two or three sawing...teams.
R: Two or three teams
I: ...to one skidder?
R: ...dragging to each jammer. And the jammer is the thing that they used to have a cable attached to it, you know, and they'd pull the logs up and the truck would go underneath between the jammer and the row of logs and they'd have what they called skids...they're long poles that they would prop up against the bulk of the truck and as they raised them they'd kind of slide onto the...up as they were being pulled by the horses onto the bed of the truck. But they used to have a lot of sawyers, see. Oh, thirty forty gangs of sawyers.
I: You say there were three men in a gang or two men?

R: Well, two men on the sawyers and then they would fall the trees and then the horses...the skidding crew would be maybe a day or two behind them to drag the logs out to the roadways. They also had what they called road-monkeys in those days. They didn't have bulldozers so these people would have to make the roads you know, chop everything down and level it off a little bit so they could haul. If it was wet in the summer they'd have to plank the roads, you know, so that it would carry the trucks.

I: What years are these in...that you're talking about?

R: I'm talking about the very early thirties during the depression.

I: How far would the skidders have to haul the logs to the road?

R: Well, normally they used to have roads every three hundred feet or so, so they wouldn't have to skid more than a hundred-fifty feet because you know that's an awful job for a horse to drag a big log.

I: Were these big horses?

R: They were big Belgians. Yeah, they liked to have a horse close to two thousand pounds if they could get one.

I: Were they raised in this area here?

R: I don't think so, no. They weren't raised here.

I: Do you know where they came from?

R: I suppose/from Wisconsin, Minnesota, wherever they...probably out west.

I: Who took care of the horses?

Well...at the camp? Well normally each teamster was responsible for harnessing and cleaning them, you know, they have to brush the horses. When they work hard they perspire and if you don't brush a horse I guess it gets very ill...brush 'em down; but they had...what did they call this guy that used to...they had a man in charge of the horse barns too...to probably clean the manure out and I suppose maybe put some hay in...maybe give 'em a early feeding of oats before the people would...before the teamsters came out, you know, so the horses would have had their breakfast before they went out.

I: Was there one horse to each teamster?

R: Two horses
I: Two horses.
R: A team of horses, yeah.
I: How many logs could they pull?
R: Well, I've heard them talk about two hundred logs a day even.
I: Did they pull one log at a time?
R: One log at a time.
I: They must have been big logs.
R: They were quite large, yeah.
I: What kind of trees were they?
R: Well, basically the same trees that are growing...maple, birch, your hardwoods and hemlock, they used to cut hemlock, some pine, whatever pine was left...let's see, and some spruce, I guess.
I: Is that...hemlock, I never heard about much hemlock being cut.
R: Over here? They used to cut a lot of hemlock years ago.
I: When did that die off?
R: Well, they're still cutting some but something happened to the second growth hemlock so that there isn't enough of it to really have a marketable feature. I mean, there isn't enough of it in this area. But they used to saw a lot of two by fours two by sixes, two by eights out of hemlock.
I: So the wood was used for building.
R: For building, yeah...well in this particular job that I was talking about, they all went to Ford Mill and whatever they did with it. I think they used it a lot in their own...car building. See, Ford used to originally use a lot of wood in automobiles. Now whether they used hemlock, I don't know; but they must have had a market. I think a good part of the Lower Michigan was built with hemlock lumber.
I: How did Ford get into this area?
R: That's a good question.
I: The Pelkie area.
R: He bought a lot of land. Who he acquired it from, I don't know
You'd have to check with somebody else on that. He had a tremendous amount...huge amount of land. He had oh...close to a million acres I'd guess.

I: How many mills were there?

R: Well, they had a big mill in Iron Mountain, a big mill in L'Anse, one in Pequaming...that was phased out in the early forties I believe, the one in Pequaming. That's the only one that's still standing...parts of it. You see the stacks of it up there. They used to saw a lot...I think Ford sawed about two hundred thousand feet a day in L'Anse.

I: And it all went to automobiles?

R: Well, I don't think in the later periods, you know, they were making steel bodies. I think the only portions they were using...there's a lot of wood in station wagons yet I think...in the early forties and thirties. But, he was selling it on the market. Used to even have ships come into L'Anse and Pequaming and load them. Load the lumber right on ships.

I: Did you ever see those ships?

R: Yeah, I guess I have. Didn't pay much attention to them...I was a kid, you know.

I: Well, do you remember where any of them were from?

R: No...no I don't. I think he had some of his own ships too. I think lot of that lumber went down state too even to Great Lakes ports, Buffalo I suppose and Chicago.

I: When did Ford get out of this business?

R: Ford...say I think they closed the L'Anse mill...let me think now and I can give you a pretty close idea. In about 1947 or '48 they closed the L'Anse mill approximately. I worked there.

I: Oh, you worked there?

R: I worked in the Ford mill...yeah, they were building boxes.

I: What kind of a job did you do?

R: I was nailing.

I: Nailing?

R:

I: Did you like that?
R: Hell no! Boy I didn't. Boy I got the hell out of there.
I: How long did you work there?
R: Oh, six weeks. That was the only job I ever quit...of course that's about the only job I ever had I guess. Oh, I sawed logs with a power saw for a few months too.
I: What made you get a job nailing boxes?
R: Well, I don't know. We were here on the...well we just got buried. I think we were living here on the farm, weren't we?
R-1: South Range...I was working then.
R: No...no.
R-1: Yeah, right, we were down here because you were sawing while we were down here.
R: Well, my folks were still here living on the farm and they were looking for men for the box factory. Kind a hazy thing for me now, I can't really remember...but that was extra money...they paid...Ford at the time was paying better wages than anybody else around here. They were looking for people to work there so I thought I'd try it out for awhile and earn a few bucks.
I: Did you say that was in the forties?
R: Yeah...it was in the late...I would guess about 1947.
I: Was that your first job?
R: Well no, when I was still in high school, I used to work for some people that had a store in Pelkie. They also had a milk route. I used to pick up milk. You know, every farm had cattle and the people living, so in the summers I used to pick up milk and deliver it to the cheese factories. They had one here by the Grandville...where they call it the Swede Town Cheese Factory, used to haul there; also to Baltic...Stella Cheese it was...these were both owned by Stella Cheese, these factories; an Italian ownership but they had several cheese factories in the area. They had one in Mass, Baltic, one in Baraga County...so that was my first job.
I: Did you have to get up early in the morning?
R: No...I think I started at seven o'clock in the morning. And after I got through high school I worked one summer 'til I was drafted in '44.
I: Did you have a truck that you drove around?
R: Yeah, I drove these trucks, yeah. First I was about sixteen I guess or something, I don't know...drew a pickup truck and then I grew out of that and I was driving a big ton and a half truck.

I: What kind of a truck was that?

R: International, yeah...C-30...was about a 1934 model.

I: Well then you just worked a few hours before school?

R: Well, no I didn't work while I was going to school...during the summers, yeah, and Saturdays I used to work once in awhile...and haul feed, you know, I used to...there was no railroad. See, they pulled the railroad out of...the Mineral Range was taken out of Pelkie in the thirties...I was pretty small when that...probably the mid-thirties, not much later than that, I don't remember. So, we used to have to haul feed from...they used to get feed by the carload lot in Baraga, so we had to haul feed from the car to the...each store where was sold.

I: It's changed a lot around here since then, I'm sure.

R: It sure has, yeah.

I: Could you tell me?

R: In regard to farming?

I: Well, there doesn't seem to be much farming now

R: No, there are some farmers, those that had the tenacity to stick and I think they're doing pretty well. They're bigger...they've salted a lot of the lands. They have big herds...fifty cows, I mean comparatively speaking for this area they're big in comparison to what they were years ago.

I: Do they still depend on any logging too?

R: Very few...no, I think no...not the farmers, unt-un

I: How has logging changed?

R: Well, first of all it's...you sure don't have the man-power that you used to have...no camps, you don't see any logging camps anymore. Smaller crews, mechanized crews...the output per man is much greater than it was then probably the average production is probably somewhere around six cords per man...five - six cords per man a day.

I: Well, what happened to a lot of the farmers who aren't farming anymore?

R: Well, what really...I think they retired and most of them are dead and the second generation for this area didn't elect to follow farming. They went to the cities and found other employment. In this particular area before Celotex and Pettibone
came along, why there wasn't really too much to do so most of the young people went down state. They went to the cities. A few of us got left here. We started farming...we bought this farm from my folks in 1949, I think...with aspirations of becoming farmers. We built this barn here. We kept cattle for about ten years but then gradually my interest in farming was declining and I seemed to relish the challenge of the woods more, so we phased out of it about eight years ago.

I: When was your first job in the woods?

R: My first job in the woods...well, we...after we were here on the farm we were sawing logs for a few months; but when we moved here we were basically farming and in the winter then I would buy a forty from somebody and we bought an old truck then and we were dragging the logs out with...we had a single horse, of course they were eight-foot long, you know, the pulpwood mostly, so we would open a road with the farm tractor, drag these logs and they used to have a little...they used to mount these little what they call (???) on a truck, called it a bob-tail truck, it was just a single axle truck with a platform on it and we'd have a little jammer on it mounted on the...powered by the...from the power take-off. All it amounted to was a couple of differentials from an old car that they would...you'd lock one side, you know, break one side and then the other side had a drum and just a cable on it.

I: Did you make that thing yourself?

R: No, I had it made in Alston here. They've got quite a few of them around. So they dragged the wood to...I had two guys in the woods and I'd drive the truck then. We'd get two loads a day and we'd take 'em either to the landing in L'Anse...Fairmont had a landing there and they would buy pulp and then I'd sell the hardwood to the various sawmills. And this went on for a year or two I suppose...or three and I finally got a tractor and started dragging them out with tractors.

I: You mean a farm tractor?

R: No, a wheel tractor...I mean a (???) tractor. But we still used horses for many many years because we used to contract log for a paper company on a Baraga Plains area. We had six horses one time and had quite a few guys. Must of had about fifteen guys then and we got into bigger trucks and self-loaders and so on. But then we couldn't get horses or teamsters to drive the horses so then you have to go into further mechanization...wheel skidders and so on.

I: Why couldn't you get teamsters?

R: Well, they couldn't make enough money. You couldn't get enough
production with a horse. See, you could only...a horse...two men and a horse they could probably drag out six or seven cords a day and that wasn't enough production to...for them to make a livable wage based on the allocated amount you could afford to pay per cord of cutting and skidding.

I: How long ago was this when you were still using horses?

R: Well, I'll have to think a little bit. Oh, about 19...early sixties.

I: It seems rather unusual that you'd be using horses into the sixties. Was anybody else using horses that you know of?

R: Well, they were still, yeah. Well actually it's very efficient. A horse is a small investment. I mean, you buy a horse and you've got three hundred dollars invested in it and you're in business. Put it with a chain and a harness and you can get people...and of course you gotta remember that there were a lot of people that used to work in the woods and I mean they had a kind of desire to do that kind of work until they got too old. When these people got too old and you couldn't get the youngsters to drive horses anymore. There was a real good setup because you could...

R-1: It takes a special kind of man...to work with the horses.

R: Special kind of man, yeah, but they were older men basically and of course most of these people are retired or dead now even that used to work for us in the sixties...early sixties when we had to go into a different type of a harvesting. It's certainly more efficient.

I: What...the newer type is more efficient?

R: Oh yeah. What we do now is...we have a wheel skidder but we don't use it too much; but we have one crew where there's three men that they cut the wood up and we have a big...it's a good-sized crawler tractor with a loader mounted right on it and a big trailer behind it and he piles this wood on this trailer and he piles it up in great big neat piles and on a good day he can get thirty cords of wood a day.

I: When did crawler tractors start becoming popular?

R: Well, of course crawler tractors...I'm just jumping...see crawler tractors were very popular on bigger logging already in the forties and thirties; but I mean when I started. I'm just talking of pulping...well they weren't using crawler tractors...it wasn't efficient. I mean, it was too big an investment to drag a stick of pulp; but they had crawler tractors in the thirties pretty much. I would think that after the mid-thirties while they were still cutting the virgin timber they were using all
I: There was still virgin timber in the thirties?
R: Oh yes...yes and in the forties even...sure.
I: Hardwood?
R: Hardwood, yes.
I: All the pine had been cut then?
R: Well the pine had been cut but the hardwood hadn't been cut
I: Why were you cutting pulpwood when you started?
R: Well, I couldn't buy any...I mean, how could I...I first of all I didn't have money enough to buy a big lot of virgin timber. Poplar was residue, anybody could buy that, you know. The old original log sawyers and loggers, they frowned on pulp. That was a weed, you know. So it was easier to get started. It was less capital investment involved, for one thing and accessibility of timber close by...close to home here within a very short distance.

End of Side A

R: Oh, they had a landing. See, during World War II everybody...there was the same type of a wood shortage as there is now although we don't have a war now; and several of the companies moved into this area. See, we've kind of...this area has always been kind of a reservoir for the Wisconsin paper mills. I look upon it as a reservoir because of the distance involved. I mean you have to transfer to wood so many...such a much greater distance than the local wood they have over there so anytime that they run real short they come into the area and set up buying. So, Marathon had a landing right where the L'Anse Depot is...there's a sawmill there now. They were buying hemlock and spruce and balsam, so they were there for several years. Eventually Marathon was sold out or merged into what it now called the American Can Company.

I: You said Marathon was a paper company?
R: Yes...they were bought up...they merged to the American Can Company.
I: What kind of paper were...what
R: I'm not familiar with what they were making really. I think they're in all kinds of paper...Marathon...well maybe that plant...that particular plant might have been this rough corrugated...you know this box-type of paper that they're making now at Northern.
I: Where was that plant?

R: That was in Rothchild, Wisconsin, I think, yeah. See, they would
haul there and then they would load themselves. They loaded...
did the loading. They had their own what they call a yard-crew
that would unload the trucks.

I: How were you paid for that kind of load?

R: By the cord...I think it was eighteen dollars a cord for hemlock
at that time. Actually the price of pulp hasn't gone up in
twenty years too much...there's been a greater increase now in
this year than anytime I can remember. For about twenty years
the price for pulp was pretty much the same.

I: Why was that?

R: Well, there was enough wood available. The supply was there so
they didn't pay anymore than they had to. Now they're having to
pay more because people have gotten out of the woods business
and it's very expensive to get into the woods business now. I
mean to get into a logging business now...I mean, if you're gonna
have trouble without talking inventories, just the equipment is
probably a hundred thousand bucks or more plus get into a sawmill
it's more money. Then you've got lumber inventories, log invent-
ories.

I: How much equipment are you talking about that's worth a hundred
thousand?

R: Well, a skidder is worth about eighteen...fifteen to eighteen
thousand...one skidder right now.

I: One skidder?

R: Yes. A new truck is worth thirty thousand dollars...a good
truck. A loader is about nine thousand dollars that you mount
on a truck. Just to build a rack...a platform out of steel is
fifteen hundred dollars for that same truck. Then you have to
have a bulldozer to make roads and open roads and if you buy a
new one...that's...you can't buy anything for less than twelve
thousand dollars and then if you want to go into some other
allied equipment like you have to have a pre-hauler...something
that you want to bring the logs to the main road in the summer
when the roads are...see, nowadays, with all this horrible invest-
ment you have to keep logging all the time. You can't pile wood
up for the winter during the summer. You have to have the money.
So, you have to buy another machine to pre-haul the logs to a
good road. Then if you have a sawmill, then you add to that
another thirty - forty thousand dollars. A chipper alone is
twenty-two thousand dollars for a sawmill.
I: How have you been able to afford all these things?
R: I don't know...just knit-picking away. I mean, you don't buy...I didn't have a hundred thousand dollars believe me. Just growing into it, that's all.
I: Is that how everybody got into it around here?
R: Pretty much except...well yeah. The plant from Baraga, Alwoods, they came here with a lot of money see...made a lot of money but the (???).
I: The local people that are jobbers.
R: Yes...yes that's right. So they...
I: And you started with
R: one horse.
I: one horse
R: and a truck. I bought a six hundred dollar truck.
I: What make of truck?
R: Ford truck...1946 Ford truck
I: How much could that carry?
R: Three cords
I: Did it ever break down?
R: Oh yeah, once in awhile. That Auto-Car there carryies nine
I: Nine cords?
R: Yeah and if we're hauling from level country where...like you can put another five on a trailer behind it.
I: Is that one of the better makes of trucks now?
R: Well, I suppose. It's a heavier truck...yeah, it's a good truck.
I: What are some of the other makes?
R: Well, Ford makes a good truck too, International is very popular in this area up here. Well, there aren't too many Auto-Cars around here...lot of Ford trucks.
I: When did you get your truck?
R: Well, this one here I haven't had too long. I used to...I've had tandem trucks since the fifties somewhere...oh let's see, I guess late fifties, I suppose.

I: Was that thirty thousand dollars for them?

R: No...the first one I bought that used. I think the most was... see I paid...in 1960 I bought a new truck and that was nine thousand dollars...a GMC V-6...beautiful truck.

I: What's happened to that one?

R: Well, wore out...I used it for six years. Six years I traded it and it was worth two hundred and fifty dollars. It was beat.

I: Is that a good life-time for a truck? Six years?

R: Yeah, I would guess.

I: Did you have any that lasted longer than that?

R: Yeah, well I had a '66 truck...that's about all it lasted was six years. It was beat. Of course these bigger ones are made heavier. I think they'll last a little longer.

I: Well, I don't know what beats the truck...where does it take its beating?

R: Well, I think principally...well driving on the woods roads is real hard then...they aren't expressways. There's a lot of twisting and it's hard on the frame and just wear and tear... they're running all day long, you know, for twelve hours a day. They're always in use.

I: Are these trucks

R: And then they get banged up too, you know, you have a tendency to scrape 'em on a tree or pile of logs or something...tear a running board off.

I: Are they made especially for logging?

R: Oh, I would say that they're take-offs from highway trucks and they probably gear them down to another transmission, auxiliary transmission on the older trucks so that you have more...lower gear ratio. But the cabs sure aren't made for logging.

I: How would you like to see a cab made for logging?

R: Like that Auto-Car is. That isn't made for logging but it's really made rugged. I mean, you don't have those frilly fenders on it, they're just deck-plate fenders, I mean, if you dent one you can make a new one.
I: You mean they're flat fenders
R: Un huh.
I: Is that the only thing that's wrong with them?
R: Well, of course the cabs were made...they're not made to stand a lot of twisting and so on. I mean, they'll take it, but eventually the doors don't want to close and it's just very hard service on a truck. (???) they could put another axle on it so you could carry more weight...of course you have to plan...that's always the object to do as much as you can...carry as much load as you can and cut down on your cost.

I: Where do you buy these trucks from?
R: Well, I don't know. Locally mostly
I: Local dealer?
R: Well they don't...the Ford dealers are...I don't know of any local dealer that handles logging trucks around here anymore. Most of the trucks that you see around here...Fords that is...come from all the way up from Marshfield, Wisconsin...V & H Ford. Apparently it's a very expensive undertaking for anybody to get into really because you have to carry a lot of parts and so on; so a small local dealer isn't in a position to do that, especially a car dealer.

I: How many logging trucks are there around here now?
R: Oh, there are quite a few...you mean in the Pelkie area?
I: Well, yes...driving into Baraga and L'Anse.
R: Well, I would say that there's...well let's see...about a dozen not including L'Anse and Baraga...just local, you know, Elo and Pelkie...and Alston.

I: Have you ever had engineers or people who design these trucks ever come around to see how they preform?
R: Well, I guess so. Now I would have to say that the trucks in the last four - five to six years have certainly improved an awful lot because they do an awful lot of work now compared to the work before. I would say that they're pretty much in line with the rest of the technology as far as, you know, adaptability. You know, you can buy a truck and you can get almost anything you want if you know what you're buying, you know...any type of gear ratio, any type of engines, and differentials, and you can really...it's available on the market, being made.

I: How do you go about buying one?
R: Well you have to...well I suppose you should know a little bit about it yourself and the person that's selling them certainly should know something and of course, you learn that you've gotta have a...you don't buy a ten-speed road ranger in the woods, you have to have a thirteen speed to get the extra gears, the lower local gears and so on and you don't buy a thirty-two thousand pound axle, you gotta get a thirty-eight or a forty-four thousand pound...you got a big engine because it'll tear the differentials up and see, I mean, you just learn by association and working with them.

I: Since you own a sawmill they must send you information on the latest things.

R: Oh yeah...you pick up and you hear talk, you know, you talk to people about equipment and of course you certainly have to be your best judge yourself on what you need, what you can afford, what's adaptable.

I: When you want to buy one, do you have to go down to Wisconsin?

R: Well, I go down state. I look around and this last truck I went down and I looked for a good used one, dickered, and found one that I thought would be adaptable and so we had it fixed up so that it would work for us...had it extended with other axles on it and so on.

I: How far down state did you have to go?

R: I went to Detroit.

I: Did you drive it back yourself?

R: Yeah

I: Who makes the loader?

R: Prentis loader...Prentis loader is made by...well it used to be called the Prentis Motor Company but they were bought...see that was started by an enterprising young Finn in Wisconsin by the name of Heikkinen...had an idea and he started building and he made an awful lot of these loaders over there in Wisconsin and everybody practically had 'em. But apparently it got too big for him, I mean inventories and everything else, so he sold out to Ohmark Industries...they made saw chains and everything else, kind of an allied thing. But, I guess he became a millionaire; but they were kind of a...went through a phase of trial and error with these loaders. The first loader that...I think I had the first power loader around here...it's called a high-above made in Ely, Minnesota by a fellow by the name of Larsen. He...I don't know what happened, he sold out to Beloit Industries, they're a big...they have...they make all kinds of sawmill
sawmill equipment so they bought it; but I think they phased out on that business...the loader...mainly the loader business.

I: Could you describe to me what the loader was like that Larsen had?

R: Well...

I: Was it basically the same as the other one?

R: Well, these loaders that we use now are what they call...I don't know if you're familiar with them at all...

I: No, I'm not.

R: Well, they're knuckle loaders...they're raising. In other words they bend in the middle and they have two cylinders, one that brings the load up and another one that knuckles, of course, they're very good, very efficient. The old loaders were a cable type of a loader. You'd have the long boom and your bucket was extended by cable and of course you had your hydraulic lines running to control the bucket, opening and closing of the bucket.

I: The bucket?

R: The bucket is your clam...oh I'm sorry...and you know the clam is where you grab the logs on each side and these, comparatively speaking, these what we call the knuckleloaders or the current models, they're positive. Everything is controlled. I mean, you can turn the clam by pulling a button and the old-time cable loaders the thing would be dangling there and you'd have to wish it would fall in the right spot and then you grab. Well, of course you get used to it so these people were real real efficient at handling it. They seemed to wear out...they had a lot of shifts that the cable could turn in and they were wearing out and they weren't as efficient comparatively.

I: Was there any time when you didn't have any kind of loader or hoist to load logs on the trucks?

R: No...I never...oh yeah, when we first started we loaded with a manure loader on the tines...we had tines on...you know, just a regular manure scoop...bring it to the truck...you had a twelve foot bed on it and just dump it and then you'd have a guy on top, I mean, you'd kind of build it up in the middle so you could roll them up in front...you couldn't reach all the way in the front.

I: What is a manure scoop?

R: Well, a manure scoop is a...it's a...well, you've probably
seen an end loader on a...where they load gravel with and so on on a road construction project...well a manure scoop is a very very simplified much smaller version on a farm tractor and you load your...you scoop your manure, load it in little piles load it in the middle or whatever and then scoop a stick of wood and...

I: Was it eight feet wide?
R: You mean the loader?
I: The scoop on that.
R: No, it's only about three feet wide.
I: How did you get a stick of wood on there?
R: Oh, it would balance in the middle, you know, get it in the middle.
I: That was harder work than it is now, wouldn't it be?
R: Well, it was slower, yeah sure it took you...it takes about ten minutes to put a load now, but I mean with a knuckle loader. It probably took an hour to load then.
I: And you were loading less on...
R: It loaded about half as much then.
I: Well, who made the first skidding tractor that you saw?
R: Well, the first skidding tractor that I...well they...Caterpillar used to make...well Holtz, well whatever happened to them...Holtz Company used to make skidding tractors. Then Caterpillar came out with the gas versions they called the ten-twenty-two and I don't know what the other figure was; but the one in this area, the real popular skidding tractor was the Allis-Chalmers Model M. It was a four-cylinder crawler. They were out in the thirties and that's what really revolutionized logging when they, you know, were able to get rid of the horses because then they started dragging these logs out with these Allis-Chalmers. They'd bring two logs at a time...three even and they'd go much faster...they'd never stop 'em...just go and go and they didn't get tired.
I: Did they put anybody out of work?
R: Well, I think there was always a surplus of men in the thirties in this area. Well, yeah they did. They certainly did use less men but they also increased their production. I'm sure that they put people out of work, yeah.
I: Well then the teamsters...did they get rid of their horses and get a skidding tractor or did they get rid of the teamster?

R: Well, I think it was kind of a revolutionary thing. Maybe they phased out and went back to the farm, some of them, and some of them went...I don't think too many teamsters became tractor drivers because that used to be a job for youngsters, you know, young guys that would have a lot of daring to drive those wild skidding tractors in the woods. So, I think it was a real challenge and a very respectable high-class job that it was to be able to drive them, something like that. So, I don't think that they were at a loss of prospective drivers.

I: Did it actually take daring?

R: Well no, but the fact that it moved much faster than a team of horses would.

I: Was there any danger?

R: Oh yeah, there was always danger. You could get thrown off a crawler tractor very easy. If you go over a log, even a sapling, you know. You know what a sapling is, don't you, and if you just don't stop when you get to your point of balance, you know when your balance is gonna go over, it'll throw you...whip you right off the seat. So, you had to release the clutch so that it would just keep pulling it. It's very dangerous if you're not careful.

I: How heavy was that machine?

R: Well that first Model M...I don't think it was more than two or three ton...four - five thousand pounds maybe.

I: What were the dimensions?

R: What...of the tractor?

I: The length and...

R: Well, I suppose it wasn't more than...well I suppose it was five feet wide maybe five and a half and maybe eight - nine feet long...all engine, you know it was great big low-speed engine up front, see, and then of course the Allis-Chalmers came out with the diesel tractors, the HD-5 Series and so on, and they were really sophisticated and fast...go through the snow in winter, you know, much better.

I: How did that first model, the M, go through the snow?

R: Well, I don't think it was a very good snow tractor, you know because it was low...the center of gravity was pretty low and
it didn't have a very wide tracks; but it was...I'm sure it was as good as three or four teams.

I: Did it ever get stuck in the snow?
R: Oh sure, sure. they did.
I: Did they get a horse to pull it out?
R: No, they can get 'em out alright...well when it gets so deep that they can't get into the woods, there's nothing you can do. Well, what they used to do was go ahead and make skidding trails for the skidding tractors with they'd either pack snow with a bulldozer, you know...a bigger tractor that would have a higher clearance so that before the people would cut the trees down, then they cut these trees of these trails and they could drag the logs out better because the trail was packed naturally.

I: Was that job of making roads...the men who did it were they still called swampers?
R: No...no I guess not. Oh for goodness...this is our first year on the farm. We were just...there's the old barn that my dad built back here and we used to have a garage and a woodshed and I was hauling the old wagons, I was hauling wood.

I: Is that pulpwood?
R: No, that's fire wood.
I: What did your father do with the wood that he cleared off.
R: What did he do with it? They used to pile it up and burn it, most of it, you know...it wasn't...they weren't...ah, well they made wood out of it. We had a lot of aspen growing here so I suppose...they used to burn a lot of aspen, they made some pulpwood, but it was kind of brush too, there was a lot of brush and they just piled it and burned it.

I: They didn't sell any of it or use any of it for firewood?
R: Well, they burned all they could, you know, themselves, but there was no market. I mean, you just couldn't give it away

I: When did a market for aspen come in?
R: Oh, I would say that there was a very good market for peeled aspen beginning in the forties up until...through the fifties and maybe halfway through the sixties, and then a lot of the paper mills started going into...well they wanted clean wood so they started using these mechanical peelers. The only mill
to my knowledge that's still using peeled aspen in Charmin in Green Bay. They like to buy peeled aspen and they dry it...let it set for a year, I guess, before they use it. Of course, that's another phase of logging that's kind of faded out because this peeling in the spring, I mean that used to be a big deal. Everybody used to cut a carload or two of pulp in the summer, you know they'd peel it, stack it, and then sell it in the fall. But as the mills quit using it, and then it's kind of an unpopular distasteful type of work. Nobody likes to go up there with the flies...it's hot weather peel...especially the younger people that they can go to a welding shop over here and get out of the heat. So that kind of phased out for two reasons; lack of markets and lack of interest really. I think...I don't know anybody off hand that's still peeling aspen. They're buying it...you know, everybody's selling it rough now.

I: Did the mills pay more for aspen that was peeled?

R: Oh yeah, they paid about four - five dollars a cord more. Then you had a twelve - thirteen percent shrinkage too, you know, when you took the bark off so it didn't really mean that much.

I: What tools were used to peel it?

R: Well, they were homemade. It's just a...well actually what they used was a curved piece of metal. I don't know if you're familiar...well you're familiar with a car spring...well you take a short piece but not the heaviest car, they used to use what they called a buggy spring. They were very very thin...oh maybe three-eighths of an inch thick...oh less than that. All you do is just sharpen one end of it and maybe put a handle on the other end to fit your hand, and you'd strip the bark off the top so that you had...you know what I mean with an axe, you take and...

I: Slit right down it.

R: Slit, yeah, and then you'd just work that metal tool back on both sides and the bark just fell off...just falls right off

I: How long did that take for one log?

R: Well, not too long...maybe well I remember that for an average guy, a hundred eight-foot sticks used to be, you know, a pretty good medium; but for the exceptional worker why two hundred was good.

I: For one day?

R: Yeah, they used to get paid by the stick...ten cents a stick. Twelve cents as inflation crept in and so on. That's to cut 'em down and to peel them and then just leave 'em there. They used to have to be left there to dry. See, they were very
slippery until...well, you'd peel as much as you can and in the summer, in August, you'd start dragging them out...draggin them out and get rid of them before the snow.

I: Were these the same people that had cut the logs that logged or were they...who was being paid for the cords of wood?

R: Well...who was being paid for the cords? Well, that was the measure that they was buying; but I mean if you were to hire somebody to cut them...I mean, this is the way that they were paid ten cents or twelve cents a stick to have them cut and peeled. Now if you did it on your own job, of course, then you benefited from the whole project by selling the wood. But if you were a contract woodsman, your job ended when you cut the tree down and peeled it.

Well did the contractor who cut the trees hire people to peel the sticks?

R: Well often times the same people would probably stay on then and help drag them out and pile them. They'd have to cut them up into eight-foot lengths and they'd pile them by hand...nice piles you know, and then that was done by the cord. They'd pay them x number of dollars a cord for that operation either with a horse, most likely a horse, or could used a tractor; but they'd drag 'em out in long lengths, you know.

Stop in tape.

R: This was the first winter that I worked in the woods. We were pulling traps and I was a young kid then and my partner...well he was quite old and he was an ill man...he'd had TB...I think he only had one lung and I think he was kind of interested in showing me how it's all done and I was certainly willing to accept his experience. He had been a woodsman...so we worked for about three or four weeks in the woods and it was a real enjoyable time. I learned an awful lot. I didn't learn how to file a saw, a crosscut, I never have and don't think I ever will because this was just this kind of transition time, you know, power saw. But this particular tree was amongst the growth of hardwoods. For what reason it was left by the pine people I don't know. That log had...I think it had five sixteen-foot logs and three twelve-foot logs...was it fifty-seven inches at the stump. We had to use all kinds of kerosene on the saw, you know, to lubricate it pulling that thing back and forth. he

I: This guy looks like/had a sense of humor.

R: He did...he was funny. He used to work for my dad when my dad was logging...Herbert Erickson.

I: Is he related to the Erickson's that are over in L'Anse?
R: Ah...Ericksons in L'Anse...no...no...no...no...no relation. They're Norweigens or Swedes or whatever they are...he was a Finn.

I: Did you like using a crosscut saw?

R: Nope...no I was very glad...was ready to forget the woods if it depended on working with a crosscut saw. I don't mind working, but I just can't...I don't like drudgery involved in pulling a crosscut.

I: Was that just all there was to it? Just drudgery?

R: Well, to me it was drudgery.

I: What else didn't you like about that...working with methods that he was...

R: Well, I mean his methods were very fine except that it was the crosscut that I didn't like. I mean here we were...I was born into the machine age and if something else hadn't come along I don't think I would be working in the woods believe me.

I: What were some of those things you learned in those three weeks?

R: Well, I think I learned how to fall trees, you know. You'd look at a tree and how it leaned and the dangers involved and what to do...where to go when the tree starts falling so that when you have a whiplash from the limbs of the tree that's going down and the tree that it hits, I mean, you have to...mostly caution I learned. To be careful...how it's all done...I just learned about logging that time. I had never done anything in the woods.

I: Well after that, when was the next job that you had in the woods?

R: Oh, I can't remember...well I suppose we went...I sawed with a power saw for awhile, one turn one winter.

I: How long after?

R: Oh I suppose a year or two

I: Was that the very first year of the power saw?

R: Not the first year that the power saws were, no. The power saw I ever saw was back in 1946. My uncle used to be a logger and he and another fellow were in partnership and they had done what we were talking about earlier...they had cut a whole mess of this aspen and had peeled it...two forties of it; and so they bought a power saw to cut it up. Well, I worked on that job too...I was just out of the service. They were crazy. They were two guys in their forties, I would guess at that time, eh, and they would try to outdo each other. I mean that they had worked so hard that they were sore at each other, they were mad; and I was about twenty-one then and in real good shape so I went to work for them bucking this wood. I was always...well see, they had
one horse that they were dragging them out with...I'm getting ahead of the story. And they would take turns driving the horse and this horse was the craziest thing I ever saw. I mean, he was just like a rocket. You'd hook a tree on and you'd get the hell out of the way and that horse would just come...just tearing out of the brush; and he kept it up all day long. And I mean they skidded a hell of a lot...

R-1: And at four o'clock that horse would go home

R: No, not that horse...no not that one.

I: On his own?

R: Yeah, often times they'd...well they're creatures of habit. Well anyway, they would take turns driving this horse because I mean a guy could only run after it every other day, I mean he just tired out; so on the day that these people weren't driving then they would be cutting this wood up with me on the landing or as they call it, the skidway. Then we'd carry that stuff in piles...that wood was big like this, you know...like sixteen inches on the butt end. And they carried in twelve-foot poles...they didn't have a bulldozer, they had a what they call swamp...a place that was clear a place for these piles. And rather than make a lot of them or clear more, they'd walk up those bloody piles and this horse was in the meantime the wood was coming all the time and you hadda keep sawing it and I thought those guys were crazy. You know, well I thought I'll see how tough they are. I figured I had twenty years on 'em or twenty-five years as far as physical stamina. So I started working and I'll tell you I had never worked that hard in my life. Yeah, well it got to a point where there was nothing to it. Well I'd just grab and I'd run with those poor guys...I mean they hadda go to keep up with me. Of course then I got smart as time went on, I'd grab the end first and they'd always have to lift it. You know, once you get one end up the other end is heavier. I thought well I'll, you know, get a little dirty too because I mean it was so ridiculous. So I'd jump and I'd grab the log and I'd wait for them, you know, and this went on for many weeks. So we were always racing because then after we'd cut the tree up, you know, then you carry it...and then we'd run up the hill...I'd take two - three steps at a time to theirs, it was really funny. That's the hardest I've ever worked in my life.

I: How much were they paying you?

R: Well, they were paying me I think ten dollars a day...was a respectable wage; but they said I was worth it.

I: How many hours did you work?

R: Worked eight hours a day, yeah.
I: Did you have any family then to support?
R: No...I was just thinking of that (???)...the first year I was home. My folks were still here, they were farming and they had cattle and they were paying me for helping milk cows and I was working there and I was really making a lot of money then that time...I must have...no board to pay and it was really something for those few weeks.

I: What was it like using that power saw?
R: Well, you hadda pile it in the flunkie...you hadda handle on the other end, it was a long way, about three feet long and the guy that had the two controls, he had the throttle on one so he was the boss really and all the other guy did was to hold the other end which was my job.

I: Was that thing heavy?
R: About seventy-five pounds I guess...it was made by Maul.
I: By who?
R: Have you heard of Maul tools?
I: R: Well, they made them...I don't think they make power saws anymore.
I: Does that company still exist?
R: Well I think Maul tools are still in existence, yeah.
I: What kind of tools?
R: Well, they make all kinds of tools...hammers and small tools. don't know, maybe they sold out to somebody.
I: Do you know where their factory was then?
R: No I don't...small tool company...I have no idea, I didn't pay any attention. I think the Maul people...or they sold that power saw business to the Remington...Remington they make a power saw. I think Sears Roebuck used to sell a Remington or Montgomery Wards, I don't know. Wasn't very popular anyway.

I: Was that a dependable saw?
R: 
I: Why did they get that one?
R: Well, there wasn't too many saws on the market, see that's the first power saw I ever saw in my life in 1946. They were just coming out; and there was another one being used over here that was a Mercury which is the same Mercury that builds the outboard motors...Mercury Corporation. But they have done all this power saw business; but they had a hundred and twenty-five pound saw that was a two-cylinder...twelve horsepower. Boy that thing used to be a real man-killer.

I: Did you ever use one of those?

R: No, I've never used a Mercury. And then soon after that they phased into the one-man power saw then. Then the sawyers started making a lot of money in the woods because they used to saw alone. Everybody used to say, "Well, not the hell's gonna happen when they're all alone in the woods." Get hurt and this and that, but the one with the bad power saw has improved to the point where it's really a good machine now. I mean there are many many good makes on the market now.

I: What happened to all those partners on those sawing teams if only one man is sawing, what happened to the other man?

R: I imagine they both bought power saws and they just split company.

I: Was there enough work for twice as many sawyers?

R: Well, I don't know. I suppose...what would have happened...well usually one man would probably have to do something else or phase out of it or something because one guy...often times the partner was more or less of a helper and the engineer was the saw owner usually. But this happened way back in the fifties...early fifties, late forties when they started phasing out. The two-man saw wasn't used very many years.

End of Part 1 and 2

I: Have you always worked in the Pelkie area?

R: Yeah, except...yeah I've lived here all of my life except the time I spent in the service for awhile and spent one winter in South Range. Other than that, I've been here all my life.

I: You said before that you went to Detroit a lot.

R: Well, just as visiting...visiting my brothers and sisters and our children. Both of our...two oldest kids attended the University of Michigan so we used to go down there and see them once in awhile, go to the football games.

I: Why did your brothers and sisters move down there?
R: No work here. It was as simple as that. Back in the thirties there was nothing to do here and there wasn't enough income on the farm and the logging wasn't too lucrative I mean as far as going into business for yourself was out of the question, I mean they couldn't even buy an extra pair of shoes let alone equip themselves to become self-sustaining, you know, or in business in their own rights so they moved to the city.

I: Were they older than you?

R: Yeah

I: And they had families during the depression...some of them during those years?

R: No, well actually...yeah well, they all got married in the city while they were working. They didn't...they never lived here as families. I mean they lived here when they were young and single and married in the city. They seem to have done alright too. I mean, one of them has done real well.

I: What kind of jobs did they have when they first went down there... what kind of jobs were there?

R: Well my brother was...he's six-foot-three, was a big man and some politician saw him so he was a Deputy Sheriff in Lake County for awhile until he went into the service; and then when he got back that didn't appeal to him anymore, so he took a course in industrial engineering and he's working at Burroughs has a real good job there. He's in charge of what ever the heck, what do they call it? Innovations on their various projects, sizing up the sizomatic...they've got some real sophisticated computers and that's what his job is now...special customers... special innovations. I mean, if they want a special thing on a machine well then he has to try and work it into it and follow it through and something like that.

I: This may sound like a dumb question, but how is it that you made it in the logging business and none of your brothers did?

R: Well, they never tried it. Well, first of all, I am much younger than the others. You see, they had already established themselves in the city before I even grew up...I was still going to high school; and by the time I got through school, they had already... most of them had been in the city seven - eight - ten years; and why did I? Well, I was a victim of circumstances really because in my own mind I guess after...see my folks...being the youngest well my folks were pretty old when I grew up and after I got out of the service and so on they wanted to quit back in the forties and nobody wanted to farm. I didn't either really, but we got married and I had to try it out. We tried it for awhile but I could see that our family wasn't interested...I mean a farm is a family project especially if you're a little lazy like I am you have to have some help and watching the kids grow up in it it didn't seem to appeal to them. Was too much to farming...they had other interests. I mean there's nothing wrong with farming
but their interests were elsewhere. So, we gradually phased out of farming and in the mean time I had been working in the woods and I seemed to like it better...the challenge. The money wasn't too great and still isn't but it's...you never run out of problems and somehow or other I'd rather deal with problems...economics and machinery rather than letting a cow swat you across the face with a dirty tail.

I: Is that what you mean by a challenge? What do you mean by the challenge?

R: Well, the challenge...it's a different kind...I mean I would rather accept the challenge that I have now than the unpredictability of animals and so on. I mean, you really have to love...I like animals but not to the...I don't like to take care of cattle and that's what farming in this area is...is primarily working with cattle...cows. And of course there's always a chance in this business that you can make a lot of money or you can lose a lot of money, but it's all part of the interesting facet of trying to outwit the elements and the markets. Everybody else is in the same business as you are.

I: Have you ever thought about moving to Detroit?

R: No. Oh I'd like to live there...but I'd like to...Oh, I don't know if I ever thought of moving to Detroit.

I: Do you think you'd really be satisfied living there?

R: I don't know...I have no idea. I would like to spend a year there...I really would. I could get along in Detroit. I would like to have the time...have had the time...and I'm not old yet, really I'm still in my forties; but I don't know.

I: Do you have any other skills? While cutting...have you gained any other skills?

R: Well, I think with this kind of a background I could probably go into sales of most any sort, peddling stuff, or I could go into some kind of a plant...I don't think an automobile plant, but I think I could manage a production thing pretty good, you know. It's all common sense mostly.

I: Do you have a college education?

R: No, I have...I went to Tech a little while after high school.

I: You didn't really need it then.

R: Well, I think you always needed it, but I just don't know. I thought I knew enough, but I think a college education is fine I really do. I think it's broadening and I think you can cram
into a few years what it might take a long time to acquire otherwise. Not necessarily work wise, not this kind of work so much...I don't know, but I'm sure it's helpful. I'm sure it's not a detriment.

I: Do you sometimes wish that you knew certain things about trees that maybe you don't know or you learned?

R: Well...I haven't got...no, see my involvement with trees is cost of operations which I pretty well determine, forecasting of markets and that and the application of this particular type of timber. I mean I don't think I need any further education there; but I wish I had more time to research stuff. You know, if I just had a little more chemistry then I could do something with that sawdust. But to keep things going, I don't have time to think of anything new. In a small operation, you know, we have about...well, from twelve to fifteen men altogether, you know. Well hell, no bosses, no...there are no...everybody works, you know so that what the hell all you're doing is marking time. You're not...it's kind of frustrating. You don't really have time to spend doing stuff that might give you something new...creating something new.

I: Do you own some pulp land of your own?

R: Well some land...couple

I: Timber land?

R: Not no great amount of timber lands,

I: Where do you cut your timber?

R: Well private, auto Forest Service mostly

I: National Forests?

R: Yes and private stumpage

I: How do you get these private jobs on private land?

R: Go see the people and talk to them, sell them, make them an offer.

I: Are they just individuals...small land owners?

R: Yeah, small lots.

I: Do you do any cutting on any large company's lands?

R: I used to work for a large company that had a big timber...government timber sale, but I never...well I used to. I've cut for
Mead and so on, but actually all we're interested now is finding timber for our own use mostly...primarily for the sawmill. So all big companies...all big land owner companies in this area have their own sawmills so I would have to turn over the logs to them and I want to keep our own bins full.

I: What is this wood used for then that you saw?

R: That we saw?

I: Saw up there.

R: At the sawmill? Well mostly all furniture and flooring. Your maple...I don't know how familiar you are with lumber, but you have your lowest grade is called 3B which is box lumber. Well we try to...we make that into box lumber but we precut that into pallet runners, specified width and that's banded and we ship it down state. And then you have your two next grades, your number 3A and number 2, that's a flooring grade. That goes to the flooring mill and then your number 1 common and your selects and your first and second (???) that's furniture. That goes to furniture people and most of it is sold through brokers who handle these furniture accounts. I mean, we don't sell direct, we can't. Most of our work is done through brokers except the flooring, that's sold direct to the mills.

I: What mills are the flooring mills?

R: Well, there's one in Dollar Bay and there's one in Ishpeming... Robbins Flooring in Ishpeming.

I: Just those two?

R: Yeah...as far as the flooring is concerned, yeah

I: Do you know which furniture companies these brokers are dealing for? Or do you sell it to the brokers and they do what they want with it.

R: Well yeah, they send a truck over and you ship it. You know, the furniture business and the wood business is composed of a lot of small plants. Wisconsin has a lot of them; but see I couldn't off hand...well, I'll tell you where...and then we sell a lot of aspen that goes to Iron Mountain...Glory Brothers. We sell that to a broker of VanKill and Winchester, they're offices are in Grand Rapids. They have a representative in Hancock. We bring it to Sidnaw, Michigan, where they have a dry kiln, they in turn dry it and bring it to Iron Mountain to Glory Brothers and you look in the Montgomery Ward catalog or Sears and they talk about hardwood furniture, well that's it...that's where our aspen goes.
I: Furniture made out of aspen?
R: Un huh
I: Is that something new?
R: Well, it's nothing new. It's your lower grade furniture... cheaper furniture.
I: How long has that been around like that?
R: Oh, I don't know...a long time. They've been using it for that for long long...twenty or thirty years...twenty years anyway.
I: Has your market for your lumber been the same since you started?
R: Just bearable a few years ago. It's good now. It was good the first year and then we had about three years of drought and now it's been good for about two and a half years...it's really good.
I: What happened in those three years when it was bad?
R: Well, they weren't buying. You'd have to pick...they'd buy a certain grade of it and the rest you'd have to hold for sometimes a year and as long as you were only selling a portion of the log and you'd have to pile it up in the yard and it would wait. In the meantime the weather would take its toll on it and you'd lose money.
I: Did you make any profit at all?
R: No, I lost tens of thousands of dollars. You asked me why in the hell I didn't get out. Because I didn't know any better. You can't get in or out of this business very readily. You can slow down a little bit but it's pretty hard to quit completely. I mean what the hell, you lose your crew and you lose everything and then it's pretty hard to start up.

Stop in tape.

R: Different manufacturing people use a different part of a log you know. Everybody doesn't want the high-priced (???). Some will buy the lower grade and cut sections out of it, utilize what they want. Aspen for that reason has become very popular I mean it's in great demand.
I: Well have the uses of the wood that you sell been the same as long as you've been in the business or there must have been some changes in it...in the way the wood is used from the way it was used in the past.
R: Well, I suppose. You've got this fake paneling that they make
out of wood now. They strip it and rather than use this kind of paneling, they cut...they just skim it off, I mean that's stretching it I suppose...that's one type of utilization that's different; but I mean basically, furniture is still made out of wood and I don't know that there's been such a radical change in wood furniture that...since I've been in it anyway. The biggest change seems to come from the people desires of what they want. One year they like Elm...like Elm is getting real popular now again, really just crazy and then they'll go back to...well when birch gets too high in price then they look for Elm or soft maple or something else then. But I think there's two things that peoples...there's trends, I mean I think it goes in cycles, they like maple and then they want something else; but now they buy everything because there is a real shortage. I think it started off when the Japanese were buying all this good maple for their bowling alleys. That kind of created a vacuum for hard maple. This was about a year and a half ago they bought every maple they could get their hands on.

I: You felt the benefit from that?

R: Oh yes...well they were paying fantastic...in fact the prices of maple hasn't been up to what they were paying since; but I think this is what started the markets for all the other species It hasn't let up yet. I don't know how long its gonna last.

I: What are the species that you sell?

R: Well aspen, maple, birch, red maple...your soft maple, some ash, elm, basswood and a little hemlock...we cut a little hemlock in the spring for study, you know, some of the local two-by-fours.

I: Oh you sell local.

R: Yeah, a little bit see

I: Which birch are you cutting?

R: Yellow birch primarily. We don't have too much good white birch in this area...it's very small, you know, in the area where I work.

I: How many board feet do you produce?

R: In a year?

I: A year.

R: Oh, a million and a half or so.

I: And how many per day?
R: Well, that's a variable thing. With our pre-cut stock it goes about six thousand every day. Depends on how many skids we cut. When we cut aspen we cut quite a little of them...we cut a load a week or so of just those runners.

I: Has there been any changes in the sawmill since the nineteen hundreds?

R: Well I suppose there has...I mean we're not really the most automated sawmill, but man wise I mean well certainly there has been. Well first of all they used to throw the slabs away before and now we peel the logs and you chip the slabs and they go to a paper mill...well that's a big change, I'm sure, utilizing a waste product...what was before a waste product. And in your sawmill of course you used to have your sawyer and a man running the carriage...of course this was on a bigger mill, and he would help...you know, he would tack the logs down...I forget what they call it...doggle...you know, that's the process where you hold the log in place so it doesn't turn when it goes through the saw. Well now you have air dogs or hydraulic actuated dogs that hold the logs, you don't have to have anybody there to do that. Used to have a man behind the sawyer in those days, that would be the man who would be turning down...he would be helping the sawyer turn the log, to rotate the log. Well, now you have a log turner, mechanical machine that either hydraulic or air or that air actuated that turns the log. So there's some things just in our little operation where this is all done by one man now. He's a sawyer and he controls all these operations through mechanical means.

I: He controls the log turning and the saw and the carriage?

R: Un hum

I: One man does a job that six men did then?

R: Three...used to be three...two or three even on a small mill in that particular operation.

I: What other changes have happened?

R: Well, of course they were living here right in the midst of this high-lift that they make in Baraga. Years ago they used to have to drag the logs with horses or tractors to the intake or inlet of the sawmill. Now they carry the logs to the mill and drop them very carefully and after they've processed them to lumber the lumber is placed on little trolleys where they used to have to be dragged out the same method with either sleighs or...and brought to the yard and piled up. Now all you do is put it on a little trolley and push the trolley out and the fork-lift comes in or the high-lift, it picks up the bottle and takes it away...one man. He feeds the mill and he clears the snow and
he loads the lumber and he also loads the trucks with the same machine and he piles...sorts the logs in the yard and different species he puts in different piles as they come in; so that's.. I would guess that that high-lift...that carry-lift that they build here is one of the greatest innovations or improvements that has ever come about in the saw mill.

I: How much does one of those cost?

R: Well I suppose about...well depends on how big you want it...just a small one...

I: (???)

R: Well, I think that would cost about eighteen thousand new now.

I: How many men did you say are working in your sawmill?

R: Well, we have six men. Well, there's three men inside the mill and there's one man debarking, that's four...and then there's one man running the lift, that's five. Usually we have a swing man...well I shouldn't even talk about this on the tape...well suppose that they have a Monday morning illness...you have to have an extra man about...that they're indisposed on Monday morning, well then you have to in very light terms, you should have somebody to take their place; so we have a swing-man usually then...and extra guy around just for that reason or then he does other work then if everybody happens to be healthy.

I: What are the other jobs besides the sawyer and the high-lift operator?

R: Well, you haven't got...well first of all, you have a man that peels the logs...he's a peeler operator; then you have a sawyer; you have an edgerman...a fellow that, well you know what an edger is...

I: No I don't.

R: Well, a log is round and when you start slicing it you've got bark on both sides, see, so you have to take that bark off until eventually when you keep turning that log it becomes square piece of wood, doesn't it. Then there are no bark edgings on it and then it can be piled; but as long as you have bark on it or bark edgings where it's long part of the log, you have to run it through two vertical saws depending on which variable width...I mean can be variated according to the need of the width of the board so that you get a square piece of board...square edges on it...it's an edgerman. He pushes it through there; and then you have a man piling...piling lumber...that's four men. Then we have one man that's cutting this tailing or this hearts into this pallet runners. And then this guy that piles the lumber.
he throws the edgings and slabs on a belt and they go up to the chipper by themselves.

I: Is that continuous from the...

R: Yeah

I: Why does the bark have to be removed?

R: Why does the bark have to be removed? I mean what are you studying your forestry for...are you in forestry?

I: Yeah

R: I thought you were being smart. Well, you probably know more about the composition of bark than I do, but I assume that the fibers in wood in order to make paper...it's broke down into fuzz and they have to interweave in order to make paper. Well, (?) the fibers in bark are so short that you couldn't interweave them and then you'd have discoloration also, I'm sure. Well, suppose you were shipping to a craft paper mill where they make good white paper; well you'd get these terrible spots. I don't think you can die them out; and they just would...they wouldn't blend into the process. It's a different type of a substance I guess than the wood itself. That's why the bark has to be removed.

T: Is there anything that the bark does to the saw blades?

R: Well yeah...well it really helps...I mean that alone is reason enough to remove the bark...it certainly speeds up the saw...you don't have to sharpen the blades and especially when you drag them through the dirty mud.

I: Oh, it's the dirt

R: Dirt, yeah...yeah

I: What kind of saws do you have?

R: We use a (???) tooth saw because a small operation you have to have a...or in any sawmill you use a solid-tooth saw you'd have to have a man sharpening saws. Well, we don't by using insetter-teeth saws the sawyer keeps them sharp and we have a mechanical sharpener that fits right on the saw on electric head motor and it only takes them a few minutes a day to sharpen them and when the teeth get short, he puts another set in.

I: Do you use only band-saws?

R: No, circular...we don't have band-saws. There's only one band-saw around here and that's in Baraga. All the other mills are circular...Copper Range has band-saws.
I: Is there any reason for having circular saws instead of band saws?

R: Well, it's easier to set up. Band-saws are better...they (???). Your average circular saw is about a quarter of an inch when the teeth are new and a little less as the teeth wear down. I guess a band-saw is...well I don't know...maybe three-sixteenths... maybe less than that so there's a savings; but maybe not so much anymore because our logs are smaller. If you have a great big log, then it really makes a big difference...cuts per tree, I mean grade wise it doesn't make so much difference I don't think anymore, you know. Our size of timber has shrunk, you know, considerably from the virgin period.

I: Is there less timber now than there was and smaller size?

R: Well...smaller size.

I: But is there less volume in total.

R: Well, I can only judge from what I'm told that there's more. I think it's being managed better. I think there's more growth, more concern for the future and I think we're in better shape now...the country is...I think this area's in better shape... condition now timber wise than they were thirty years ago overall. You know thirty years ago they had some virgin stands yet... now everybody's quite conscious of...even small...I mean very seldom do you...well there are still exceptions; but if I was to cut a private piece of land I know I wouldn't cut trees down for whatever you could utilize. I mean like it's become kind of a sinful thing to just slash.

I: What's your own outlook for the future?

R: Outlook?

I: You own future and the future of the woods?

R: Well, social security is my...no...you mean the timber industry?

I:

R: Oh, I think...I don't know. I imagine people are going to... I think people are getting tired of plastics and if they can afford wood...there's a certain distinctive...the distinctiveness in wood that you can't duplicate. If people can afford to buy wood it's certainly going to keep us happy to supplying them. I think there's a future in the wood business. I guess you've got to get a little more diversified all the time.

I: Do you think your sawmill will ever grow any bigger?

R: I don't know...probably. Well, I don't know that I want it to
grow so much bigger because then you have...well see a few years ago they used to talk about efficiency; but there's a little more important factor involved than efficiency and that's supply of raw material. If you get too big, then you have trouble keeping that dinosaur fed...you know, fed. I don't know, maybe I figure what I'm gonna do is just maybe just concentrate on low grade outlet more than trying to concentrate on high-production...production as far as furniture wood is concerned because their competition is different...very keen.

I: You mean the better quality wood is becoming scarser.
R: Yeah, there's more people interested in it.
I: Who's competing with you?
R: Everybody...every sawmill around.
I: How many sawmills is that?
R: Well, there's two...two in L'Anse beside Conners, I mean they would ship their logs out, they're buying...that's three; there's one in Baraga...that's four; and there are...well Copper Range is buying timber and the Penneygoers, (???)...that's quite a few of them beside the paper companies. They take a lot of wood that's salvagable...they buy hardwood now too. See, a lot of little logs go there; and there's this big veneer mill in Besmer called Ironwood Products, all they use is aspen for plywood...fabulous place...you should go see it sometime.

I: A new place?
R: About three years...three or four years old. And besides they're buying (???) in Wisconsin and there's a lot of competition.
I: Do you think the forests in this area can support all that?
R: They seem to have been able to so far...I think so, yeah. Well, they're using up an awful lot of low grade wood which isn't really...hardwood has really come into its own in the last five ten years now as far as utilization in the paper processing. It used to be kind of a wasteful thing before...by hardwood I mean maple tops and so on...they're being used now. People are paying money for them.

I: What percent of your wood goes into sawdust?
R: Well, it depends on the thickness of lumber you're cutting. If you're cutting one-inch lumber, twenty-five percent. And if you're cutting inch and a quarter well then it's proportionately less, you know, twenty percent. That's terrible. If you're cutting
six quarter then it's less; but I would say twenty percent

I: Is there anything at all that you can do with this sawdust?

R: Well, yeah there's a...well there's several things you can do. You can dry it and make a sweeping compound out of it and there are concerns that are buying it, but they're so far away from us that you really don't realize an awful lot...a couple dollars a ton, I guess. Even that's a big help just to be able to dispose of it. I would think that by next year we'll be selling the hardwood sawdust. You can sell it right now if you want to set up, but see we don't produce enough sawdust to fill a car in about two or three days and we would end up paying (?) on a car and that would offset any gain.

I: How far away are these sawdust buyers?

R: Milwaukee...three of them there.

I: Do you think anybody will set up a plant that uses sawdust closer?

R: I don't know...I haven't heard

I: There was a lot of inquiries made by a company in Marionette, Wisconsin...that would be a little closer; but that's as far as they went. I don't know what their process...what they were using it for, but they were gonna use an awful lot of sawdust.

R: Have you sold any sawdust?

I: No...farmers are hauling it for bedding. All of a sudden they've discovered that sawdust is an excellent bedding. They read it in the paper this fall. Now they're hauling it like crazy.

R-1: They just come and take it.

I: Yeah...do you make any money off from that?

R-1:

I: Would you like to?

R: What...sell it to them?

I: Have them pay for it?

R: Well I...as long as they're hauling it it eliminates the disposing of it, you know, I would have to go there on a Saturday afternoon and make that pile a little bigger over there...just keep moving it further up.
I: How long has that pile been there?

R: How long has that pile been there...seven years...eight years.

I: If one of these companies that uses it, could they use sawdust that's been there for eight years?

R: I don't think that they could use the old sawdust...must have decomposed already some of it. I wish they would. Boy that would...take the whole pile for two dollars a ton...many ton there...thousands and thousands of tons. But it won't be too long before they'll be utilizing it...I mean it'll even be profitable for us to get rid of our sawdust.

I: How much of the wood goes to the chipper...into chips?

R: Well, you know that's a very variable thing because it depends on the type of logs you are sawing. See, on a high grade of log you have very little waste. You have poor logs, of course that proportion increases pretty fast because you have rot in the center of your logs and big hollow portions, well the area right around the hollow is usually chipped because you can't cut boards right up to the...on the rough out of a log...you can't get square lumber out of it. So, well I don't know...well what would you consider...about ten - fifteen percent, I suppose, ten percent maybe.

I: Do you have to allow the logs to sit in the yard for a certain period of time?

R: No, they shouldn't sit at all. I mean, hardwood logs shouldn't sit...and I mean it doesn't make any difference in the winter time because they're dead and froze and they don't change; but if they sat over summer they would stink...ruin your log.

I: How long do you let the cut lumber sit out?

R: I don't...well it depends on the market. If I could sell it right off the...well first of all the lumber is cut and you have to hire a grader or have somebody go through it and they turn every board and determine what quality...what category that board fits in and what price range. That's how you sell it. So you have to have it...when you get a few truck loads then you have this man and his crew come along and they determine what quality lumber you have and they stack it accordingly into the respective piles and then you sell it providing you have the market for it which we have right now for all grades and all species.

Stop in tape.

R-1: ...and was sitting in his old mill was down at the river here in Pelkie. That's where you got that.
R: At that auction, yeah...auction sale. Well the reason we... it's located right by the...there's a spur on the...there's a railroad spur there, that's why we're located there because that was an unused spur and I was able to buy it...well first the piece of land, enough to set the mill on and then the sawdust pile started growing and the original owner of the land lived right by there in the white house and his wife I think was becoming concerned at the unsightly sawdust so they offered to sell the house so we had a house which was a real good thing because our...I think our sawdust pile was within thirty feet of the line to begin with so after we were able to acquire the additional land we were able to keep pushing the pile further and the people moved out that way. But it was really kind of a piece meal progression; but mainly we located here because of the Cliff-Dow Chemical Company, a subsidiary of Dow. Well, the reason we located so close to the railroad, we had the spur there and we were able to saw wood into sixteen inch length pieces of wood...they could make charcoal out of it. We had a shoot running right to a (?) car so as slabs were developing they had kind of a homemade automatic swing saw that would cut these slabs up and they would go up the shoot and into the railroad car and we disposed of an awful lot of slabs that way. Then about three years ago...four years ago they discontinued operations and then of course that dried up that market for awhile. I think we sold wood for about one summer but it wasn't a very profitable deal because people are phasing out of the woodburning stoves into oil. Oil was the in thing and bottle gas was reasonably cheap so we were real happy when we were able to start selling chips. First we sold peeled slabs to a place in Green Bay...I can't think of the name...it'll come to me. What we'd do with the slabs, we'd make a (?) with (?) and then load them into a railroad car with the lift. But then when (?) became more interested in getting all the local slabs and chips that they could, we got the chipper and we've been doing this for about three years.

I: How much do they pay you for a ton of chips?

R: Fifteen dollars.

I: How much do you get for a ton of lumber?

R: Oh, well that's such a variable thing. At thirteen dollars... assuming that you...a thousand board feet of lumber weighs five thousand pounds...so we're getting thirteen - twenty-six so that's six and a half...that's thirty-two dollars a thousand, that's a very small amount in relation to your lowest grade lumber now is a hundred eleven dollars a thousand a big box load. But it's a return for something that'd go to waste otherwise.

I: Well, what were you getting paid for those slabs?
R: Oh that was much less, about four dollars a ton. Well of course you didn't have to have all the equipment either. They didn't have to be peeled for that purpose, they could be rough so you were selling the bark too, so you probably gained another...oh I don't know...ten - fifteen percent in your weight.

I: Where was the equipment made that you have now?

R: Well, that chipper was made in Lower Michigan...Winn. It's a Mor-Bark, you've probably heard of them.

I: In Saginaw?

R: Ah...it's closer to Claire.

I: Yeah, that's in the general area. How big is that chipper?

R: Well its...fifty-eight inch chipper, I guess the big wheel is a fifty-eight inches around bit it'll take a thirteen inch round log so that's another reason we got it in case the chip market really flourishes we can chip round wood with it also...small diameter around that you can't saw.

I: You said/that the price of a cord of wood has been the same for twenty years but now it was starting to go up?

R: Yes, that's pulpwood, right

T: What's the reason for that?

R: What's the reason? I think well mainly there isn't enough to go around. It reverts back to the old supply and demand. See, when they aren't getting enough, people have to pay more money to get it. Even Celotex here in L'Anse, they were paying about...I think they started paying six dollars and seventy cents a ton. See, they always bought by weight. Now they're paying nine dollars and twenty cents a ton for pulpwood.

I: Where was the saw made? Who manufactured the saw?

R: The saw? Well, you've probably heard of Simons Saw Company, they manufactured the saw.

I: Well, I have heard of it. Where is it located?

R: I think on the east coast somewhere.

I: Is that that used saw that you bought or is that a new one?

R: You mean the saw itself?

I: Well, were you talking about the blade?
R: I'm talking about the blade

I: Oh, I meant the machinery.

R: Oh, I think the saw and the carriage...it's a Mather...it's made in Alabama I think; but there again you buy through a dealer...I mean parts and so on so you don't really deal with the plant itself.

I: You told me how much you had invested in logging equipment. How much is invested in the sawmill?

R: Well see, there again I didn't buy everything new. Money investment in the sawmill is about probably thirty-five thousand in the mill itself...oh more than that with the lifts and so on...forty or so thousand.

End of Part 1+