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

(Funded in part by the Keweenaw National Historic Park Advisory Commission / U.S. Department of the Interior, National Park Service)

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Comment:
- Men didn't get paid
- Says company cheated them
- Interesting
- Very good story
- Reference to--Heideman Michaelsen, rich
- Reason for its formation
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Interview with ARTHUR OIMAS
by Art Puotinen  August 3, 1972

We'd like to begin, Arthur, by asking you questions about your parents, you indicated that they came to this country from Finland. Were they married at the time that they came?

No, they were not. They were married here.

They came separately then

Ya. My mother was 4 years of age when she came

And your father was

he was about 20, I think.

Did your father or mother ever indicate to you why they came to this country?

No, they never did.

And the region they came from, was this in the northern part of Finland?

AO: Ya.

Did they ever tell you anything about the trip from Finland to this country?

AO: Well, one thing they did say, it took them about a month to get over here. The passage on the boat was very slow.

AP: There weren't any illnesses or any other problems like that?

AO: Well, probably some were seasick as they generally do get that way.

AP: Did they both come directly here to the Copper Country?

AO: Well, my father came to the Iron Country first, around Champion and Republic and those places.

AP: Did he find employment after his arrival as a miner there in the iron mines?

AO: Oh, ya.

Was he an underground worker?

AO: Ya, he was an underground worker; most of his life underground, he spent sinking a shaft. And while, we're on that subject, I sank shafts with him for 9 years.

AP: Was that in the iron district or here?

AO: That's here in the Copper Country. Wolverine.

AP: So you actually learned your trade from your father then, in a sense.

AO: Well, I went down there first to begin with when I was 13 years of age.

AP: What type of job did you have? Were you a water boy?

AO: Water boy. Drill boy, they called 'em.

AP: Did a person who was sinking a shaft, such as your father did at one time and you too,
was there any special problems that he would encounter? Was it dangerous work?
What was it like?

It was dangerous but one reason why they kept you there, your knowledge and skill of
doing it right because after all, that shaft is at a pitch of about 47°. And you had
to be able to hold that on that degree. So it wasn't just a "hit and miss" project.

Where did your father learn to do this? He didn't learn in Finland, did he?

No, he didn't. I guess he picked it up a little at a time, working in the mine

Did he ever tell you anything about the working conditions, first of all, say in the
iron range area? What was that mine life like? Did he get a fair wage? Were the
working conditions pretty good?

Well, he didn't mention anything about the iron mines, but he did mention about the
wages later when he came to this area. Working in the woods, first.

AP: Were wages better in the mines or the woods?

AO: Well, I might relate an incident that happened to him and a few of the other old country
boys. They were working in the woods between Laurium and Lake Linden. And they worked
their for 2 months for some jobber and this fellow told them to come back in the spring
and get their wages. And when they went there to get their money this man had a bunch
of drunken bums and a lot of big dogs there and he chased them "get out of here" he
said. And they weren't paid for a thing they done those 2 months. They worked for
nothing. All they got was their board and room.

AP Was this jobber a Finn, or some other nationality.

AO No, he wasn't.

AP Were all the men who were working for him, Finns or

AO Well, I guess there was a scattering of French people, too, like there are a lot of
French people around the Lake Linden area.

AP Were you yourself ever in one of those lumbercamps?

AO Well, only to look into the door, never lived there or done anything.

What did your father think of the lumbercamp life? He was single at that time, wasn't he?

AO Ya, he was single. Well, I don't think he liked it too much because I recall him
saying when he worked at Oskar, down here on Houghton Canal Road, he was in the woods
there, and those days they didn't have any crosscut saws in the woods. You had to
dump a tree with an axe and then chop off a log with an axe, everything was done with
an axe. Well, then he says, finally, this contractor, Oscar Eliason, evidently heard
about these crosscut saws and he decided to try one out. And he ordered a saw and Dad
says a gang of those lumberjacks went out to see how this saw works. See if it could
keep up with a good man with an axe. And Dad said the saw happened to be in good shape
coming from the factory and a couple of husky men pulling at it and sure enough, it
worked better than an axe did so the contractor ordered a dozen saws. That's when the
first saws came into that area. That work wasn't quite as hard as swinging an axe all day

AP: Do you recall roughly what time that was? Was that around the turn of the century?

AO I'd say, that's before I was born, somewhere around 1898, in the 1880's.

When did your father and mother get married then? Was that in the 1890's?
I think it was.

You were born in '93.

So it was early in the 1890's. There's one older than I am, in the family.

AP: And all of the 13 brothers and sisters were born in this country

Ya

Do you recall where your father met your mother?

No, I don't.

Was he active in the church at that time?

Well, not too active, no. Later years he was, though

Your folks got married and where did they settle?

Up at Wolverine, or Kearsarge, they call it. Wolverine Mine

And then he went into the copper industry right there

Ya. And we lived there, I was 20 years of age when we left there, moved on the farm at the canal.

AP: Let's talk a little bit about that life, near the mine, near Wolverine Mine; did your folks live in a company house?

No, they owned their own house. I might say that that was a sort of a tendency among the Finnish people to own their own homes.

AP: Not too many went into the company house.

AO: No. But the English people, again, were just contrary to that, they did not own their own homes. They lived in company houses.

Did the Finns want their own homes, or were they forced to go into their own homes because the company houses were filled?

AO: I think it was the spirit of independence that lives in the Finns, they didn't want to be depending on anybody.

AP: Did your father build the house himself?

AO: My grandfather built it, my mother's father. He was quite a carpenter and first of all, I might say that they lived at Copper Falls before my mother was married when they came from the old country. And grandpa being a good carpenter, he was working for the mining company. And he helped to build the Delaware Mining Company Mill at Lac la Belle which has been up and down a long time ago. And I might mention this while we're talking about Copper Falls, grandma told us, (I heard her say this several times) grandpa and their oldest son, Herman, my oldest uncle, the 2 of these were working for the mining company at the same time. And the 2 men, together, earned $28 a month. And grandma said, we saved a little money too.
How did your grandparents—did they have a garden or anything to supplement their

AO: I don't know, they raised a few potatoes and they had a cow, also, so they cut their hay
around the wild meadows wherever they could find a little bit and that was to feed the
cow for the winter months. And most of the miners, too, in later years, they'd buy a
cow in the spring of the year, milk this cow all summer and then butcher that for winter
beef when winter came in.

That made it possible to eat good meat for the winter months

Well it wasn't so good after it hung up in some shack for 4-5 months.

How did people preserve meat in those days? There were no refrigerators

No. There was no way of preserving—they salted

There were a number of children in the family, what would your mother do when one of
you became sick? Did you go to a doctor? Did you have some home remedies?

AO: Well, we lived in the mining area and each company had its own doctor. And as a rule
he resided in the mining company property. So when any of the kids got sick, they'd
call him and he'd come and I recall one time, the first doctor I think I ever saw,
Dr. McCray, and when he'd come in the house he'd look at this sick kid and he always
asked mother for a tablespoon. And he'd put that in our mouth and let it there for
some time, then he'd take it out and look at it and this instead of a thermometer.
And then he says, you'll be all right in a few days. I don't know if they had therm-
ometers those days or not but that answered the purpose. He could tell from the
moisture or something on the spoon what the temperature was.

AP: Did your mother have some home remedies that she used ever?

AO: Well, I don't know of anything in particular, of course, she made all her bread at
home, and stuff like that.

AP: Where did you go to school as a child?

AO: I went to school at Kearsarge and then I went to high school in Calumet, 1906. And I
graduated there 1910. That's one thing I'd like to talk about when I told you I went
into the mine when I was 13 years old, this was for vacationtime. A kid 13 years old
he wasn't supposed to be out playing ball or getting in mischief or anything like that,
he was supposed to be paying for his room and board and that's why I had to go in the
mine. And other kids did do. And we were paid the enormous salary of $26 a month,
$1 a day for 10-hour shift. And between all this I salvaged a high school education, too.

Did you learn to speak English first in the grade school?

Ya

AP: Your parents, did they both speak Finnish?

AO: Always spoke Finnish at home

AP: They never did learn English then.

AO: Well, they could, just carry on a conversation with somebody but it was broken English.

AP: Your dad had to learn some English to get by in the mine I would think.

He did, and he was a stickler for education. He just insisted that we go to school.
AP: Why did he feel that way?

Well, I guess he thought that to make a living at hard work isn't anything—I mean ashamed of or anything like that, but he knew it's a hard life.

Well, evidently you picked up some of that feeling because you continued your education.

AO: Oh, ya. I'll say it stood me in good stead in later years

AP: Looking back, do you feel that those were good schools that you attended?

AO: Very good.

AP: What made them good? The facilities? The teachers?

AO: Both.

Do you remember any of your early teachers?

We had a Miss Wooster as my kindergarten teacher and then we had Miss Bromley, I think she was in the 2nd or 3rd grade, and we had a Miss Cunningham in 4th grade and then a Miss Conley was our teacher when I graduated from the 8th grade and went to high school.

Were any of your teachers Finns?

No. Not those days.

They were all of English background?

English and Irish.

How did you and other Finnish young people get along with the other nationalities in school? Were there any problems?

AO: Oh, there were problems. We were overlooked more or less by some, especially some of the kids living in the city, well, they thought we were just a bunch of hicks, farmers, and so on, and that's the way they treated us.

AP: How did the Finns do academically? Were they right up there?

AO: Very well. And I'm proud to say that too because lots of the Finnish kids were on the honor roll and they were valedictorians of their class and so on when they graduated from high school.

AP: You graduated in 1910, is that when you began working in the mine?

AO: Ya. You couldn't get a job for love or money any other way but go in the mine

AP: Was that kind of a tough time because this was a period before the strike in 1913 and the labor organizers came in about 1909-1910, didn't they?

AO: Ya

AP: How were the wages when you got started?

AO: Well, they weren't too high, the daily wage for miners was about $65 a month. But dad and I (I'll tell you a little story) we were sinking shaft together like I told you, and we always were on contract. We had to sign a contract the beginning of every month. We were paid $19 a foot for sinking and then we had to pay for our dynamite which was $17 a box, a box of caps cost $3, a ring of blasting fuse was 50¢, and a
box of candles was $8. This was all charged up to us. But one thing I notice, and I never did see the company sign this contract, we had to sign every month but I've never seen them sign it. So it was more or less open on their side. And one month in particular, we made a terribly big wage before the strike, $130 each, we made that month. And about a week before payday, the second captain came down and he said, boys, we can't pay you all that money. So dad says, why not, we honestly earned it, he says, yes, but what would the other men say if they heard that you got that much money. He was afraid they'd have a rebellion of some kind, I guess, and they paid us each $105. They robbed our family of $50 that month.

AP: And you were never paid back?

AO: We were never paid back. So we made fairly good money, a little bit better than they did on other mining jobs but

Lots of the Finns were trammers, weren't they?

Well, lots of 'em were and lots of 'em were miners, they were good machinemen, lots of 'em were.

AP: How did you and other Finns feel about this one-man drill that came in?

AO: To begin with, they rebelled against it more or less, they didn't like the idea because 2 men worked together on the bigger machines they had before but they could see that there's no other way out of it if they intend to stay and make a living for their family, they gotta accept it. And they did. Finally they worked themselves into the idea.

AP: That was one of the issues in the strike. The union wanted to go back to the two-man drill, didn't they?

They were looking for that, that's right.

Do you have any recollections of the strike, how it got started and what went on?

There was some dishonesty among the employers like this little incident I just mentioned to you, and so on, well, the men felt resentful of anything like that, they were pulled by the nose when you know that it wasn't honest. Things like this, they brought on the strike. Not only that, but I've seen men treated like animals; a man is sick and he's laying down because he can't work anymore and the boss comes along and gives him a kick and tells him to get in and get in another car. Or he says, get out, there's lots of men at the office. Well, a step like this doesn't do any good. People remember things like this.

The mining companies were feeling a little pressure economically about that time weren't they? There was a period before 1900 when it was sort of good times, before the strike, the companies were feeling economic pressure and so they were kind of putting the screw line to

AO: ya, and they had their good times, too. I recall when the stock of Calumet & Hefa went up to $1,000 a share and Wolverine, the little mine, that was up to $500. So they must have had some good points about it too.

AP: Did any of the miners have ownership of stock?

AO: I don't recall of any of 'em.

AP: So there was no profit-sharing

AO: No.
You mentioned about this one man that was sick, was this one of the problems that the company wasn't taking care of, people when they were sick, or safety hazards.

Well, they weren't too much concerned about your health.

You produced or got out

That's it.

Did the Western Federation of Miners come organize in the Wolverine mine, too?

No, they didn't. They had an office in Calumet and mostly all, whoever wanted to join the union, they went up there, and joined it.

There's been quite a bit of controversy knowing in terms of how many men really voted for the strike. The company put the figure at a lower number and the Federation of Miners put it at a higher number, did you yourself vote in that decision whether to strike or not?

I voted to join the union. Not so much for the treatment that I was getting but I could see there were others who were not getting a fair shake.

Was that feeling pretty much wide spread among the people you were working with then?

Oh, ya

The strike started in June or July?

July 1913.

When it started and the work stopped, were there any incidents that stand out in your mind?

Well, I don't call it any, the only incident that always will stand in my mind is the Italian Hall disaster where about 90-95 people got killed, children mostly, having a Christmas party. And somebody went up in this building there and hollered "fire" and of course, that caused a commotion and everybody started to run to get out and they ran down the stairway and the door down the stairway was opening in, well, they jammed against the door and they couldn't get out and they just suffocated right there.

That was really a tragedy.

It was a tragedy

Did any of your family or your friends, were they involved in that?

No, well, I knew a family who lost 3 sons. But at that time we were already on the farm; dad figured when the strike came on, it was best to get out or pretty soon he'd lose all his savings and he bought the farm.

Did other Finnish miners see it the way your dad did?

Oh, ya. That got to be a trend in later years, when they accumulated a little money they bought a farm. Some went to Tapiola, others went to Trap Rock and Aura (back of L'Anse), some went to Bruce Crossing and Paisley.

Why did the Finns do that? Is it because the Finns have always liked to be on the land and farm?

Well, that's one reason, I guess, but another was that they could see that they couldn't
continue doing this hard work all their life, they had to get a break sometime. At least get out in the fresh air.

AP: The hours were long. You worked in the mines 6-day weeks?

AO: Ya.

AP: And how long was the shift?

AO: It was 9 hours.

AP: After the strike it was an 8-hour day. But before that, it was 9 hours.

AP: So you saw very little sunshine.

AO: In the winter months, you wouldn't see any sun. It was dark when you went down and dark when you came up.

AP: Gee, that was a tough life. What did you and your fellow miners, and your family, do for a good time?

AO: I don't recall them ever having a good time. No celebrations of any kind.

AP: Well, on Sundays. Did you go to the church at that time?

AO: No, we didn't go to church. Some would play ball or go fishing or something like that.

AP: I've read that about that time there were a lot of people who were not too interested in the church, they

AO: Ya, there were, and about that time there were lot of these "agitators" came over from Finland and they were promoting this socialist idea, which I'd say was the original communist idea. And that kept a lot of people away from church.

AP: And did these fellows circulate around the mining region, with their speaking?

AO: Oh, ya, they made sure they got their point across, down in the hole especially

AP: They talked to the miners right down in the mine

AO: Ya, then you couldn't have a gathering of any kind but I mean, if they're working with somebody. They'd talk to him, or else when we're sitting down and waiting for the mancar to go up, they'd put in a few words there where there was a half-dozen men waiting.

AP: Didn't the shift bosses get wind of these guys?

AO: Well, the shift bosses were all Englishmen and these fellows were all Finns, so they couldn't understand.

AP: These fellows were also miners then, too. Were there any meetings held by these men in the town or the location?

AO: I've heard that they did have meetings but I never went to them. I don't know of anybody else that went to them.

AP: So the contact you had with them was down in the mines

AO: Ya.

AP: Were there some miners who argued with them then?

AO: Oh, yes. I recall my dad talking to some of them and they kind of belittled the
United States in saying something about how hard it is to make a living and dad said, why don't you go back to where you came from? That's always a good place to go to, he says, so if you don't like it here, there's nobody keeping you here. Well, they didn't like that either.

As I understand it, there was at one time here the socialist paper, Työmies, being printed in Hancock around 1904 and up through the strike and there were other newspapers too, what Finnish newspapers did your family get?

AO: When I was a kid, we used to buy the Paiväl Lehti. That was published in Calumet and that was there for quite a few years and finally that petered off; and then Valvoja came in, my dad subscribed to that. Today as old as we are, we get Amerikan Uutiset. We still like to read Finnish.

Right! You speak English very well. Did you get along easily in the mine when other nationalities had to learn English?

AO: Oh, yes.

Did they have any night schools for people who were miners or farmers or whatever and they wanted to learn the English language?

I don't remember of any.

How old were you then when World War I came along?

I was about 20 or 21.

Did you register for the draft?

Ya

And did you have to go to serve?

AO: I well to Laurium with my grip/to go and there Walter Grief, the clerk, told me that my name was checked off. All I could do was turn around and go back home. And I was put in class 4-F. And I asked him what the reason was and he said, well, you only got one ear to hear with, I lost the hearing in my left ear when I was 13 years old.

AP: Did you lose it in the mine?

AO: No, just a bad earache brought that on. And that was one reason why, but my older brother, he went to service.

AP: Did he go overseas then, too?

AO: Ya, he was over there pretty near 2 years after the war was over, Army of Occupation

AP: What was it like in the Copper Country during World War II? Did people know war was going on?

AO: Oh, ya, they knew and I'd say it was just a pity to see some of those people. They were grieving over the boys.

AP: Everybody was working though

AO: Oh, there was lotsa work In fact there was a shortage of men.

AP: Did the company try to get workers from other areas then?
AO: Well, yes, they did. They recruited some from the cities and especially after World War II, I know they brought some Germans here from the old country. But most of all they recruited after World War I, well, they were Mexicans and people like that.

AP: How did the Mexicans survive the northern winters?

AO: Oh, they weren't here very long.

AP: They didn't last too long. Was it mainly the climate or did they just feel out of place up here?

AO: Well, I guess it was both. To begin with, they weren't too ambitious and evidently they could see that they gotta produce like those Copper Country boys do and they hated to do that.

AP: Do you recall the first time that you voted? What presidential election it was?

AO: Yes, I do. I don't recall the presidential election but we were all on the farm already and we voted at the Salo School, that was Hancock Township, that was headquarters of Hancock Township in the Salo School and I voted there but I do remember that I voted Democrat because I thought that was the workingman's party those days and to vote Democrat those days is very

(end of tape)

(continued)

they had a terrible depression after that and there was a lot of hunger and want going around and these old timers all remembered that. And they really stressed the fact that you should never be a Democrat, all you'll have is a depression and hard times. But the ways that things were going and I knew the stuff that went on in the Copper Country wasn't all above board and honest with these corporations either, so I felt that Democrat was more of a workingman's party.

AP: Well, most of the mining company's management were Republicans, weren't they?

AO: They were Republicans and they were all supervisors in the county and they were all on the election boards.

Did they put any specific pressure on the miners to vote Republican?

No.

But you at least know where they stood.

But I do remember when we worked in the mine and on election day, we were brought up at 4 o'clock in the afternoon. And the polls closed at 5. So we had to run about a quarter of a mile to the changehouse to change our clothes and then run almost a mile to the polling place to vote. Well, this was done because they knew that all those miners weren't Republican, to keep them from voting.

You had to really want to vote, to vote those days.

Yes. And I recall, too, where some of these fellows just came over here from England, were over here maybe 2 or 3 years and they had their citizenship papers and they were on the election board. And here we were born in the country and gone to school and everything, and we never got there.

AP: Did any Finns run for public offices those days?

AO: Well, I do recall one, Bill Heikkila ran for sheriff.
Did he make it?
Yes, he did.

Did he stay in office very long?

AO: No, it wasn't very long. A moment ago when you asked me about the first time I voted I recall voting for P. H. O'Brien for circuit judge.

AP: He was a friend of the workingman, wasn't he?

AO: He was, very much; and (I forget the name of the Prosecuting Attorney) he was another Irishman.

AP: You yourself never ran for public office, did you?

No. The only office I ran for, I was on the Stanton Township Board for 18 years and I was a justice. In those days there was a Justice of the Peace on the board. And you were Justice of the Peace?

AO: I was a Justice.

AP: Is that right? What type of duties did you have?

AO: Well, the only duties we had was to sit on the board and make the decisions there. We never had any office of any kind or perform any marriages or anything like that.

When you were justice, how old were you?

Well, I was almost 30 when we got married and this was after that. I'd say, about 35

Where did you and Lena get acquainted?

It was after we came to the farm. After 1913.

AP: Were you on the farm then, too?

AO: Ya.

AP: Before we get you 2 married here, let's talk a little bit about what that farm life was like. How many acres did you have on the farm?

Well, my dad bought 120 acres.

That was a pretty good sized farm. And you had milking cows. Do you recall roughly what was the herd about?

AO: Well, those days the herd couldn't be very big because there was hardly any outlet for your milk and so on. The only outlet was selling cream to the creamery up here where the pop shop is now and well, I guess dad had about a dozen cows.

AP: Did he have grain and potatoes?

AO: Ya.

AP: What type of machinery did he have those days? It was all horse-drawn?

AO: All horse-drawn.

AD: But he had grain drills for planting and binder for cutting grain and potato digger.
AP: What kind of prices did he get for his produce? Were the prices pretty good?

AO: I'd say about as good as could be paid those days. But I recall (I don't know if I should bring it in here now,) but she and I were farming after we got married and speaking of prices, I recall when this depression came on in 1929, we sold a bull which gave 800 pounds of beef, for $25. And I had an egg route over here on Roberts Street, used to sell eggs once a week, and I went into a house and asked a lady if she wanted to buy some eggs, she said, how much are they? I said 15¢ a dozen, she said, when they come down to 10, I'll buy a dozen. W asn't much encouragement in that. And yet we had to pay our bills and make a living, too, and under those conditions and at the same time we were selling potatoes for 25¢ a bushel.

Those were hard times, then.

They were hard times.

When did you get married?

'22

1922.

AO: We have our golden wedding coming up this fall

Did you get a farm, then, very close to your folks' place?

AO: Well, we took over her folks' place. It was across the canal from my folks' place.

Did your folks live with you then?

Ya.

They lived with us until they died.

Ya, we took care of them until they died and we buried 'em.

At that time, did you become part of the church group then? After you got married?

Did Pastor Michaelsen marry you?

No, we were married down here where O'Neill's Funeral Home is, that was the parsonage of the Congregational Church of Hancock.

LO: Rev. Michaelsen was here at that time.

AO: Rev. Eugene Rich was the pastor.

AP: So as far as your church background goes, both of you then became part of this church when Pastor Michaelsen came.

AO: Ya, well, that was the church of our parents. And the reason we couldn't get married by our pastor at that time, Rev. Heideman was the pastor of the church before Michaelsen came, and those guys were all out deer hunting and there was no way of getting ahold of them when we had our date set so we said, let's get it over with.

AP: You were married in the fall, then.

AO: 1922. November 9

AP: Can you say something about the early life of the church. I mean the church has been
AD: When did you move to town?

AO: I'd say it was a fairly good-sized congregation. I was on the board there for 13 years. I was treasurer for 11 years, that's after we moved to town.

When did you move to town?

'58.

So your period of direct involvement or really active participation was in the '50's.

Ya.

Is there anything at all about the '30's that we should talk about, those hard times? How did you make a go of it? Did the people of the area pitch in and help one another, or was it every man for himself?

It was just about everybody for himself.

You didn't get any work on WPA, did you?

AO: No. I might relate a little story about that WPA stuff: they had what they called a "mattress project". We spoke about it together and I says I'm going to see if I can get a mattress out of this, we haven't gotten a penny out of WPA so far, or relief either, let's see if we can get a mattress. So I went to Bill Leppanen and asked him about it and he says; sure; there was a little questionnaire we had to fill out; about your income and so on; and he called me aside a few days later, he says, by the way, your figures in that income sheet are a little too big, couldn't you knock off some of that so that you can qualify for a mattress. I said, I'm not in the habit of telling lies any other place, and I'm not going to tell a lie for an ol' mattress. And that's all we got out of WPA.

AP: Now this Bill that you mentioned, what was his position? Was he in charge?

AO: He was with the triple A office in Houghton, Agricultural Adjustment Association.

In that farming area, was there a co-operative store at all?

Not in that area.

AP: Did you have any dealings at all with a Finnish co-operative store?

AO: I had lots! I was on the board of the Copper Country Dairy for 15 years; I was secretary of the board for 5 years, and chairman of the board for 10. And it was during my jurisdiction that they built that new building they got in Dollar Bay.

AP: That's probably one of your biggest accomplishments.

AO: That's where I got my ulcers. I finally landed in Mayo's and they cut off 3/5 of my stomach down there and when my doctor here, Leonard Aldrich examined me, he says, I see that new building didn't do you any good.

AP: Where there some special problems that you encountered in getting that thing up?

AO: Do you mean in the building?

AP: Ya.

AO: Not too many, I'm surprised how the members cooperated, evidently they had faith in
the project and there were some who were against it, but not too many.
In fact there was one old fella came to me after we had the building up and I used
to go down there once in a while and look things over; I was in the boiler room and
this ol' fella came to me and says, you know, Mr. Chairman, if we didn't have this
new building we wouldn't have all that debt in the bank either. I said, listen, if
we were in the old building, there'd be a padlock on the door and we wouldn't allowed
to go in there. Because the government already had condemned it. But we borrowed
about $60,000, I guess, and in 3 years' time, they paid it up.

AP: The farmers who were involved in that, were they various nationalities or were they
all Finns?

AO Oh, ya, but most of them were Finns.

Was that at all tied in with Central Cooperative Wholesale?

AO: No, Central Cooperative had nothing to do with it. Independent of everybody.

Were you actually involved in getting the cooperative started then?

Well, not actually, I'd say about a year after they started, we got into it

Do you remember who started it?

There was an old fella called Viitali, he was from Wolverine, the Mayflower area,
he's the man who originally started it. And then I guess Charlie Aittama from Lake
Linden, he was another one.

And gradually picked up interest.

Ya.

Well, looking at your life, would you say that that particular work was your greatest
accomplishment?

AO: I'd say so, yes. Because we drove away a lot of this unfair competition that we
had before that and the farmers were able to make a decent living after we got going.

AP: I'm not sure that I know what you mean by "unfair competition".

AO: Well, there were several dairy companies here, they were outside capital. ...
And because of this is a kind of a "dead end" here, there was no possible chance
of shipping the milk or cream anywhere else, that is, Wisconsin or anywhere, because
they had everything sewed up there. They'd pay you what they felt like. And I re-
call one firm that was paying 15¢ a pound butterfat here when they were paying 35¢
a pound in Minnesota.

So your cooperative made it a more even market.

In the end we chased 'em out of here, they folded up and left.

Could you explain as simply as possible how the cooperative works. In other words,
the farmers brought in their milk and it was what, processed?

AO: It was weighed first and the test of your butterfat taken and your butterfat sample
was put into the laboratory and that was tested twice a month, you were paid twice a
month and then your butterfat was computed with the number of pounds of milk you sent
in and you were paid according to that. And then at the end of the year, if the
corporation made a profit, well, that was pro-rated back to you according to the
amount of stuff you sent in.

This is secondly called a producer's cooperative.

AO: That's what it is.

AP: You didn't have any kind of a consumer's cooperative associated with that?

AO: No, nothing.

AP: Was there a Consumer's Cooperative here in Hancock?

AO: Here in Hancock, there was a grocery.

Did you ever buy from there?

Yes.

Thinking back, did most Finns try to buy from Finnish merchants, Finnish storekeepers, the Co-op or whatever, or did they pretty much circulate different nationality stores?

Well, yes, I don't think people favored the nationality too much, where they got a good buy, well, that's where they went.

That only makes sense.

But what dealing I had with the Finnish merchants like Henry Sakari and Lepisto Brothers down here, or Lepisto company, and the Farmer's Co-op, I'd say they were fairly well in line with the prices of others. They had to be in order to stay in business.

AP: Were there any Finnish lawyers, did you have any contact?

AO: Well, I never had any dealings with lawyers but there was one here in particular, John Kiiskila. He's an old-time attorney and

AP: He was alive and well about the time that your dad was in the mine, wasn't he? 1900? Wasn't he practicing then?

AO: I think he was, if I remember right, he was a graduate of University of Michigan Law School.

AP: Did he work closely with the workers or the company or

AO: Well, I don't remember too much about him, doing that, but to say that he went to college; I recall a couple of fellows who worked in the mines, they saved a little money and from their savings, they went to college. Dr.-Sersen-was-one (I can't think of the name now).

AP: Did they go into some profession and then come back into the Copper Country?

AO: Well, a fellow I know stayed in the iron country instead of coming up here.

AP: Did you know Dr. Sersen?

AO: Well, I've seen him, in fact, he was at our home once, in Kearsarge.

AP: I've run across the name on several occasions, I think he was quite active during the strike time and against the socialists.

AO: Yes.

AP: What they called, the "ponitas". I asked you sometime ago, in that mining life which
was very hard, you had all these long hours, what you did for a good time, you said there weren't too many good times, what did you and your family do on the farm? for a good time.

Well, I don't know, ma had a good dinner waiting for us all the time and when we got a belly full, we were pretty well satisfied. Because you couldn't expect any more or better than that.

Did you come into town on special occasions like 4th of July; what was an old time 4th of July like here?

AO: Oh, ya. I'd say you'd come to town and hear all the noise, firecrackers and that stuff and parade and walk the streets back and forth all day long. And then walk back to the farm in the evening.

AP: How far was your farm from the town here?

AO: About 7 miles.

AP: That was a nice long walk, wasn't it?

AO: Ya, and her farm was farther

AP: Do you recall when you got your first car?

AO: I do.

AP: When was that?

AO: That was about 1919 or '20.

AP: And what kind was it?

AO: Dodge.

AP: Did it run pretty good?

AO: Oh, ya. Very good car

AP: And you had that for sometime, and ever since that time you've had a car?

AO: Well, there was a couple years in between the time we got rid of that till I happened to get a hold of a new one.

AP: Let's beyond the '30's into the '40's and '50's, and get back to a little bit about your church work. You mentioned that you were treasurer on the church council or board, as a church board member, what were some of your duties? What did you do?

AO: Well, I had to keep a record of all business, all transactions. And then report to the church board every month.

AP: How was the church doing financially?

AO: Well, I'd say not too bad

AP: It's standing and it's there

AO: It's standing and it's there, and we had a few thousand dollars reserve, too, and finally quit.
AP: What, when were the services held in church? Did you have services on Sunday morning?

AO: Ya.

AP: And was there Sunday evening services.

AO: Yes, Sunday evening, too

And what were those services like? How did it go.

I think a good portion of those old timers were very serious-minded Christians. And it was nothing uncommon to see them rejoice, for their soul's salvation. They just knew they had something. They let the world know all about it.

That was a very joyful type of

You bet! They weren't ashamed to let people know how they felt about God.

Was the service conducted in Finnish or

AO: In those days it was mostly Finnish.

AP: We're talking about "those days" we're talking about when? '50's?

AO: Prior to when Michaelsen came here. He's been here about 30 years.

IO: Then he did interpreting after that. After he came here. No, it wasn't interpreting either, he spoke Finnish, that's right.

AO: No, there were only Finnish services up 'till then. And sorry to say, there were some of the old timers, they were not in favor of the evening services, they figured that they were being gyped or something, they're paying for something they're not getting.

Did you go to confirmation school?

Ya In Calumet.

Who was your pastor?

Rev. A. L. Heideman, father of Rev. Paul Heideman

Do you have any recollections about him, there are so many stories that are told about him, what was your experience with him?

AO: Well, I might mention this that we lived at Kearsarge those days and I had to ride the streetcar to get to Calumet. And this was during my high school days. I was a junior in high school at the time and we'd go home from school and have a bite to eat and go back and jump on the car and go back to Calumet for confirmation. And there was a boy called Vic Abrahamson from Allouez, him and I traveled together and we went to confirmation together. And the funny part of it was, or sad, there was an old fella called Harjala. He was our teacher. Maybe Heideman taught during the day but we had to go there in the evening. And sometimes this old Harjala kept us there until midnight and then we missed the last car and then we had to walk home, which was about 3 miles. And then get home and start to do your high school lessons after midnight. It was a pretty rough 2 weeks.

AP: This Harjala. What was the confirmation school like? Did he teach you Bible history or Luther's Cathechism?
AO: Well, Cathechism and Bible History, too. They had just about everything they learned in Sunday School and so on. The sad part is that I never went to Sunday School, there never was a Sunday School in Wolverine. But Dad used to teach us every Sunday morning. He'd sit on the coach or wherever we were in the living room and we had to read and he'd sit there and listen and he had a memory like an elephant, if you said a word wrong, he let you know about it.

AP: Were there other Laestadian families, or Apostolic families, that had this same practice?

AO: Ya.

AP: There was instruction in the faith right in the home.

AO: Ya.

AP: Does that practice still exist, do you know?

I don't think so

It's pretty much Sunday School. Do you think that we miss something because that's done.

AO: I don't know, I think in those days it was more personal contact with the kid when somebody was talking to him only.

This man whom you mentioned was your teacher, Harjala, did he ever give any sermons or talks in the church?

AO: I understand that he was a lay preacher.

AP: I'm very interested in what you have to say about the church because my background has been with the Synod group, what circumstances led to the various groupings in the Laestadian movement? There's several different groups, the church you belong to now and also the Heideman group, and the first-born. Did that take place long time ago or is that more recent?

AO: Well, the first-born and the Heidemanians, they split quite sometime ago. I don't remember anything about that, but then again, this division between the Heidemanians and the group that Rev. Michaelsen represents, that's before Rev. Michaelsen's time. Rev. Mihttuli, who lived in South Range, he was a pastor of the church here at the time. And Rev. Heideman was also, so the church board appointed Rev. Maatala as an assistant to Heideman and Heideman wouldn't have any of that. He just took up and walked out. And a certain group with him and that was it.

AP: Was it more a matter of personalitites rather than some kind of doctrinal difference?

AO: I don't think there was any doctrinal difference at all. It was more or less a personal affair.

AP: Well, I guess that can happen sometime. We've been talking very much about the past now, and I want you to think a little bit into the future. What do you think this area needs right now in the Copper Country? What would predict for the area 10 years from now?

AO: I'd say if we don't get some industry in here, it's just too bad. I hope the mining industry gets going again. And it's just too bad they closed it down like they did up there.

AP: What do you think is the big problem in the mine, has it been misunderstanding between labor and management or is it need for better technology or both of those and more?
Well, I couldn't state for modern mining because I haven't been there to see it. No contact.

Your mining career ceased many years ago.

AO: Ya.

AP: What about tourism, do you think there is any future in that?

AO: I think there's a great future in that, but I'd say there too, they shouldn't kill the goose that's laying the golden egg and bleed them to death when they're here. Financially, I mean. If you want 'em to come back, you gotta treat 'em right.

If a tourist were to come into this area and he had only a day to spend, where would you tell him to go and what should he see?

That would depend a lot on what he's interested in.

Just depending upon your interests, what would you recommend?

I'd say the scenery first of all, like Keweenaw, that's a lot of historical background there.

How do you look upon life today, you've had a career as a miner and you've been a family man and you've put up a producer's cooperative, how do you feel about life?

Well, I'd say I had a happy living and I think if I had my life to live all over again I wouldn't live it exactly like I did, I know I made a lot of mistakes and so on, but if I could do it again, I'd try to correct those and get the most out of it. I know I had a lot of satisfaction in doing a lot of things I did

(end of tape)
Suomi salutes the people who make this area great

Mother
a. Hildur Hart
b. Toran Joki
c.

Father
a. Fred Joenva
b. Kihilo
c. 

Mother
a. Kaisa Kiistala
b.
c.

Father
a. Arthur
b.
c.

Mother
a. Lena
b.
c.

Child
a. 
b. 
c.

Child
a. 
b. 
c.

Child
a. 
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Child
a. 
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Child
a.