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)

CONDITIONS FOR USE OF .PDF TRANSCRIPT:
Finlandia University, formerly Suomi College, holds the exclusive copyright to the entirety of its Finnish Folklore and Social Change in the Great Lakes Mining Region Oral History Collection, including this .pdf transcript which is being presented online for research and academic purposes. Any utilization that does not fall under the United States standard of Fair Use (see U.S. Copyright Office or Library of Congress), including unauthorized re-publication, is a violation of Federal Law. For any other use, express written consent must be obtained from the Finnish American Historical Archive: archives@finlandia.edu.

PREFERRED FORMAT FOR CITATION / CREDIT:
“Maki, John”, Finnish Folklore and Social Change in the Great Lakes Mining Region Oral History Collection, Finlandia University, Finnish American Historical Archive and Museum.

Note: Should the Finnish American Archive be a resource for publication, please send a copy of the publication to the Archive:

Finnish American Historical Archive and Museum
Finlandia University
601 Quincy St.
Hancock, Michigan 49930 USA
906-487-7347 - fax: 906-487-7557
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Topic</th>
<th>Page</th>
<th>Comment</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Section Laborer</td>
<td>231</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Repairing Track</td>
<td>232</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Warehouse on the Inside</td>
<td>234</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Shipping Logs by Rail</td>
<td>236</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Limestone Mountain Incident</td>
<td>288</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Getting Engine Back on Tracks</td>
<td>239</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Blair Hill</td>
<td>241</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Handcars</td>
<td>241-42</td>
<td>&quot;Camel-Backs&quot;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Alston Theater</td>
<td>243</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reasons for Discontinuing Railroad</td>
<td>244-45</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tom Bonds Saloon</td>
<td>245-46</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cream and Butter Shipments</td>
<td>247</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Insides of Passenger Cars</td>
<td>248-49</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Death on the Rails &amp; Bumming Rides</td>
<td>250-51</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Drilling Holes</td>
<td>253</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Laying Ties</td>
<td>254</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hewing a Tie</td>
<td>255-56</td>
<td>Logging Hazards</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>&quot;Barber Chair&quot;</td>
<td>258</td>
<td>&quot;Heavy-handed&quot; Sawers</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Logging Styles</td>
<td>259-80</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Picu Allu</td>
<td>262</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tar-paper Shacks</td>
<td>263-64</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>&quot;Lice&quot;</td>
<td>265-66</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Train Accident</td>
<td>267</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Taurinen and Ruona</td>
<td>271</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Floating Logs</td>
<td>271-72</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
The following is an interview with Toivo Ojala on September 22, 1974. We will focus on the history of the Mineral Range Railroad because Toivo worked on that for quite a few years.

I: When did your parents come to this country? When did your father come to this country, Toivo?

R: It was in the late 1800's, around 1890 or something like that.

I: Where was your pa from?

R: He was from Finland.

I: Where did he come to first?

R: He came right to the Copper Country.

I: Did he work in the mines here?

R: Never did work in the mines here. He started in the railroad and that's where he always did his work.

I: What railroad did he work for?

R: Mineral Range.

I: And that's how you worked into it?

R: That's right.

I: Where did he live at the time?

R: Well we were living in Osceola. He worked on the Mineral Range between Tamarack and the Osceola Mill. That was on a rock haul see.

I: I'm very confused, I thought the Mineral Range only went from Mass to Keweenaw Bay.

R: Oh, no, that was another branch, that was the Mineral Range too. That's where I started to work in 1923.

I: What were you doing there?

R: I was a section laborer.

I: What did that involve? I've heard people talk about these section laborers.

R: Well burying tracks, and so forth and so on, and building new spurs. There was a lot of logging in those days. Every year we had to put in new spurs for different loggers.

I: What were some of the spurs that you worked on?
Oh, let's see if I can recall them now. There was Hillier spur, Bownner spur, Otter Siding and then we built the Frances Y in 1923. In the fall of 1923 they condemned the bridge at Symer and that was west of Francis. I spent most of my younger days working on that certain section of track. Mile post 19 through Mile post 29.

Where was Mile Post 19 again?

That was between Nisquula and White Siding

And outpost 29?

Twenty-nine was right at Seimer

Well tell me what were the section crews like and how many men were there?

Well we always had a crew of three or four men except if there was a bigger job come up then we would hire extra you know.

Who did you work back in those days with?

My dad was foreman back in those days, Eli Ojala.

At the time where were you living?

At White Siding, a section house at White Siding.

Who was living at the section house at Pelkie at the time?

Jack Peterson and Lussie

Jack Peterson was Lussie's father?

Ya

Can you go into detail and describe the kinds of work you did? You mentioned briefly repairing the track but I've never repaired a track. I never want to either but what kinds of problems did that initial track have?

Well there was tie removals every summer and most of the summer we were on tie removals.

What is involved in renewing the ties, what do you have to do?

You take and pull and spikes and dig a hole and drop the old one in and then you make a new bed for the new tie. The proper height, well as close as you can get it anyway. Then you bring it up to the rail with shovels.

That was pretty important right?

Oh ya

I mean if you didn't get that just right what would happen?
Well if you didn't do it properly it could cause broken rails and stuff like that.

Do you recall any accidents on the Mineral Range that were due to that sort of thing?

We had derailments and stuff, you know, they weren't always kept up so good but we never had any real bad derailments on the main line. Then in Siding just a car or so.

How big were these sidings? How long were they?

Oh, some of them were anywhere from a thousand feet on.

Was there a siding right there in Pelkie?

In Pelkie, ya.

Well the first one, when you start coming from the Keweenaw Bay direction was in, was there one in Froberg?

There was one in Chelse and then in Nelson.

Where is Nelson Siding today according to today's roads and maps.

Well it's east of Froberg Siding. Up on the hill.

Up on the hill toward what.

Towards Keweenaw Bay.

I see and there was one in Froberg?

Ya.

Was this close to that old warehouse?

Ya, it was right there.

Do you recall when that warehouse was built?

That was during the Depression. They were building them in them days.

Around 33 or 34 something like that?

Ya, it was around that time. See when they were on those projects, they built warehouses in several different warehouses in different locations at that time. They were potato warehouses and they used them also for cabbage storage then too.

Did you ever walk into that warehouse?

Oh ya, I was in there alot of times.
I: How many cars would they generally leave?
R: It would all depend on how many they ordered. As high as four cars at a time.
I: And then several men would what?
R: They would grade them first and then they would load them. Then when the train came back through it would hook them on and pull them out.
R: Right.
I: Okay, there was also a little bit of logging involved in this.
R: Quite a bit. They even had extra trains hauling logs because that's how they handled them. The regular train would haul passengers and freight and stuff.
I: What was this train that used to haul the passengers called?
R: We never really had any name for it, it was just a regular train that's all.
I: What time did it go through? The Pelkie area in particular?
R: It was somewhere around noon.
I: Then it would go to Mass?
R: Ya.
I: Then turn around?
R: It would go to Frances and turn around and that was after the bridge was condemned see. That's when they built the Y so the engine could turn around there and then go back.
I: I'm going to show you a couple of pictures and this should bring back some memories and perhaps you can describe what's in them. Here's a picture of them loading logs in Pelkie, have you ever seen that done before?
R: This was in that spur track there that led down in the hole and that was their landing there for loading logs. The logs were down in that hole.
I: Okay, as we think of the way Pelkie is today, where would that spur track have been located?
R: Let's see, it would be back of the co-op gas station.
I: What kind of a job was it to get those big logs on there? How did they get them on there?

R: It wasn't too bad, they used to use a jammer. There was a pulley on top and then a pulley on the bottom and they had those hooks. You just shove the hooks into the ends of the logs and you start pulling on the logs with the horses and pull then hook on the next one.

I: I see. We're they doing this year around in Pelkie?

R: No most of their logging was in the winter. They couldn't haul on account of soft ground and stuff like that so they would wait for the winter. They would cut the logs in the fall already. Then they would pile them in the woods. Then when they started sleigh hauling that's when they brought them to the landing. With horses and sleighs and then later on that's when they went into the tractors.

I: Right there it says that's the Mineral Range and there are some letters there that look like S9.

R: 89 aint it?

I: Oh ya,

R: That's the car number

I: Do you remember that car?

R: I can't remember every one of them exactly. This was an older type of a wooden car and then they came out with a steel one.

I: When were those used?

R: Oh they went way back. They came out with the steel cars in the early twenties.

I: Do if you had to estimate when that picture was taken, when would you say?

R: Well I would say at least in the early twenties.

I: Very early twenties ha?

R: I: That man there I've heard is Axel Tepsa.

R: I: Does that look like him?

R: It does ya.

I: Did he used to work around there very much?
I don't know, he was a farmer there and then they used to work in the woods to make ends meet because they couldn't make it by farming. So they used to work out in the woods and on the landing there. I can't recognize that teamster over there through this picture.

Did you ever load logs yourself?

Oh no I never did in Pelkie there but I did in Otter Siding and Hillier Spur.

When did the hardwood market develop, that looks like hardwood there

Ya, they are.

When did they start hauling them?

I recall in the early twenties because that's when I started on the railroad was in 23.

And there was a special train that just carried wood right?

Ya, it used to come after logs every day. It was a special train just for logs.

When did the train get into Pelkie about?

The express used to run earlier in the morning and then by the time they got back they had a full day in.

Where would these logs go?

Well most of them would go to L'Anse and Baraga. To the mills there.

Here's another photograph and it looks like the train is having a hard time of it.

Ya, I see they have the wrecker there.

Is that a wrecker?

Ya, that's a wrecker. That's the coal and water tender.

Every now and then you'd lose one like that.

Not very often but in the winter time when the snow was quite heavy we would derail quite often. With the plow even. Quite a problem putting them back. Sometimes you had to work all night and then the engine would start to run short of water, the plow might roll over on it's side. Then we had to start shoveling snow into the tender to make water. To keep the fire going and keep the steam engines from freezing.

In a situation something like that

Yup
Limestone Mountain looking toward Norman Marshall's.

That's where we were by the spur here where we almost tipped the engine over.

You remember that?

Oh ya, I was there.

When did that happen?

That was in about 1923

In 1936 I've heard that it closed down

Ya around 37 maybe

Ya, well what happened that day? You said you were there, do you remember that day?

Oh ya, we hit that snowbank and all of a sudden everything started happening and that was it. The snow was so high.

About how deep was it?

The snowbanks were about eight to ten feet high

How high was that plow, you can only see part of it there.

It was about eight feet high.

Wow, that snow was really high then.

When we hit that hard bank there it threw her.

Oh, the force of the bank against the plow.

Ya, it took us all that night. This happened in the afternoon and all that night we worked there and we got a wrecking crew there from Marquette. We managed to get the engine on and then we were supposed to go to Pelkie to eat at Pelo's because she was preparing supper for the crew.

Who was that?

Mrs. Pelo. He used to be a blacksmith there. Then when we got the engine on they decided they weren't going to feed us, we were going to go right into Keweenaw Bay. So she got left with all that cooking and she was quite mad about it but I think they reimbursed her for it though. Because there was quite a few of us men there, the train crew, the wrecking crew and everybody else.

Did the local farmers come to help too?
No, they just came to observe that's all. So anyway we left the plow there that night and we came back the next day and rerailed the plow. We also repaired the track naturally.

That must have been quite a job to get one of those back up on the rails.

You better believe it. It was no easy task.

How did you do it?

You just hook onto the engine with a big rope and that rope was at least six inches in diameter. You use that for pulling and the bigger the rope the better because a cable wouldn't hold. This was all manilla rope and the farmers were using pieces for tying their potato bags and stuff. We would pull it back and when we got it closer to the rail where it was steadier then we used to put in what we call camel backs. Then just keep pulling and jump it on the rail.

What were these camel backs?

They looked like a camel with a hump and one went on the inside of the rail and you couldn't cross them up or it wouldn't work. You had one on the inside and one on the outside and then when you got on top of there they would slip on the rail. The wheels would.

How long would it take you to get a car back on?

Well this plow took a long time but ordinarily a car if the conditions weren't too bad it would probably take an hour or so.

You called this ......, how did it get that name?

..........that used to be a logging spur here. All the farmers in that area used to use it for loading their logs and stuff. See everybody was clearing land in those days. The logs they would get from there they would haul to the Ahola spur and then they would load them up on the cars and ship them to L'Anse and Baraga.

Is that the same as Gidding's Siding.

Gidding's was

More towards Nisula?

Ya, Gidding's was right below the Limestone Mountain

And Ahola was more towards Pelkie.

So these spurs weren't far apart were they?
R No. Sometime we would have two within a mile. They would have to built a spur to get the logs there.

R They had made arrangements for us to eat and we never did

I Was there a little grumbling on the part of the crew.

R Well I guess so. They were getting hungry and thirsty and everything else and all we had was snow. You couldn't eat that very well.

I You had to shovel alot of snow to keep the engine running that

R Oh ya, we were shoveling steady into the tender

I I imagine you have to shovel alot of snow to get the water up?

R You better believe it. Ya, we had a couple of men up on the bank all of the time.

I What did these trains burn? Coal?

R Coal ya, they were coal burners at that time. Then they went into fuel oil. But coal was mostly used.

I Well now, that particular branch of the Mineral Range as I understand it was designed to carry ore to a stamp plant.

R Ya in Keweenaw Bay.

I Where did it get the ore from?

R Mass City.

I What mine?

R Mass mine

I The Mass Mine, was that producing pretty good at that time?

R Oh ya, it was

I How many ore cars would that train have?

R Well this is a little bit before my time when they were hauling the ore but they used to have twenty to thirty cars at a time. They would have a long train and when they could get to Nelson Hill there they would cut it off and bring part of it up to the side track and then come up for the rest.

I Because it was too heavy.

R They couldn't make the hill
I That hill is what they call Blair Hill right?

R Ya, we used to call it the Nelson Hill on account of the spur there. It was between Froberg and Keweenaw Bay. That ain't the only time we went into the ditch with that plow.

I No one ever got hurt on that train either?

R No. Nobody ever got hurt, bounced around a little bit, but nothing that amounts to anything.

I Okay when was that taken, that looks like a patrol car doesn't it?

R Ya.

I It looks like it is in Pelkie because there's the warehouse there?

R Ya, and there's the old depot there.

I On the right hand side?

R Ya, this used to be the depot here.

I What was in there?

R Oh, they used to use that as a place to store things. Package freight. Most of the time they only locked it at night so the people could pick up their freight. That locomotive I don't remember that one at all.

I Let me see what it says, it says Witcone. What is that right there?

R That looks like a load of hardwood logs.

I Did you ever see a man traveling like that?

R Oh ya, we've done it.

I You've driven one of those things before?

R Oh ya,

What did you call those?

Handcars

Could you get those things going very fast?

R Oh ya, you could go about thirty miles an hour with them if you pump fast enough. They were gear driven and those handled gave it motor power. There were generally four men on it. Two on each handle. I don't know who that would be.

I Is there any way to tell where that is?
R Well there's no side track there or nothing.
I So it all looks the same
R Right, it all looks the same
I What was it like driving one of those thing? Can you recall any trips you used to take with those. After they discontinued the hand use they put motors on them is that true?
R Oh yes. The section foreman used to have to buy the motor himself. I don't think that was a fair shake but the company would furnish the oil and gas.
I Did you have to get one of those?
R Ya
I They used to supply the gas hey? Where did you get your's from?
R They used to have a railroad supply company
I How come the section foreman had to get his own, you'd think they would supply them?
R Well ya, you'd think so but them days they didn't. I know Matt Niemi was in White Siding before my dad bumped him because he didn't have no work in the Calumet area so he had to go down on this branch here. Matt Niemi was the foreman there when my dad moved in and there was kind of hard feelings there for a while about it. Matt started as laborer for my dad and they got along all right. Seniority was what counted there.
I So how long would it take for you to get from Nisula to Pelkie on one of those things?
R Well from Nisula to Pelkie it's all down hill so it wouldn't take too long. We used to go from White Siding to Alston because they had a theater down in Alston at the time.
I Is that right?
R Ya a whole bunch of us would pump this thing down the hill. Coming back wasn't so easy though, because it was all up hill. We used to have six people on there and everybody pumped it.
I Bet it was pretty rough after spending the night getting a little tanked up and cranking it back home.
R Well we never used to booze much them days. Nobody ever got hurt on it. They had a funny braking system on them. All there was was a peddle there and the brake shoe would rub against the wheel only on one side of it too.
The guy who was in that position was the brakeman and he always to push down on the brake if he was going too fast.

Tell me a little bit about the theater in Alston

They used to have shows there, and it wasn't everyday, only certain ones

They had films?

Ya films.

I'll bet you could get moving down hill pretty fast

Oh ya, you'd have to use the brakes

Because that handle would be moving too fast to even control?

Ya. You had to let go if it started going too fast and then brake it. Thirty to thirty-five miles an hour downhill that's pretty fast.

You bet. I imagine in those days you would see a lot of animals deer working on the railroad.

Oh yes. Deer and bear, they were common. They were all over the place.

Were there accidents where the got hit or did the train go slow enough?

No this wasn't a very fast train and they generally got out of the way.

Okay what is this picture?

That looks to me like the old Sturgeon River Bridge. They remodeled it later because it seems to me that all this truss work was taken down.

Is that the same bridge?

Ya, that's the last bridge that was there.

Right behind the co-op right?

Ya

So when did they take this super structure down?

Well I don't know what year because I wasn't even working on the track yet then. I think we were still up in Calumet.

So that was probably before 23?
Oh yes. It was before.

That looked like a pretty solid bridge

Oh yes, it was.

What's this stuff right here and it's also in that picture?

That's just piling there protecting the bridge in case logs came floating down they wouldn't damage the bridge. They would break the force of the log jam.

How high was that bridge above the water?

It wasn't very high, only about eight feet above the water

Were there problems in the spring with the logs coming down?

No we never had too many problems, well you'd have to steer them by sometimes or break the jam.

When did they take that bridge down?

Well when they tore out the track they took the bridges, culverts and the whole works. That was in about 38 or 39.

They took it all out hey?

Ya, they discontinued the whole track

You mean if you were to walk along that railroad line today you couldn't even find an old railroad tie?

No you'd probably find some of the railroad ties still there. Because cedar lasts for a long time. But it's all grown in with brush now. Some places they are using it for a road. They use those for hunting roads.

Why did they decide to take that thing out of there, to discontinue it?

They didn't have the business. Business went bad and they started trucking so much then that they just couldn't make it pay. So they had to give it up.

Well the mine probably had something to do with it right?

Well.

Didn't the Mass Mine peter out a bit.

Ya, they closed down and the mill at Keweenaw Bay, that was all closed down.
I: Do you recall when the mine closed down?

R: Well, I don't know exactly what year that was? Like I say I'm a little too young for that.

I: But it was already closed like in the twenties when you were working?

R: Ya. They weren't hauling no more rock

I: So logs were the big business right?

R: Logs were the business right. And then shipments into the stores like in Nisula they had the co-op store and in Pelkie the co-op store and Maki's and sold alot of feed.

I: One reason is the logs were being wiped out and that's a resource that doesn't replenish itself quickly and all around the railroads the farmers had cleared their lands and there were no more logs plus the trucks would haul supplies.

R: Right. They started hauling feed with trucks. From Baraga even they would haul right into Pelkie. So that cut down on their railroad use. They finally had to abandon it. So in the spring of 38 I moved to Hancock here and started working on the section here. After they closed down the mines.

I: Do you remember a saloon in Pelkie called Tom Bonds saloon?

R: Ah, Silvola used to run it when I was in that area

I: It was right approximately where the post office is now and right next to the tracks.

R: Ya, it was right just about where the post office is now.

I: You're you ever in there?

R: In Silvola's? No I was too young in those days.

I: What was it like there? It was more than just a bar, wasn't it also a pool hall.

R: Ya, they had a pool hall there too.

I: You don't remember the place very much.

R: Well, they used to call it Biskaboo's

Biskaboo's.

R: Ya.

I: What does that mean?
I don't know, somebody christined it that I guess

Is that a Finnish name?

No I don't think so.

It's just regular slang.

Right

Didn't they have some rooms in the upstairs?

Ya, they had some rooms for travelers. Salesmen used to come in and they would stay there.

Did you know Silvola?

Ya, I knew him.

What kind of a guy was he? What did he look like?

Oh he was an average size man. I'd say about 5'8 or 9 something like that. He wasn't too heavy set.

Would he run the place by himself?

Ya, and his wife would take care of the rooms. Where you could get a lot of that information would be from Urho or maybe her brother Herkkila in Pelkie.

Here's a picture it was taken in 1918 on it.

Ya, that's the old co-op store there. And that's the cheese factory and there's the side track that runs in on the side where the store is now. Then there was that other store that came from way back that was down in the hole on this side.

Did the Mineral Range haul any milk.

No, not that I know of. Oh wait a minute cream cans

Oh no milk but it hauled solid cream right?

In a refrigerated car?

No they just put them on a regular coach. The coach was divided into three sections, there was the smoker, and then the compartment for the women and then what we used to call the baggage car. So they would put the cream cans up there and haul them into Bridgeman Russell there in Hancock.
Well that made it possible for the farmers to make a little living there.

Right. Every day they would stop at all the sidings and if they had cream cans they would pick them up. The trainmen had to load them up too.

It wouldn't spoil would it?

No, I mean it was cream and most of the time cream is sour when they churn it into butter anyway.

So it didn't matter than?

No, it didn't matter

And Bridgeman Russell made it into butter.

That's right

Did you haul any cheese out of Pelkie?

I don't recall if they loaded it in boxcars or not but they must have. Because there would be no other way in the early days to haul it.

Right. What did you say that building there was?

That's the creamery.

The creamery, well what would they do there

That's where they were making the butter. They had a butter factory there and the local people would haul it there with their own conveyances.

But what didn't go there was shipped out on the train.

Right.

So the creamery couldn't process all the cream that was coming in

Ya, and maybe Bridgeman Russell would pay a little bit more so they wouldn't turn it over to the local one here.

Was that creamery a cooperative thing?

So if they could make a little more they decided not to cooperate with it then?

Right
Ya, they had several different managers there and I can't remember who the first one was.

Lot of lumberjacks used to travel on that railroad too?

Oh yes.

Where would they travel?

Well, they would travel to where ever the spurs were to the larger camps. Then again when they would come home weekends they would come down on the train again.

Oh so alot of those guys who were parttime farmers and part-time lumberjacks would ride the trains to the camps right?

That's right.

What was the fare to ride the train in those days?

It wasn't much, it was cheap. I can't recall for sure but it seems to me between White Siding and Keweenaw Bay it was only a dollar and something. That's about twenty miles so that wasn't too bad.

What did the insides of these passenger cars look like?

They were practically the same as present day coaches. They had seats and all this real velvet cushions on them and an aisle down the middle of them. There were three compartments like I said and the third compartment was for hauling the milk cans, freight and oh yes, they used to have the mail run too. They had mail for Pelkie and Nisula because they were the two main postoffices. Oh for Alston too.

Elo too?

No they didn't go there, I don't know why they didn't haul the mail into Elo.

So all the mail would come into Pelkie and then a horse and buggy would haul it into Elo and perhaps Tapiola too?

Right.

Green velvet seats. Sounds like some pretty fine material for lumberjacks to sit on.

It was.

Lumberjacks used to travel in style then right?

Ya. They were comfortable seats.

In fact you don't see green velvet now.

No you don't, that was a popular color them days I guess.
I guess because it didn't show the dirt so much.

I bet the lumberjacks liked that. Were the cars heated?

Oh yes. They had a coal fired stove on both ends and they kept the coach pretty warm. Sometime when it was real cold weather it didn't work too good but nobody ever complained too much.

Yes, the lumberjacks could take it.

I imagine that's mainly who rode it right?

Ya, mostly and then traveling salesmen used to come in by train all the time. They also had a hotel in Alston.

What was that hotel called?

John Roulette used to run that. Then the Finns dubbed him mokieusie.

That, why?

I don't know why. They just christined it that's all.

You don't know what that means.

It's just another slang word.

Those were the days.

That's the Pelkie area right there. The co-op and the old cheese co-op.

Do you remember any stories, any memories that kind of stand out from the railroad days? What train did you generally ride on?

Well we used to call it a mixed train because it had a coach and then other freight. Then if one train couldn't handle all the logs then this train would pick up the logs too, on the way back into Keweenaw Bay.

Let's say you're coming from Keweenaw Bay in 1923 or 26 something like that and you're just on the top of Nelson Hill, what would it look like?

Well this track was built on a side hill and then there was the Sturgeon River flats down below here.

You could see all that from the hill?

You could see that from the railroad.

Would the train have to brake going down that hill?

Oh ya.
Ya, their brakes worked pretty good and they could stop quick if they wanted to. I remember one time the log train was coming through Pelkie and a couple of kids latched onto the train. It was dark and night time and the train was heading back.

Were they trying to hitch a ride?

Ya, they were hitching a ride to go to Hamar. When they went through Hamar, they were going so fast that they were afraid to jump. So they got to Froberg Siding and they were way past home so they figured they were going to bail out of here right now. So they bailed out and hit the plow bank where the plow had pushed the snow and one of the guys rolled back under the train and he got cut to ribbons. All they were doing was picking pieces up with shovels.

So when he jumped out he hit the bank and rolled back under the train

Right.

Do you remember who he was?

If I remember correctly there was a kid named Keranen and another one now which one it was I don't know.

I heard Waielus. How was that spelled?

Waielus.

And another one was a Keranen

Right.

I heard the Waielus boy was the one who got killed.

That's right, he's the one that got killed.

According to Urho.

Ya, he's the one that got cut up

That must have been a pretty sad thing. Did you stop the train immediately?

No they didn't even know they were on there. They just found pieces afterwards.

So the Keranen boy went home and brought the news.

Ya. They knew there was something wrong because he went home and he was scared. They started questioning him and he finally came out with it that they hitched a ride on the train and the other one rolled under and was all cut up to ribbons. That happened right in Froberg.

That was pretty dangerous business buming a ride on the train
You bet it was. Then when it was dark, they couldn't see where they were jumping and they hit the bank. The other one didn't, they other one got off all right. The section crew came along later and the undertaker and they shoveled snow and whatever looked like a piece of flesh they would throw it into a box. The undertaker took it away then. There weren't too many big pieces of course the skull wasn't too broken up but most of it was one bloody mess that's all.

Did that happen very often, not an accident like that but people bumbing a ride.

Oh they used to buming rides alot but then would get off when the train would come to a hill and they couldn't go any faster, they would have to slow down. Then they would jump off. But then when you're coming down hill it's kind of dangerous to jump.

Do you remember any old guys or loggers that used to buming rides?

No, I don't remember of any, they used to generally ride the coach. They used to pay their fare. Although you used to see some of them old lumberjacks but I didn't know their names or anything.

When you'd see them were you instructed to kick them off?

Oh ya, you weren't supposed to let anybody ride and the trainmen would chase them off but most of the time they didn't care, they were kind of lax about it. Of course they would sooner see them pay their fare than buming a ride. They couldn't keep track of all of them because they would jump on when the train was in motion and there they were.

Times were pretty hard then too

Ya. Money was hard to come by. I used to work in the lumber camps for thirty or thirty-five dollars a month. Of course you had your board but that isn't much money, thirty or thirty-five dollars a month.

No it isn't.

Then when I started working on the railroad we used to get about forty dollars every two weeks. Sometimes if we had 13 or 14 days we would get $44.80.

When was this now approximately?

Well this was in the twenties well all the way from 1920 to 1930 something.

So actually the railroad jobs were the better jobs in those days.

They were better paying ya
R It was bull work though, hard work. Hot sun beating down, it wasn't easy.

I You mean working on the railroad in the sun.

R

I The repair work

R

I Did you do any repair work in the winter?

R You couldn't do it, the ground was froze. The only thing you could fix was if the rail spread or something like that. If you found a spread then you would have to dig out and pull the spikes out plug the holes and then respike it and bring them in. We never had no serious derailments down here.

I I imagine with the extremely cold weather and the incredible frost you'd really have a lot of damage to the railroad and the repair job would be great every spring.

R Ya and on a lot of them you had light rail. Only 50 and 60 pound rail and the ends would break up. Sometimes it took us about a month to get all those broken rails repaired.

I How would you do that?

R Well we used to take and cut off the part that was broke with a sledge and a chisel and then we would drill new holes in there with a hand drill.

I Were they pretty heavy?

R Well they were 56 pounds to a yard. So they weren't too light. We had some 60 pound to a yard too. A thirty foot rail would be about 600 pounds for a 30 foot rail.

I Would two or three men grab that then?

R Well we'd take one end and sometime in the winter we would only have one man and a foreman. We'd take and get one end up on the push car first and then take and get the other end up. They were too heavy otherwise.

I Sounds like backbreaking work

R It was.

I So you worked for your money then

R Right.
R We had a lot of rail trouble up there on that branch.
I What job did you hate the most about that or what job was the most aggravating or difficult.
R Drilling holes.
I Through the rail.
R Ya. That was a hard drill. You had an upright drill and then a handle and a wooden handle on both ends. One man would get on one handle and another one on the other then you set your feet how fast you wanted it to cut and the tighter you fed it the harder it was to turn.
I But the faster it would cut?
R
I You used both arms when you were doing this?
R Ya. oh ya, you had to one arm wasn't enough
I And as much strength as you could muster up?
R That's right.
I I don't quite have the idea of what these drills look like because I've never seen one but they were a two man drill?
R They have one of them old timers yet in Hancock and I guess in Houghton too.
R Ya see you just hooked over the rail and then you brought the whole thing back and then just clamped it and that steadied it.
I Then the two men would do it and how long would it take you to drill a hole?
R If you had good bits it didn't take too long but oh I'd say about ten fifteen minutes.
I You're really drill a lot of holes in a day.
R Oh ya and that was a backbreaker. That was the hardest work as far as I'm concerned. Some of them didn't like to put in ties but I did. I really liked that.
I There's a little art to that too isn't there?
R Oh ya
You have to know what you’re doing. We used to set our pace, generally two of us. About 24 times a day and you were doing a good days work.

I imagine

You bet

You’d have to dig the holes and pull the old ones out and put the new ones in, spike them and then you’d fill in your holes and level it out so it would look good.

Alot of work.

Yup, but I used to enjoy that because it seemed like you had an objective. If you were going to get those 24 ties in a day you had to work accordingly. Sometimes you’d get through a little earlier.

What kind of ties were these generally.

We used to use hemlock and cedar them days.

And they were how long?

Eight foot. Then we went to hardwood after somewhere around the late thirties.

Well the local farmers used to make the ties, would you buy them directly from them?

Well they would send the tie inspector down and they’d have them on the landings. A certain measurement on the face of the tie, they were number ones, number two’s, number three’s and then there was the rejects. Then there were some that were no good at all.

These were the grading of the ties.

Ya

What did a tie have to look like to be a number one?

Well it had to have an eight inch face on it and solid of course but if there was any rot at all they would graduate to two’s and three's and rejects. They used the rejects for sidetracks. They were too small a face on them. Maybe about a five inch face on them.

How much would the farmer get for a grade one tie?

I can’t remember what they were getting but I think it was around seventy-five cents a piece. Then it started going up and up and they were a dollar after. Now the hardwood sold for about $4.00 a piece.

Oh the hardwoods today?
Ya.
Well for four bucks a piece.
Yup.
But in those days the farmer had to hire a guy to hew them too?
Oh ya and alot of them hewed their own too. It was all hewed work, they didn't have the saws yet them days. Some of them guys were crackerjacks at it too.
There's quite a knack to hewing them isn't there?
You better believe it
Have you ever done it?
I tried it. Ya we hewed some ties for some sidetracks herein Hancock. For Armstrong Thielman we used to hew our own switch ties there. That was quite a job.
How do you go about hewing a tie.
We used to take an axe and first mark it because sometimes the wood is twisted. We used to call it corning. Every so far chop it with an axe. Then you go with the broad axe and start.
Oh and this would be so that the piece would bend?
Bend or break out.
Break out ya. Most of the time they broke off because you corned them first.
How far apart?
About a foot apart.
You called it corning and about a foot apart you knock these in
Ya
Do you do that with a regular two faced axe?
Ya
Then how do you stand on this log, you said you stand astride, you mean right on top of the log?
You have to stand right on top of it and you hue down.
Along side of your feet and if you're lucky you don't hit yourself.

Sounds like a rather precarious operation

It was a hazardous job all right

You couldn't let your mind wander for a moment right?

No, no. If you slipped, it was pretty dangerous. That broad axe was sharp, almost razor sharp. You could easily take a chunk off your boot. You could take a toe too.

It wasn't an uncommon thing to have a guy take his toes off?

They would cut themselves, pretty bad sometimes

Do you remember any of them?

No, I don't remember any names and places but it was in the logging camps.

Do you remember any real good hewers?

I can't recall of any

How many could a good hewer do in a day?

Oh, I don't know but they could make a good living if they were doing it by contract. Oh I imagine they made about twenty to twenty-five ties in a day.

Have you ever seen this sawmill before?

Ya, ya

Did you ever ride the train through it?

I never worked in that area before. They had all these different sidings and spurs for loading logs and lumber.

Looks like there's some logs downin the water there too.

Ya. That's the hot pond there, that's where they steer them into the mill

You mean the ones that would come on the train they would dump into the water?

Ya,

Why would they do that?

Well they had that conveyer and they used to call it a bull chain and the chain would run right out into the water and then the guy would guide the log and the bull chain would grab the log and bring it right into the mill.
I Pull it right up into the mill?

R Right. Then from there it went to the carriage and there were two men working the carriage and then it went to the saw to be cut into whatever dimensions the slabs were needed. Then they would have to go through the edger to take the edges off. This was after they were sawed. So they had square edges.

I So by dumping them into the hot pond there it made it very easy for one man to manage one log.

R Right. Another reason for having the hot pond was a lot of them logs would be sandy from skidding them out of the woods so this would kind of wash the sand off so it wouldn't be so hard on the saw blade.

Oh ya I can imagine a lot of sand going into that blade would dull it in no time.

R It didn't take long. They had a man filing all the time. A special filer. Some guys were good at it, they could make a saw cut and other ones weren't so hot at it. They generally got to know that trade pretty good.

I Did you ever grab one end of those?

R You bet I did. I sawed logs.

I With a cross cut?

R Yes.

I When did you do it?

R That was during the Depression Days. I worked out in the woods and we were sawing logs. Me and my brother-in-law for Bill Ruono and that was up in Red Rocks there. By L'Anse there.

I Approximately where his camp is now.

R Ya. Somewhere in that area there. If you had a good saw and a good partner there it wasn't bad. Kind of interesting work. Then you have to watch if you knock a tree down and you get another one a spring pole. I had a couple of close shaves.

I Did it pin the tree down and send it whipping back at you?

R It sent it whipping back and that piece where it was cut came like a bullet. You didn't know which way you were going to go. You always watch when the tree falls and if you see that wind coming you always go to the side never away from it. It'll catch you every time. I had a close one one day, I thought I was a dead pigeon but I got away from it. Never even touched me. That other fellow there looks like he could be a Frenchman or something.
I  Seems to me I should know him
R  Several people have said that
I  I just can't think of who that is.
R  This limb that comes is it on the tree you're sawing?
I  No it's generally on the one it hits. It bends the tree way down and a piece breaks off.
R  And when it springs back up it sends a piece flying.
I  Ya. Sometimes more than one.
R  Does it?
I  Well that can kill a man can't it?
R  Why sure. A lot of them have lost their life. Another thing when you're sawing a log off a stump like that in cold weather some time it would sliver like that and she'd kick and take a long slab off of there.
I  Called a barber chair?
R  Yup and them are the ones that were bad. But if you watched your notch and notched them right you didn't have that. A lot of them didn't make much of a notch and then when she started to go a barber chair would kick back.
I  Oh it was the barber chair itself that would?
R  Ya, that would bring the tree back. Oh ya, there were a lot of them that got hurt. I know a fellow by the name of John Hase that was there when I working in and he sawed there and he got banged up pretty bad. He was all right afterwards but he was in the hospital for a long time.
I  I imagine a man had to be in pretty good shape to work one of those saw.
R  You better believe it. Like I said it all depend on how good the saw was filed, how much set you had and what kind of partner you had. If you had a heavy handed partner boy that was bullwork. I used to be so tired, I used to come from the woods at night and barely make myself over the threshold into the house. Have supper and hit the sack right then and there.
I  I imagine after a winter or so of doing that you were in pretty good shape.
Oh ya. Your muscles were hard that's for sure.

I understand that to work the saw properly a team had to have a certain rhythm.

Oh ya, you have to pull it from end to end and the longer the stroke the quicker you would get through the log.

How would you describe that rhythm?

Oh it just comes naturally. When you are sawing sideways like that that is the hardest. Then when you're sawing down there's nothing to it. Unless you get a pinch and we used to carry wedges to drive in up above the saw and that would spread that crack. Sometimes we had to saw from underneath and that was kind of hard to do. Sawing the wrong way coming up with it. There were alot of tricks to sawing logs.

I understand that if you had a good team and a good saw you could buzz through a tree in no time almost as fast as a contemporary power saw.

Ya like I said if conditions were good we could saw 50 logs a day. By the time you saw 50 logs you're tired.

I bet it was rough then if you had a bad partner.

It sure was.

I imagine there were arguments between guys in those days.

I don't know, we never used to say much but we sure would give each other dirty looks sometimes. Some guys used to ride the saw they would put so much pressure on it. Then the guy on the other side he had a heck of a time to pull it through. Then if you got a good Sawyer, a light handed man it was like taking candy from a kid. But if you had a heavy handed partner you were in misery.

Did guys have reputations for being heavy handed too.

Oh ya.

And the other sawyers would avoid them like the plague?

You better believe it.

Can you remember any heavy handed guys?

Well I said I used to saw with Carl and he was more or less heavy handed and then with Waisanen and that was for firewood. Sometimes I used to try and pull him through the crack but he wouldn't come. Boy that used to get me mad all that pressure on there.

Were there any guys that you recall as being exceptionally good?
I don't really recall. Generally they always worked in partners. They'd get used to each other in time.

But when two guys went out for the first time it was generally not the best thing hey?

No it wasn't. Like I said it was bull work and then when you were sawing crossways like that, that was another problem. There's a lot of tricks to that too. Then we used to have to swamp trails. In some camps they had swampers but some camps we had to swamp our own. One winter when I saw sawing we had a lot of small timber. I told my partner I don't think these are going to pass. Oh he said we'll saw them anyway. So while he would file the saw and fix the saw up I'd go swamping. Well I made regular boulevards for the teamsters. They could get in there so nice, didn't have to crawl in the brush. Then the scaler would come along and check our logs. He said well you have a lot of small ones here but I'll take everything. Considering we had done such a good swamping. My partner used to say you're too particular, you don't need to make no boulevard. I said it might pay off. And it did.

Would you like to go back to those days?

No way. Not even if I was able to.

Really, what about this good old days business.

Well that's what we would call them, the good old days. I wouldn't want to go back to it no more.

But I bet on a cold frosty morning it was kind of nice to be working in the woods.

Oh ya. Like these guys, they only have their shirts on, you get too warm otherwise. You had to peel off.

Now there's a nice load of logs, look how nice and perfect they are Straight size trees.

That's Art Burdstrom hauling logs in Pelkie.

Did you ever drive one of those?

No I never used to haul, my brother-in-law used to do a lot of that

Looks like the sled has a couple pairs of runners on it.

It has ya. These here are the bunks.

Where are the bunks again?

Right here where the logs are on.
Then they had those corner binds and they would throw a chain around each corner and then throw a wrapper chain around the top to pull it tight.

What was that called again?

A wrapper or corner binds. You chain them onto the bunk

There was quite a knack to tying in a load right?

You better believe it. You have to always watch your logs where you're going to put them see.

Those look like perfect logs.

They are perfect logs. So that's Art hey?

Yup, many years ago. You can see the big log piles there in Pelkie.

Ya, you can see the logs piled up here.

How did they used to unload those logs?

Just knock the chains loose twist the chains down and then when you found at the bottom knock the corner binds off. Sometimes you would knock the corner binds off first. Then the load will all go on one side see.

You dump it all at once?

Ya, We try to get as many as possible off by knocking the wrapper off and then the corner binds. Boy sometimes you get over half the load off in one shot. That's another thing you had to make sure you weren't in the way when those things started coming. When you're knocking those corner binds you had to be fast footed. When you knocked them you had to jump at the same time. Sometimes the logs would stay there and other times they would scoot right off.

Sounds like a dangerous way to make a living

It was a dangerous way. There were many dead men. When they were trucking one of my friends uptherere in Hancock was hauling to Donken and he figured well he's unload that logs before he had his lunch and went back in the woods again. One of the logs rolled off the top when he knocked the wrapper off and that was his finish right there. It killed him right there.

Right on the spot?

Yup. And many that I heard of but I can't remember their names. This guy was called Felix Krimm and he was trucking on his own.

White shirts on Saturday night and Sunday?
Yup, all the time and a tie. You weren't dressed up if you didn't have a white shirt and a tie.

Lumberjacks and everyone?

Ya, sure, when they were in town. Some of those crummy lumberjacks they just kept their old clothes when they came into town. They would blow in all their winter stake in a few days so they didn't have money to buy clothes.

They'd blow it all in one shot.

Right, blow it all in one shot. Then the tavern owners would say okay boys back in the woods. Here's an eye opener, give them a drink on the house and out they would go.

Do you remember a guy named Whiskey Pete?

No but there was a whiskey Bill up there somewhere in the Twin Lakes area. But I can't remember Whiskey Pete.

Picu Allu

Ya, they all had their nicknames. Picu Allu Pikku Little Al

Oh, Picu Allu.

That was just a nickname to him.

What was he like?

He was only a little short gabby little guy. He used to hang around the lumber camps all the time. That Mauno Letto was another one. Oh there were alot of them, one he got drunk and slept in the snowbank and froze all the fingers on his hands and lots his fingers.

You mean he left his fingers in the snowbank?

They had to amputate them

What's his name, I can't catch the first name

Well it's fingerless Frank.

What was he like?

He was quite a drunk. He used to come to Hancock and spend his stake and then hang around waiting for a few other lumberjacks to come and buy him a few. Then he'd have to take off for the woods again because no one would buy any more for him.

What about this Mauno Lehto?
What was he like?

Oh he was just a typical lumberjack that's all. You could smell that tar paper when those guys would come into town even on the other side of town they would say well here comes the lumberjacks. The tar paper shacks they used to stay in. You could smell the tar paper and the dirt.

Ever stay in one of those tar paper shacks?

Ya, and used to freeze in them too

Something like that?

Yup, there they are.

What were they like?

Well, they would set them up in the winter. They'd bring a sawmill out in the woods, they would saw green hemlock, slap them up and put a tarpaper roof and sides. There was no lining in it at all and you know what green lumber is when it's frozen in the winter time. Then they would have a big barrel stove. You'd wake up in the morning sometimes and your blankets would be frozen to the walls. Then they used to have like a clothes line up above the stove. The guy who got up first always got the cleanest socks and the ones without the holes. The ones that were last they had to take what was left.

Oh so they'd kind of take each other's socks.

Oh ya, they'd steal them. They'd steal your socks, mits and everything if you didn't watch them. You had to get up early in the morning.

Was that considered kind of a joke?

No it was no joke but you couldn't prove it that they were your's. We never marked them or anything. If we would have marking pencils we could have marked the mitts at least.

Choppers too?

Choppers, liners, and socks.

Well from what I've heard most of the lumberjacks are honest good hearted men.

They were.

Ya, or are those stores.

You mean the foreman's at the camps?
I  No, all the lumberjacks. I thought they didn’t do things like that. Or was this prank stuff going on all the time, always playing tricks on one another.

R  Well, I think it was prank too, if they saw a clean pair of socks or mitts well that was there’s then. There was no way you were going to prove it unless you had a fight. Fight for your own. They were miserable to stay in them camps then.

I  But those were the good old days?

R  Ya, they were the good old days then. Not very good were they? Then they had double bunks, made out of hemlock, room for two in the lower and two in the upper bunk. A handful of straw and two blankets, one on top and one under. Then you would have to use your own coat or shirts and stuff for pillows. Some of them camps would get so lousy that your blankets would even walk off the bed during the night. I used to have to come home and get loused twice a week when I was staying at the camps.

I  How did you get them off of

R  Go in the sauna and peel off and throw them on the hot rocks.

I  Your clothes on the hot rocks?

R  Ya. That was the best method of doing it. But then if they got real bad while you were out in the woods you had to get some blue ointment.

I  What’s blue ointment?

R  It’s a kind of an ointment that they used to use for lice and all that stuff.

I  It was sold in the local stores and that?

R  Ya. They used to supply it at the camps too

I  What was worse the lice or the ointment?

R  I don’t know, when it got hot that ointment wasn’t so good either. It would burn but them lice were miserable. When you got out into the woods and started sweating you were itching all over. I used to even have to drop my britches and start picking them out and throw them in the snowbank.

I  Those were the days all right.

R  Oh, they were miserable.

The Finnish lumberjacks might have had a little advantage over the others, because they at least went to the sauna.
Ya. Well that's why these camps used to get so lousy. Some of these lumberjacks used to be of different nationalities, and they would come for a few days and louse the camp up and then move on to the next one. That way they kept everybody in lice.

Do you remember any of those guys?

Ya I remember them but I don't remember names any more.

Really rough characters hey?

Well didn't they build any saunas in any of those camps?

Not them days. You had to go to some farmer or home or wherever they had a sauna. All they had were wash basins and a barrel of water and then they would heat some water on top of the stove.

I'll bet a farmer would even be hesitant to let a whole bunch of lousy lumberjacks into his sauna.

Ya, I guess they didn't like it very much. If they knew they were lousy they wouldn't allow them, no way. But if they didn't know it why there you were. Next time you knew better.

I wouldn't like the prospect of bugs crawling all over me all the time

No sir. It's miserable

Did they bite?

Itch and oh ya, bite. Then in some camps they had bedbugs and that was just as bad. They had both you know.

What did the bedbugs look like?

They're kind of brown and something like a wood tick. You know what a woodtick is?

Practically the same looking and boy them are miserable. Just when the lights would go out then they would come at you.

But there were some nicer parts of the camps life. Weren't there some good stories told?

Ya, they would tell their adventures and different things. Like this one guy Lekku they used to call him. He had an old horse down at Ruona's camp. He wanted to get rid of it because it couldn't do it's work any more so Lekku took that horse, took dynamite and a piece of rope and some caps. He went out in the woods and set the charge.
He lit the fuse and the rope wasn't very strong, just a weak rope. When that thing started to sizzle you know of course Lekku started running away. He didn't want to get blown up. The horse took after him. He was swearing and running up the road hollaring get away from me. Luckily it went off before the horse caught up to him.

It got the horse?

Yup, it got the horse. If it would have caught up with him he would have been gone too.

The horse was just following him because he thought of him as a friend.

Right. Well when the fuse started sputtering, he got scared and jerked and broke the rope and started running after him. Ol Lekku running down the road and the horse after him. There was nother one Sorrilekku. Sorri was his real name but they called him Sorri-lekku.

What does that mean then?

Sorry.

Where washe from?

He used to work around them big farms therein Pelkie. For Taurinen's and different ones and then he used to go to Taurinen's camp and Ruona's in the wintertime. In the summertime he would be over there taking care of animals and farm chores. Haymaking and all that.

You get a warm spell and it cuts and the water runs over the track then you get a hard storm on top and you didn't know what was under there. You come plowing then and the ice would carry you right off.

Where would this happen?

We had that happen just east of Hazel there one time

In that lowland down by the swamp there.

Ya, there used to be a cut there right out of Hazel on the east.

So it was in the winter and you had a warm rain, it flooded and then it froze again.

Ya, it froze again.

And you found yourself going into a solid wall of ice.

So we had to shovel our way through and then take picks and pick the rail out so we had a rail for the wheels. There was only three of us there with the train at the time and we must have shoveled and picked a quarterof a mile of track.

Holy smokes
All we done was brought it down to where the rail was on both sides and then we plowed it out after we got the rail. Then just below Gidding's there we had the same thing happen but there was an old farmer's crossing there and we had the same situation there. We were going lickity split and all of a sudden the plow turned sideways and there we were down in the down over the bank. It wasn't too high of a bank, only about four feet or something like that. We had to leave the plow there that time too and come back the next day and get it. We got the engine on, the engine was crossways too. We had some old boiler plates on the tender where they keep the coal and the water. We kept piling them under the wheels and pulling her back. Then we used camelbacks like I said and she walked right on the rail. But the plow that was impossible to get it that night. We left it there. We came back a couple of days later and pulled it on. See it was only running three times a week at that time. That's why it had a chance to freeze up. If we were running all the time it wouldn't have done that.

Sounds like a rough business trying to run a train with the kinds of winters we have here.

Yup, you'd never believe it.

Kind of sad too that it ended it's operation.

Ya, well they had that high bridge that was about a 100 feet high there in Symer and oh it was over a 1,000 feet long. The firesteel river went underneath there. The B & B, bridge and building crew was there repairing the bridge. So they had the trusses on jacks and then this rock train come along and the vibration caused the jacks to slip. The engine and the fuel cars got across and naturally when the other rocks cars went down. A few cars and combination coach and baggage car got left on the other side.

Anyone die on that one?

No. It broke in the middle of the train see.

Oh how lucky.

Then the cupplings let go and it dropped and that's where that other part got left. That was quite a project to repair that bridge, it took them quite a while.

Did you ever work with Lester Peterson?

Oh ya.

Where did you work with him?

Well two crews would get together on bigger jobs. Him and his dad were out of Pelkie and I was out of White Siding. Then we used to meet at the Mile Post 19 and we used to get together alot and work together. Art Burdstrom worked on the railroad there too. I think Jack Koivunen worked there for a while too.
Then they had another section in Keweenaw Bay, when they put them motors on them hand cars. Then they lengthened their sections and that's what they got out of it, more work. You got to work faster and easier.

I heard there were two families living in the section house in Pelkie One would go one way east and the other one would go west.

Ya, that's right

Was that before your time?

No, let's see who was in there, I don't recall but that's about the time they started lengthened the sections.

Ya

So then they only had one at Keweenaw Bay, one at Pelkie and one at White Siding. Then years ago there used to be a section at Symer, but they only had five mile sections at that time. Then they made nine and ten mile sections out of them.

When you got the motorized car

Ya, the motorized car.

Which was did Peterson's crew work?

Well they worked from Pelkie west. They came all the way to one mile west of Nisula.

Do you recall who else worked for Jeff Peterson, his son Louis, you mentioned Jack Kouvunen?

Ya, he worked for him.

And Art Burdtstrom.

That's about all I can think of right now. Oh and Eli Parkkila, he came from Finland. Eli worked in Pelkie first and then he came to work in White Siding. He worked for my dad in White Siding then and I was working with him naturally.

That's a pretty good deal where a father can make pretty good wages and his son can too.

Right

That was very fortunate for those times.

That's right.
I mean the family was comfortable in those times right?

R Ya. But you had to stick to your job otherwise you didn't work up no seniority and that was the end. Well someone else might step in with a little more seniority and after you'd quit once you couldn't come back. I felt like quitting many a time but anyway I stuck it out. Forty-six years and some months.

I That's a long time working on the railroad.

R Yup. Actually I started in 23 when we built that y but I didn't get enough time in to get on the seniority list. So then my seniority started next spring. You had to have six months in a row before you could get on the list even. So anyway I was fortunate that I got started that way. Yup, I made a living off the railroad for alot of years.

I If you had to do it again would you do it the same way?

R Well, I don't think I'd change, when I used to go out I used to run big crews all over the South Shore system. As far as Wisconsin and St. Ignace. All along the line wherever the South Shore tracks went. I worked on almost every mile of it. I used to have big crews, sometimes eighty some men.

I The railroad owned alot of land.

R Oh ya. They had certain places and locations where the railroad bought the property and then they'd lease it to these different stores and businesses.

I I know that's how the government enticed them to build them by giving them land.

R Oh ya, that was all government owned

I Well the railroad opened up that country

R It did ya.

I Made it possible for people to make a living. They couldn't have sold their logs, they couldn't have gotten their feed, and they could not have sold their cream.

R No. The railroad made it all possible.

I And today, the younger generation, or my generation even knows that there was such a thing called the Mineral Range.

R That's right.

I That was the first railroad up here

R Then it was called the Hancock to Calumet line. It's spoke of in that Saturday's paper there.
Then the Mineral Range absorbed that and then they had a big yard there and that's where they used to haul their rock, from Mohawk, Ahmeek and all them places. Then they had the Ahmeek Mill there and Mineral Range used to haul their rock and the Tamarack and Osceola Mill. They were down in Hubbell or Tamarack Mill or one of them locations. That's where the Tamarack rock used to and the Osceola Mill was right next to it. Then the Ahmeek mill was a little north of there.

Do you remember the Waisanen brothers working in conjunction with railroad at all?

No I can't ever remember them working on the railroad but they were doing an awful lot of logging and farming there. They really were in the logging business there for a while. Seems to me they were logging for Hillier. The lumber company.

Boy it must have been alot of timber.

Alot of timber came out of that branch.

They emptied that area out. I wonder if you could see the pile of logs that came out on the Mineral Range how high it would be.

Millions of feet. Them bigger companies used to get a million feet contract. Then they would have small jobbers working for them too. They used to take out a million feet of logs in the wintertime.

How did Ruona and Taurinen fit into this larger logging picture?

Well they were in the other siding area, not a siding a spur that way into Clear Lake. Close to Winona.

That's where both Ruona and Taurinen did most of there's?

Ya. Most of their logging. Then around Sawmack there Taurinen did alot of logging too.

Where's that?

That was next to White Siding, there was a spur there too. They used to haul across the Otter River and then way back by the Pike Lake Road there.

Where did Mat Ojja do his logging then?

I think he was most of the time in the Pelkie area.

Well who did Taurinen and Ruona get these contracts from then?

They got them from them from the Lumber Company and then also the Ford Motor Company.

I see, that's how that worked.
They got a big contract for Ford.

They really had a big one then. That's when they started taking all these hardwoods for floorboards for cars.

That stuff went to Pequaming?

It went to L'Anse. There was a mill in L'Anse. That Pequaming mill used to get their lumber from the Huron Mountains. Then they used to float them across the lake all the way from Keweenaw Point there. They had them big log rafts and they would tow them across from Pequaming.

In nice weather.

Right.

I'll bet they would lose a few logs.

They did lose a lot of logs. They used to have that boom that would chain the logs together, and then come around and then to the scow chain it onto the scow and take off.

There were a lot of logs in the middle?

You bet.

You've seen those before.

Oh ya, I've seen those before. We used to call them log booms. They weren't moving very fast either. It was a heavy drag.

Sounds like a very inefficient way of doing it but that was the best they had for those times.

The best they had.

I mean I can imagine a Lake Superior storm tossing logs all over the place.

Yup. A couple of years back here one of the booms broke on the Canadian side. All the logs were all along the shore of Michigan. They had different contractors going there and picking them up.

Bet there were a few pirates in there getting a few too?

Oh ya. They didn't get them all either.

I know many a sauna around the Pelkie, Keweenaw Bay area were built with logs that floated down the Sturgeon and Otter and got kind of stuck on the side there.

Oh ya. They made them stick sometime.
I Throw a few chains around them with your horses and pull them upon your land.

R Ya, they done alot of that.

I But then the logging companies did just as much because they didn't exactly cut on their own land.

R Oh ya. Well that's it, they used to go over their own land and I guess there were some pretty bad squabbles about that.

I Do you remember any?

R No, I can't recall any real bad ones. I heard of them but it's one of those things I wasn't too interested in at the time. My career was railroad and then I did work out in the woods too. I never seen where I worked at they went over the line anywhere.