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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T: John, suppose you tell us something about the Copper Country when you were young—let's say about the mining.

O: From what age?

T: Well, when you were young.

O: Well, I used to work when I was about twelve years old.

T: Twelve years old.

O: On the hayfield for a farmer name William Johnson. What I was doing there was carrying water for the men that worked on the field—drinking water, you know.

T: Yeah.

O: When we got paid for that, you know, dollar a day.

T: Oh.

O: For ten hours sometimes, eleven hours sometimes.

T: Just carrying water to the workmen.

O: Yeah, yeah, carry that sometimes about a mile and a half, you know, from the place that you bring it to the men—about a mile and a half sometimes, at the first, you know, at the last end of the season.

T: How was a—how old were you before you start entering the mine, working in the mine and that?

O: Entering the mine?
T: Yeah.

O: I started there in nineteen twenty two, I guess it was.

T: Sixty two

O: Nineteen twenty two!

T: Oh; twenty two. I'm sorry.

O: I was at that time sixteen years old.

T: Sixteen.

O: Yeah, you see at that time they hired sixteen year olds - boys to work in the mines as a scraper boy, see, then I worked in the scraper gang with them. The scraper would run up and down the stove them, an bring the dirt down into the shoot then from there to the car.

T: What other jobs does the men do besides mining?

O: Others?

T: Yeah.

O: Oh, lumbering, sawmill, farming, and stuff like that. Then ah, well, of course they have them fishermen, the commercial fisherman and all that you know, stuff like that you know.

T: What did trigger you to go into mining when you were that age, why didn't you go into lumbering or fishing or
O: Well, I did then when I was older . . . Well, I couldn't go at that young age when.

T: Lumbering.

O: Yeah, at twelve years old, you know, well as far as fifteen and sixteen years old like that you could have went work in the lumber camp, see.

T: Yeah.

O: But then after I worked in the mines there for a while, then I worked for Johnson— you know— the one I used to carry water for the farm.

T: MMM (meaning yes)

O: He was a logger too, see.

T: Ah.

O: He used to log for Dollar Bay Saw Mill.

T: This Mr. Johnson that you worked with you said he— lumberman. Is he connected to the mining company, or what?

O: No— well he was at that time he was, you know, hauling powder and stuff like that grain powder for the mining company and then hauling coal, you know, delivering coal for the people around, and ah, he had the coal business, you know, and ah, he used to do logging wintertimes for the Dollar Bay Sawmill. Then I worked for Johnson at the lumbercamps and then off and on I used to work in the mines, see.
T: I see

O: See, see, ah, I was...

T: You were working part time in both places.

O: Yeah, see I'd work Johnsons summertime and then wintertime I'd go lumber-camps, you know, then sometimes I'd go work in the mines.

T: I see.

O: 1929...Let's see...1929- That Depression came little after that.

T: Ah-huh.

O: In '32, I think it came in '31 or something like that. Then we got laid-you know

T: I see...

O: And, ah, there was no unemployment, no social security, no nothing for the older people either. When they got laid off they were too old to get any job anywhere else so they didn't get any Social Security or anything.

T: So what happens when they were layed off--ah, how did they get their money to support their family?

O: Well, they had to go to the Relief, you know, and get from there, you see

T: I see

O: And that was the only way they could get along, you know...

T: Did you have any trouble then, I mean, you were fairly young by that age, weren't you?
O: Oh, yeah. Well I was, ah, see I was born 1906. Yeah, 1922 I was fifteen, see... See, I'd work off and on in the mine, you know, and that then, see.

T: Were you still, ah, staying with your parents during the Depression, or

O: No, no

T: You were on your own.

O: I was on my own—I was married then.

T: Oh, I see...

O: In 1929 I got... '28 I got married.

T: Did you also go on Relief to support your family, or were you farming?

O: Well, I worked till then, you know and that, and then I worked for Johnson, see...

T: Ah-huh.

O: Yeah, and then of course, they give a little bit from Relief then at the end. Then that CWA came, you know, and WPA, you know. That...

T: What's CWA and WPA?

O: That was, ah, like a—like a—Well, I don't know what they call it.

T: A Union, or...

O: Yeah—No it's not a Union, it's a Federal Aid, you know.

T: Oh, I see.

O: They give work for you, you know. You work in a place like the roads or
stuff like that, and you get paid for it.

T: I see.

O: Instead of Relief, you know...

T: Ah-huh.

O: Of course on Relief, you know, you have to work too, you know.

T: Ah-huh.

O: Yeah.

T: During this mining period, ah, when the mining was going on, does this mine open year round? I mean, was there mining going on during the winter?

O: Oh yeah, year round, yeah.

T: Year round.

O: Like Quincy Mine #2. They used to work, ah, three shifts at one time, see? And they used to be, ah, about over 100 men on a shift, you know. Close to 150 sometime.

T: One each shift.

O: Yeah. On one shift. Oh, they was lot of guys there. Yeah, that #2 shaft is about--over a mile deep, you know.

T: Is that right?

O: It goes on a 45 at the top, and it tapers off into 30, then on the low--about half way, see...
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ash
T: I see.

O: That's that shaft house that's up now. That big hoist.

T: Oh, I see. I've read magazine pictures of miners going into the mine--

O: around here in the Copper Country, and before they have electricity, they

T: used to use candles.

O: Oh yeah, yeah, yeah... I even got one of them candle lamps.

T: Oh, you do.

O: At home, yeah, yeah

T: Were the candles used when you go into mining, or they had.

O: No, not when I went

T: Not any more.

O: No, they were carbide lamps.

T: Oh, I see.

O: But now I think they're mostly electric lamps, you know. Batteries and

T: that. Yeah, they were carbide lamps, you know, that I used.

O: Very interesting. How often do the people get paid--the miners get paid?

T: Every two weeks.

O: Two weeks, we used to get, Yeah.
T: What was the wages then?

O: At, well, at the scraper we got $2.50, no $2.75--yeah, that's what it was...

T: A day, or...

O: when I was about sixteen age, but then tramming...

T: Is that a day or an hour??

O: That was a day. That's the day, not a hour.

T: Oh.

O: Then the trammers used to get--and timber gang men, you know, that used
to work in timber gangs, used to get $3.75 a day, yeah.

T: What is a trammer?

O: Trammer is that, see when the miners are working in a drift, you know,
they drive holes, you know. Then they blast that off, see, they go ahead
all the time. They blast maybe a section there about four feet, five feet,
maybe six feet in more, you know, and then that dirt comes out.

'Then they blast that off, see, then they go ahead all the time."

O: Yeah, comes out--well that powder gets blasted out, see. And then the
trammers got to tram that out into a car.

T: Oh, I see.

O: and bring it down to a skip, see. And a dkip takes it up surface, see.

T: Yeah.

O: Yeah.
T: How was the copper being sorted out from all the other dirt, and that? Did they put them in a big boiler or so, or

O: No, they crush it down the mills.

T: Oh, they crush it.

O: Yeah, down the mills, there. See, when the crusher is, ah, when the rocks come down and there's this crusher and just squeezed that and it breaks all the rocks loose from the copper, see.

T: I see.

O: Yeah, and then the copper get separated from the rock, see, cause the rock will smash up, you know, but the copper stays together, see. And then they have the mills there, you know. After it gets through the crusher, then it goes into a wash and then into a tables and well, they got rolling mills like, you know--what they call them... There's some pebbles in there that cleans up the copper, that grinds up that rock, you know. Then the tables, well, clean all the copper--separate it from the sand; see, see,

T: How do they determine how much coal had been dug --are they being determined by the ton, or by the load, or what?

O: You mean in the mine?

T: Yeah.

O: What average...ah.

T: capacity had been dug?
O: Yeah. I wouldn't know that. That would be in the office, you know.

T: I see.

O: Yeah. I know they had many carloads, you know. They had about, oh, if I can remember now when they used to haul down to Quincy Mills there, you know?

T: Yeah.

O: Well, they had a big string of cars, you know, and I can't remember now how many tons there is in each car, you know. Railroad cars, you know. Yeah, so they had quite a big.

T: How long did you work in the Mine? You said you were working part time at the age of twelve, and then sixteen you were working full time.

O: Well, I worked from that '29-'22, what was that? Well, I worked...well, I wouldn't know, see I worked off and on, see.

T: Oh, I see

O: So that what makes me, you know. 'Cause I worked here and there, see. Worked lumber camps, then worked mines, then I worked up Quincy hauling coal.

T: How were the housing around there then. Were there a lot of houses up there on the hills?

O: Oh yeah. There was plenty houses up there, yeah.

T: Fairly crowded at there then.
O: Oh, it was just like a town. But there was streets, but there was no paved streets, you know. It was gravel, mostly.

T: Yeah. Most of these people live up there, I imagine, work in the mine?

O: Oh, yeah, yeah. But there's a lot of new families here now. There's very few now that is from that time, yeah.

T: Were those houses Company owned, or...

O: Yeah, yeah, up on the hill, yeah. There was some private owned, but most of them were Company owned.

T: This houses that were built by the Company, I imagine they were built on lands that were once privately owned, weren't it?

O: The houses that were privately owned, they owned the land?

T: No, the Company houses.

O: Oh, the Company houses!

T: Did they own the land that they built the houses on, or...

O: Quincy Mining Company owned the land.

T: I see.

O: Yeah, that was in their own property.

T: I see...

O: But there was some houses built by private people that leased the land from Quincy Mining Company.
I asked them in the kitchen to come to the back of the building and sit on the floor. The room was empty, except for the old man who was standing near the window. I asked them if they need anything, but they told me there was nothing they needed. When they left, the old man looked very sad. I didn't know what to do, so I decided to go home.
O: That's...from here? Five miles.

T: How did you get to work?

O: Three miles from Quincy--I walked.

T: Oh, walked the three miles.

O: See, it's three miles from Arcadia to Quincy. Wintertime you couldn't--there was...then you plow the road--the roads, the side roads, there was only few cars--who had a car, well they couldn't use it winter time, they roll the roads, you know.

T: Instead of plowing it, they roll it?

O: They roll it, of course they plowed it because the road will go a little like roundy. The horses with sleigh would slide off of that, it will be like a hump, then they would pull the plow, the horses would pull the plow

T: Instead of pushing the plow the horse will pull the plow?

O: Pull, pull the plow behind--the horses will be ahead. Then the plow would widen, cut that center off, then the roller will come behind and press the side stones. The middle was hard and the sides down, then it was nice, see

T: So this business of putting salt on the road and that was...

O: No, that was out then, there were no salt them days, then if you want to use your car you got to wait 'till spring.

T: I imagine.

O: Yeah, salt was out them days.
T: How would, ah, what does the men do for recreation, you said there's
three shifts going on, well, maybe they come home-- What do they do have
for recreation? Do they have a lot of bars like they have now, or what?

O: They call them--before they used to call them saloons.

T: OH, saloon!

O: Yeah.

T: They go to saloon, then

O: Yeah, well, the same buildings like now, the same buildings but they call
them bars, they were saloons then, yeah, but I can't remember what year
when they change that to bars, but they were saloons before

T: Was there a lot of sports around here then---baseball...

O: Baseball, yeah, baseball, hockey, and stuff like that,
but it wasn't like now, there's more now.

T: Oh, there's more.

O: Yeah, there was only few.

T: Like--ah, let's go off and talk a little bit about the rest of the people
around here. You say most people were miners then, either miners or lumber-
men were there

O: Farmers, farmers, well everybody had a cow in them days, like everybody
here in town, they had cows right here in town, people that were living
here in town had two, three cows, but then I don't know what happened to
that. I think the ordinance, they cut that out, they couldn't have none in
town, see--cows.
T: So they--did they have any dairy factory around here then?

O: No, no, the farmer with the--like you know, this big farmers with fifteen twenty cows, you know, they deliver the milk to the families right from their home. There was no dairies like we got here now.

T: Then those that have couple of cows, they just milk their own, I guess...

O: Yeah, they got their own milk and then probably some neighbors would want five pound pails, five cents, you know. Like this five pounds water pails that's for milk--they give five cents for a pail.

T: How would you compare the prices of food and other merchandise in the store today and then?

O: Well, the prices were low, you know, but then the wages were way down too see. I don't know--it runs nearly the same. I don't know.

T: Do you say you could buy more with a dollar today, or you could buy more with a dollar in those days?

O: Yeah, you could if you had the dollar, see. But you didn't have the dollar.

T: Right.

O: So like them--I mean like now, if you make some of that wages, then you know you'd...

T: then you would be pretty much well off

O: I don't know it was there, and there that you could make it go see. Of course the cars were cheaper, you know, but then you need to have to buying power either, see
T: Right.

O: Yeah

T: What, ah-- I like to get into fishing. Do they have any commercial fishing around there?

O: Yeah, yeah.

T: They do.

O: Yeah, well, you would have to, you want to go commercial fishing, well you would have to inquire that from the-- I don't know-- Conservation Department or some state--.

T: You mention getting into accidents in the mining and that. How were the PEOPLE that get into accidents hospitalized?

O: Well, they had a doctor you know. Quincy Mining Company had a company doctor, you see... You pay seventy-five cents a month.

T: For insurance, or what?

O: Ah, yeah, that's like insurance. Then you had free doctor and that, you know, but you'd get hurt or anything in the mines, you never got nothing else.

T: You never get any treatment?

O: No, no benefits at all. You got killed, you never got nothing, families never got nothing them days.

T: Don't they have family doctors then
O: Well, they had that company doctor, you know, no others.

T: No other doctors?

O: Well, they have doctors, but you had to pay, you know.

T: Oh, I see.

O: But from the company, like I was talking about company doctor, well, you pay that seventy-five cents, then you go free there, see? Then they had a dispensary up there, on the side, when you're going up the hill. Right on the side there where the trailers on the left there, there was a dispensary up there, you know. And you'd get the medicine there, see, and that was free, you don't need to pay no extra.

T: You only get free medicines.

O: Yeah, cough medicines and stuff like that, but you had to pay that seventy-five cents.

T: A month.

O: Yeah, then the doctor was-- but then I think you had to go to the hospital. I think you had to pay the hospital. I'm not quite sure, see, but I think so, because I never had to use it or anything like that, you know

T: Did you have a farm then?

O: My dad, yeah.

T: Your dad had a farm.

O: Just, ah, forty acres.
T: What kind of...

O: He had cows, chicken, and stuff like that.

T: Did you grow potatoes, or vegetables, or what?

O: Yeah, vegetables, potatoes, some grain for the chickens.

T: I see

O: He was a blacksmith. He do blacksmith work, you know.

T: What does--ah, what kind of things does he make--horse shoe or what?

O: Well, he make horse shoe, he make anything. He make horse shoe, then he make hand hooks, you know, for lumber camps, you know, like turning logs over, hand hooks, they call it. Then he work for--he had a shop of his own, and then he worked for the Arcadia Mine Company in a blacksmith shop there, see. Then he sharpen drills and the picks and stuff like that. Then, ah, should handle or something broke, then he had to put a new handle. All that work, you know...

T: How was the-- how was the work in the lumber camps, how would you compair with the work in the mines--in terms of safety. Do you think it's to work in the lumber camps, or working in the mine?

O: Oh yeah, you got more area there. You can watch more than down the mine, see, you got small area to work like working in the stoke and like that, you don't know when. But in the lumber camp you can see a tree coming down or something like that. In the mine you don't know when that rock will let loose, more often a fellow accident the mine than in the lumber camp. But of course, you get accidents in the lumber camps, too, you know.
T: Was there any accidental fires that occur in the mines?

O: Yeah, Quincy had a fire, but I can't remember what year it was.

T: Were you working there then?

O: I was working, but I wasn't working that night when the fire came.

T: I see, how did it happen?

O: I wouldn't know.

T: I see.

O: So I, so then I didn't work after that in the Quincy Mine. That was before the fire. I worked like tonight, I worked. I would have to go to work tomorrow night, but I don't know what happened--I didn't go, and the fire was that night, see, when the fire was there. Well ah, then the men had to come up number eight, you know. They had to walk from number two to number eight. They couldn't come up...

T: How far is that?

O: Well, that's only about quarter of a mile towards north Calumet.

T: I see.

O: Next, ah-it's taken down see. Ah, and they come up that way, then after that fire, then I can't remember now how many--how long after that--then they had to start all over. Of course they had it all closed in so they had to smother the fire, see. So they opened it up. I don't know how many months they had it closed so--but then the timbermen go work in the mine, see, and fixed the shaft because the fire was in the shaft. So seven men got killed there.
T: Seven men got killed!

O: Yeah, air blast, yeah--buried them all up, so I know one guy that...

T:...that got killed there.

O: Aittama, yeah.

T: Is that what kept you from going back?

O: No

T: You just decide not to go back?

O: I went then, mechanical work.

T: Oh, I see.

O: Yeah, repair cars, yeah.

T: Where did you learn to repair cars, then?

O: Where did I learn to repair?

T: Well, I worked off and on even if I worked somewhere else in the mine I used to fix cars for people, and then I imagine I got little bit mechanical experience like from my dad because he was a blacksmith. It comes right from the family. There's three of us brothers in mechanics.

T: Are all of your brothers still living?

O: One

T: One, and he is still a mechanic?
O: Yeah.

T: What do the people--do the miners, you know when they go to the mine, do they--like ah--do they come back home for lunch, or do they bring their lunch with them and eat in the mine, or.

O: Yeah, they eat in the mine.

T: They eat in the mine.

O: They take their lunch with them, then they eat down there.

T: I see, so once you go down there, you don't get up 'till your done.

O: No, no 'till you're all done, yeah. So you stay down there that eight hours.

T: Well, John, it's been nice talking to you. Do you have anything else you want to add to this tape?

O: NO, not right now.

T: I think that's all I have to ask; if you don't have anything more to add, then we'll stop here. And I thank you very much for helping me with this thing.

O: You are welcome.

THE END.