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>Comments</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>History of family</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Immigrating to this country</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reputation of his father</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Why his father came to the Copper Country</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Clearing homestead land</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>His father as a logger</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Caring for a cross-cut saw</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>How to use a cross-cut saw</td>
<td>305</td>
<td>use of rhythm</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Clothing of a logger in the winter</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Transporting logs by sleigh</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Job of a teamster</td>
<td>307-8</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>River drives</td>
<td>308</td>
<td>account of an accident</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Entrance of machines in the logging business</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Operating a dairy farm</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Money during the depression</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Exchange of labor for labor</td>
<td>312</td>
<td>bartering</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Summer farm employees</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Visiting neighbors</td>
<td>313-15</td>
<td>storytelling</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pete Nelson – storyteller</td>
<td>316-17</td>
<td>known as Whiskey Pete</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tough lumberjacks</td>
<td>318</td>
<td>interesting reference to Matt Ruohokoski</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
The following is an oral historical interview in the home of Helmer Peterson on September 21, 1974. It's a very cold, grey, fall day and we had our first snow already this morning and Helmer and I are going to talk about the past that he remembers and the past that he lived.

I When did your father come to this country?
R He came here about 1890.
I 1890?
R
I What was your father's name?
R His full country name from the old country, he carried the old Russian name and it was ....................... but it was such a job for the Americans to pronounce it that he changed it to Peterson.
I Your father was from Russia?
R On the Russian border between Russia and Finland.
I What languages did he speak?
R Finnish.
I Then he was on that land that Russia took over and conquered from Finland.
R That's right.
I So actually he was Finnish but when Russia took over that land he became a Russian citizen because he had no choice.
R That's the way it was
I And he came here in 1890.
R
I Was he married at the time?
R No he married in this country.
I What was your mother's name?
R Her maiden name was Sauvola.
I Where did they meet?
Up in Quincy there, dad worked in the Quincy Rockhouse on surface in that historical rockhouse with the many gables. He worked there to construct that and he worked in that rockhouse for eight years.

Why in the world did he leave that area of the Finnish Russian boarder?

It would be a long story. When he lived in his home country of Finland many of those Russians that lived on the border they went around peddling. They carried their wares on their backs in sacks and they traveled all over Finland. They prospered quite well those three brothers peddling so they thought they could set up stores. They pooled their money and the oldest brother left for St. Petersburg to buy stock for the stores. They already had stores set up and bought. But on the way there, he was traveling across the ice in the winter time with horses he met with theives and they murdered him and put his body under the ice. After that they, the two remaining brothers decided they might as well start a new life somewhere's else and they came to this country.

Why did they come to this country? Did they receive any news there were opportunities or did relatives write them?

In those days there were many immigrating out of the country. They heard of better opportunities here than elsewhere and also they heard about the copper mines here and they felt they could make their living a little easier in the United States but it seemed that they found it difficult. It wasn't as easy as they thought.

Okay if your father worked approximately eight years on the surface of the Quincy Mine when did he move out to this area?

Around 1900.

Around 1900.

Yes.

I see. What was it like here when they came?

Well, the settlements around those mines were growing, they had to build their own house there and there was quite a bit of competition between the Finns and the Irish there. The Irish have no use for the Finns and naturally the Finns have less use for the Irish so naturally there was a feud going on always between them.

Do you recall any stories your father used to tell you about them?

Yes, there's quite a few. My father was a well built man. He was six feet one inch tall and very strong naturally from carrying those packs that even at the time of his death when he was 75 years old they said that there isn't a man that would escape from his hands.
R  He had many encounters with men who thought they were better but they were wrong. When he worked there at the Rock House, one time they wanted to know just how much he could wheel on a wheelbarrel. They loaded it up with rocks as high as they could and dad took off, then they loaded it up with mass rock copper and it was the same thing so one day they nailed the wheelbarrel down to the floor said he won't move it this time. He straightened his back and the wood just got left in his hands. Another time there was a mob of them and they wanted to get him under and see how many he could handle alone. There were about five or six that tackled him and he took the first one on and grabbed him by his arms and used them as a club. When he dropped this man down he was as limp as a rag and he didn't show up for work for about a month later. When he did he showed them his arms and all the flesh and muscles were out of his arms from that grip he had on him. He never was able to use his arms much after that.

I  He must have been very powerful.

R  He certainly was, like a bear.

I  I imagine he acquired quite a reputation there.

R  Yes, he did. He had quite a reputation for strength, nobody knew his strength.

I  I imagine when a man acquires a reputation like that a lot of people try to try him out. Because they want to make a reputation for themselves.

R  That's right. Even after he moved on the farm here, there was a man we hired. He was a shorter man but he considered himself strong also. He was well built like a gorilla and they were clearing land on the farm. In those days the trees weren't much worth for lumber because there wasn't much market. In order to clear the farm everything was burnt in the piles to get rid of it. They were piling these logs in order to set them on fire and there was a good sized log of hardwood on the ground and this strong man thought he could lift up his end of it and he chose the but end of the log and dad told him he better get on the other end that he'll handle the bigger end. He moved over to the top end and when they lifted up the log his end didn't come up off the ground but dad lifted up the whole log.

I  So evidently that man learned from that little experience.

R  He could see that dad was better.

I  Well why did your dad come here, was it solely because of the conflicts with the Irish.

R  No.
He didn't like the mine because in those days there was no way of clearing the air and it was awful dusty. He was afraid of his health. The men had to breathe alot of dust and he developed silicosis in his eighth year and that's what he died of.

Why did he select this particular area? Who owned the land here beforehand or how did he acquire the land.

His brother had moved here earlier and had homesteaded four forties and dad bought one forty from him.

Tell me a little bit about clearing the land. People have talked about that and evidently it was an enormous task. There were pine stumps from what I understand around the whole area. That was the problem.

After the brush was cut down, there weren't so many brushes as big timber that they had to deal with. They were cut down and burnt and the stumps were left to wrot for about 15 years. It wasn't till a few years after they came here that dynamite came into use. They bought this dynamite and blasted the stumps out.

They couldn't do anything with the stumps right away could they?

They couldn't do anything with them?

When the stumps where green they couldn't do anything with them. They had to leave them until the stumps rotted sufficiently and they could be removed.

And the dynamiting wouldn't blow the stumps out of the ground would it? Would it just break them apart?

The most rotten ones would fly up but those that had green roots on them had to be pulled out with horses.

That strikes me as one of the sadder aspects of today. Some of these fields are brushing back in.

And when I think of the labor, the blood, the tears involved in the early pioneers clearing this land by hand and now to see it brushing back in. How do you think your father would feel if he went by some of these fields and saw the swamp elder and the apple trees sprouting in the middle of these fields.

I imagine he would feel awfully sad to see all that heavy work going back into the woods again.

How did your dad make a go of it here.
He did a lot of logging because farming didn't pay enough to get the staples for your table. After he was living here for a few years the logging companies moved in and they gave out contracts for these settlers to log the timber for them. The first logging operation consisted of hauling the logs down to the lake. They would float down the Sturgeon River to Chassell. That was the Wooster Lumber Company who done most of it.

Did your father have a contract from Wooster?

Would he hire men then?

Yes he had men working for him, they would go out in the fall and stay all winter and then come home in the spring.

Where were your father's camps?

On the Sturgeon River.

Down close to Otter Lake?

Between Otter Lake and Chassell.

Did you ever grab one end of a cross cut saw?

Many times. Ever since I quit school at 14 in the 8th grade that was my work. Doing exactly what these men in this picture are doing.

There is quite a knack to that isn't there?

Ya, there certainly was.

Can you tell me a little bit about the knack of sawing?

Well first of all that saw had to be in good shape and if there ever was a particular job to do it was to file a cross cut saw. It consisted of the cutting teeth and the rakers and those cutting teeth had to be a trifle bit higher so that the cutting teeth would cut and then the rakers would come along and pull back the dust away from it. If that saw was in good shape the shavings from a maple tree would come out just like shoe lacing. It would be about 18 inches long.

So you could tell the quality of the edgings simply by what the shavings looked like.

Yes, that's right. If they were filed right they could almost cut as fast as these modern power saws. It certainly didn't take long to go through a maple that was a foot or 16 inches thick. It was just a matter of maybe a minute.
Where did you buy your saws in those days?

This Swift Hardware in Houghton sold them. Also these local stores carried them in stock.

What kind of brand saw did you like to use?

It was a Simons.

Yes. Simons always made good good saws. Atkins made good saws too, but I never had good luck with an Atkins saw. But a Simons were always reliable.

Well there was some teamwork involved in there wasn't there? I mean it was a team job.

Yes.

Who did you used to saw with?

I had many different partners, who ever happened to come along but.

Who was your favorite partner?

There was one man who lived over by the Otter River named Ed Hayranen. I remember one time we were sawing in the fall for a couple of months between Tapiola and Toivola at the Dollar Bay Lumber Camp and we were rather young kids at the time too. Those others would poke fun at us for trying to compete with them. We weren't trying to compete with them just trying to make that almighty dollar. We kept working until the last team was laid off and we were the last ones to be laid off. When we went into get our paychecks the clerk told us we had sawed the most logs in the same time as the rest of them.

So you knew what you were doing.

Yes.

Tell me a little bit about the team work involved in the sawing. Does only one person pull.

You both push and you both pull at the same time. There has to be a certain swing or rhythm on it. I remember sawing with some partners on the other end who had what you call a heavy hand. If you got a partner who had a heavy hand it made it awfully hard and tiring and difficult to saw with a partner like that. It felt exactly like you were dragging the man and all.

What do you mean rhythm? I have an idea of course what the word rhythm means but what kind of a rhythm was it?
Well it was a rhythm in the sense of the word that the saw would sing when you pulled it through, it had a perfect rhythm.

And so when you were walking in the woods you could really take one look at a team and tell whether they were really on the ball.

That's right.

Just by the sound of the saw.

That's right.

This is an undercut in this picture. This tree is leaning this way. If it was a top cut it would drop the other way. You put a slot in there so if the tree is sawed from the otherside in leans like on a hinge.

You'd run the crosscut all winter long

Wasn't it kind of hard in the cold winter, what kind of clothes would you wear?

In that type of work it wasn't necessary to wear heavy clothing because you got your heat from the exercise. Often time in below zero weather we'd be working in our shirt sleeves.

I've heard that you could see a little cloud of steam from two men who had that saw singing.

The back of the shirt had frost all day long.

It was freezing as fast as you were perspiring.

That's right.

I imagine a young man would be in pretty good shape after working a winter on that saw.

That's right, you were in A-1 shape after pulling that saw

Right, eating good food.

That's right and you could really put away the grub.

I'll bet after working on that all day you had somewhat of an appetite.

That's right and you carried your lunch out in the woods with you and you had your coffee or tea and you had your lunch by the fire.
I: Were you ever in one of those?

R: They all look very much alike and this is just a typical one like they all used to be. I might have been to this one.

I: What kind of construction was in one?

R: It was train construction mostly although years ago in this area they used to build them out of logs. This guy who was logging for Houghton Lumber Company, they had a lumber camp here. It was just a little bit down the road from the east side and the camps were constructed out of maple log.

I: It was sometimes made of maple logs.

R: Yes. They laid the logs on top of each other and sealed with some kind of plaster.

I: Do you recall those days?

R: That looks like pulpwood and yes I’ve been on many a load like that.

I: What was it like to ride on a load like that through the woods in the winter?

R: It was nice if you were on the level but if you were in the hilly country and had to take those logs down the steep hills with maybe over a thousand feet of hardwood logs on your sleigh that was another story. You had to have a good sandman there who knew his business on sanding the hill. When the loaded sleigh took off down those hills you had to have a good sandman to sand those ruts that would cut into the road. It was heated in the fire and that would slow down the decent of the sleigh. Sometimes if it wasn’t done right and the sleigh got away from those ruts that were cut there it ran away and the team just wasn’t able to hold them back on that weight. Many a horse broke it’s leg there.

I: When the logs just crushed them.

R: Right.

I: Evidently those are poor logs in that picture

R: Yes those seem to be hollow, poor timber. Although logs with solid sides and just a hole still make good lumber if they’re not rotted otherwise. That gang looks familiar but I can’t place any of them.

I: It must have been quite a job being a teamster in those days.

R: It was because you really had to be on the ball. The teamster was the first man up in the morning outside of the cook. You had to be out there in the barn and feed your horses, harness them and get them ready and you’re out before day break.
I It must have been cold at times sitting on top of frozen logs?

R That's for sure.

I What could a man wear to stay warm?

R Well there was only woolen shirts and woolen pants and what they call the swampers with a couple pair of woolen socks inside. There weren't any insulated boots in those days.

I And the teamsters only choice was to freeze with a smile.

R That's right. He'd just have to sit there and after the sleigh had been unloaded he'd have to walk behind.

I That part of the river drive will bring back a memory too.

R What is this, it looks like a river drive, sure enough.

I Did you ever ride a log?

R No, I was too young for that. I always wished I was through school so I could go on the river drive because that was always considered to be about the most exciting of any of them. Floating the logs down the river.

I Did you used to go and watch the river drive?

R Yes, many times. Also when the logs were let into Otter Lake, there were millions of them. The kids would run across the log rafts and play for hours. Jumping from log to log. We thought that was a lot of fun.

I It could have been dangerous too?

R It could have. When you think of it we were just young kids fooling around and we didn't know how to swim and were about a half a mile from shore.

I Do you remember any old river drivers?

R Yes, there were quite a few of these old timers but I forget who all they were.

I Do you recall any accidents on the river drives.

R I don't remember that anyone ever got drowned. Many of them had close calls. This Axel rescued a neighbor of his who fell off a log and went under completely. He was a young man and quite strong. He reached in and pulled him out by the collar and threw him up on the bank. The man happened to be a short fellow only a little over five feet tall so it was nothing for him to throw him up on the bank.
So he was a pretty strong man himself
Yes he was.
Gradually the machines took over the jobs of the horses.
Yes, machines came into use about in 1930. Maybe a little earlier. Maybe the late twenties these tractors took over the job of the log sled.
Were they much more efficient?
In some cases they were. I was working for a logging camp up in Herman. It was about 1929. They had a caterpillar tractor pulling a couple of loaded sleighs at the time. They made pretty good time with that. Also it was used for letting down the loads down a long hill. The hill was about a quarter of a mile long and it was too dangerous to let it down the hill otherwise so they had a long cable and this tractor was on the other end of the cable. The tractor was able to keep the loads from running away with the team.
You were saying you were working at a logging camp in Herman, whose camp was this?
That was Bill Johnson's.
Did you ever work for Bill Ruona?
No, I never did.
Matt Taurinen?
Nope. They worked more around the Pelkie area and I worked in the Tapiola area although I did work in Herman for this Bill Johnson and then one winter I did work in back of Ontonagon. We took a contract out there to cut and skid logs.
So your father logged?
Yes.
In the fall and the winter.
What did he do in the summer?
We always had a small dairy farm.
I How many cows did you have then?
R I believe ten was the most we had. A herd of ten was considered quite big in those days.
I How did you sell your milk?
R It was picked up in trucks from the dairy in Hancock. Bridgeman Russell used to pick them up.
I That was a little later than that farming became a way to make a living.
R That was in the twenties. They started picking up milk in the twenties.
I Can you get that down a little more accurately when in the twenties?
R At first they only picked up cream, that's the way it was. The farmer kept the skim milk and fed it to the calves and hogs or whatever he had. In the earliest times it must have been in the 1920's when they started picking up milk. I mean they picked up the cream and the milk got left home.
I Well what did your mother do during all this time? I'm sure she had to work a little bit.
R Yes, she had a garden, chickens, and I believe she did most of the milking although the boys helped when they were around home. Mother was about the busiest person of all.
I What kinds of work did she have to do?
R Well she had to take care of the family and she was a great one for picking berries in the summer and when they were in season. Before this cream pick-up came she used to make all the cream into butter. It was sold in a pound.
I Who sold the butter? Would your mother go into town all the way by herself?
R No, we would wait until we had enough and then dad would pick out a cool day and load it into his wagon and start into town.
I I see at the various stores.
R Yes.
I And there were also eggs, right.
R Yes
Would you sell the eggs also?

Yes, it was pretty hard to peddle them to the consumers because you had to get rid of your load quite fast. I remember one time dad and I left for town to sell butter. He thought it would be a cool day in the summer but instead it turned very hot and sultry and before we got to town the butter was running and melting already. It was packed in one pound cartons and wrapped up back then. Only thing we could do was when we got to town take the whole load to Bridgeman Russell and they took the whole load off our hands. Otherwise it would have been a total loss.

How much would you make per pound of butter on an average in those days?

I don't think it was more than twenty five cents.

And for eggs?

Eggs were about the same too.

Twenty-five cents a dozen.

So a person didn't get very wealthy on the eggs and butter did he?

No, no. On cream if the cream measured 30 to 40% butterfat that was rich cream. I remember during the Depression Bridgeman Russell was buying that butterfat for a dollar and five cents for a five gallon can.

That'll get you a gallon today. Of milk I mean.

I've talked to a lot of people and they've all said money was a source of anxiety. It was so hard to get and it was necessary to make the land payments.

That's right, yes.

Do you ever recall your parents worrying about it?

Yes, I remember dad had a small mortgage to pay off and he had to borrow from a friend. He was lucky to have a friend that had the money. This friend decided to quit this country and go back to Finland. He had to pay him off immediately. He insisted on having his money right away so as luck would have it he met up with another friend who loaned him the like amount and that's the way he went until the times got better.

I remember with my conversations with the people that every nickel and penney would be saved.
R That's right

I Just to make those land payments and the interest payments.

R Yes, and also the taxes although the taxes weren't heavy but many people weren't able to pay their taxes even though they didn't have any mortgages on their land. It was enough to scrape enough money to pay the taxes. I remember it was during the Depression when we were in that boat also. We had to meet certain payments and even though I was getting close to 30 I still had to give all my earnings to meet the payments for the home.

I You were still living at home?

R Yes. I lived there until I was 30 when I got married and until that time all my earnings went toward the home.

I My father had a similar experience.

R Well if you wanted money you timidly went to your dad and asked for fifty cents and that's about all you dared to ask for because you knew that he didn't have more or couldn't afford to give you more.

I Given that money was so scarce, work was plentiful but it didn't pay. There was work for everyone to do but it wasn't what you might call monetary employment. It seems there developed a tradition around the countryside where people would exchange labor, for labor, rather than for money. Do you recall anything like this in your childhood?

R Yes, that was common because people just didn't have the money to hire so they would help each other back and forth.

I What was thought of a man if he would help another person and insist on being paid in money?

R Well it wasn't even thought of. There was some labor that was quite cheap. These lumber camps would hire these lumberjacks for the winter. They didn't operate these lumber camps in the summer at all like they do these days. Naturally these lumberjacks were free to go as they pleased. Most of them went and had their binge and they were broke after they got their final paycheck in the spring. They had to eat so they wandered around until they found a farmer who needed help. They would offer themselves for the summer for board. They would get paid what you could afford to pay them. Sometimes it was less than fifty cents a day and if you didn't have that they were satisfied just to have their stomach full.

I I've heard that some of those men gradually would even be considered part of the family.

R Yes, they did, I know we had many of them that were as close and as dear as one of the family.
I asked that question about the exchange of labor rather than money because it seems that even to this day, there is a custom around here where even though people may have more money than they had then, if one person helps another in the area it's expected that the person receiving the help to say well what do I owe you? If the other person says nothing, think nothing of it it's saying that this guy understands the old custom or it seems like there is a newer custom coming around where people expect to be paid in money.

R That's right. In those days people realized circumstances weren't any different with your neighbor than with you and you acted accordingly. If you had something that they didn't you exchanged and it was more of a barter system.

I Did you like that system?

R It worked wonderful.

I I look back and think well something wonderful has been lost.

R That's right, that's for sure.

I And somehow it's not quite the same now.

R No, no. It seems to have made people more greedy. They've set a value on their time where they never even thought of it before.

I When one person would work for another for a day or so did they keep very close track of the hours?

R No, no it was a long day from morning till night. Nothing less than ten hours. No it wasn't considered a full day at all unless it was ten hours.

I Well times have changed and it looks like people are better off.

R But at the same time I think people are much closer then they are today. They still had time to visit with each other than they do now a days. Today people are in such a hurry they don't even have time to visit with their neighbor. In those olden days it was common to visit quite often. I don't know where they found the time but they did. There was always a suitable time when they would go and visit their neighbors.

I Many people have said that and it always struck me as kind of an irony. Today we have automobiles which makes it far easier to get to our neighbor's house.

R That's right.
In those days you hitched up your horse and maybe your neighbor was 5 miles away. You visited for several hours and thought nothing of your lost time.

I think it's because today as you say people have put a value on their time.

That's it. It don't take much of your time but still you don't think of taking that time off to visit. People were much closer to each other.

Another thing that may have been responsible for this is the invention of home entertainment. Radio and television.

That's right.

Many people now turn on the radio and television for entertainment where I think years ago it was visiting and story telling. That was the entertainment.

That's right.

I remember among the older folks that used to visit my father had an incredible talent for telling stories.

My uncle was one of those, Jeremiah Peterson. He could entertain a house full of people all night long. He was especially known for his stories. He had a special knack and wherever he went and even visited these neighboring towns, like Calumet and Hancock and the mining towns. When they heard that he had come into town people would come from all over and stay until morning to listen to him.

Do you remember any of his stories?

No, I don't, I can't think of any now.

It would have been good to have a tape recorder.

Ya. that's for sure.

He sounds like a very outstanding case of story telling but may not have been quite that good but nevertheless could tell stories. I remember old timers telling these bear stories. When I was a little kid. They'd have me on the edge of the chair and I was listening so hard you could hear a pin drop in the room.
There were many people who would sit around and listen to these stories. It seemed like visiting in those days involved story telling and it was in itself a form of entertainment.

Yup. Especially at those lumber camps in the olden days. There were some of those lumberjacks that had a special talent for telling a story. There was one Frenchman from Chassell by the name of Ed Bissure. You could be at his lumbercamp for ten years and he'd have a story night after night and no two of them would be alike. They were interesting. I never heard anyone like him. If that man were on radio or television today he'd be worth a million. I don't know where he had gotten them but he really had a way of telling them.

And in those times too there were what the local people call characters.

Ya, regular characters.

That's the only word I have for them.

I suppose Yahoo in Finn refers to the same thing.

Ya, ya. That's right.

I mean they were exceptional characters often far different from normal people who nevertheless were tolerated and looked at with a bit of amusement. Can you recall any characters?

Oh ya, this Matt Ruohokoski was one of those.

What was he like?

He was a short man about five and a half feet tall but built like a gorilla. He had real long arms that came down below his knees and a broad chest. His hair came up from behind so it stuck up above his forehead. He really had a way of telling stories and tales or whatever you would call them. I've got some of those written down.

Sometime I'd like to see them.

Do you remember a man named Whiskey Pete?

Yes.

Do you?
I'll show you a picture of him.

Okay.

Is that him?

That's Pete Nelson.

Pete Nelson.

Yup.

Tell me a little bit of what you remember of him?

He had been educated to be a minister, in Sweden. He was up to the point where he would have been ordained and he threw up his ministry and left for America and he became the wildest lumberjack that you could ever find. I forget how this one story went but he used all his wages to order a special train from Baraga to Houghton. The dispatcher gave word in Houghton that some high official was coming to Houghton on a special train. They got the band ready in Houghton and the band was at the station to meet him and when the train stopped Pete stepped out with his duffle bag and axe and wedges in his pocket.

And they were expecting the governor or someone like that?

Yes, yes

And he spent all his wages probably to hire that train.

Ya, ya

Well he had the name Whiskey Pete, was he fond of alcohol?

Yes, he really liked his Whiskey.

Did he used to be one of these lumberjacks who would fight?

No, he was a quiet man but he would have his fun with his drinks. He was a real small man, maybe five feet tall. He did a lot of sawing and he used to be good with the broad axe and even ties.

Do you remember seeing him hue ties?

Yes, he worked for those contractors, that had tie contracts and swamp stuff.

Did you ever talk to Whiskey Pete?
Oh yes, we spent months at the same lumbercamp.

Where did he work, or what camp was this?

I don't remember what camps, but they were mostly lumber company camps. There were so many of them lumber camps you forget which one you worked for.

Do you recall any of the wild things that Whiskey Pete did? You said he was one of the wildest lumberjacks. What did he do that made him wild?

I suppose it was just getting himself loaded drunk in the saloon and under the table.

Was he a good worker though?

Yes he was a good worker.

He wasn't one of these people who drank but did not work?

No, he was an ambitious man.

Was he a good man? Was he a good hearted man?

Yes. Never any trouble with Pete. The only one he wasn't good to was himself.

Because of his heavy drinking right?

Ya. He was just a helpless alcoholic. Although he spent months to earn his wages and then blow it in on one good binge.

Boy, it must have been some binge.

Ya, that's the way they did it.

You said you went to his funeral.

Ya, he was buried in about 1938 I think.

Did alot of people come to his funeral?

No, it was a small funeral. That was during the Depression Days and WPA working and we happened to be working right near the church and I asked my boss if I could go in and pay my last respects to Pete. He allowed it so I went in there.

Did you ever see that man?
Ya, I wasn't too familiar with him but I heard from a friend of mine that he was really a tough egg. One time he went out there and cut his thumb with an axe. He just went out there to work and took a needle and thread and sewed that severed part right back on through the nail and all. The thumb nail. They said it was an awful job but he stitched it real close. I forget another operation he did on himself that was a still bigger one. He stitched himself wherever he needed stitching.

He must have been something.

Yes, he was.

There was another man around here who was very tough and did an operation on himself. You may not recall him.

I don't recall him.

Who is the toughest man you have ever met?

I think that Ruohokoski was as tough as any of them. One time he carried a five gallon can of kerosene home in a gunny sack on his back and it was midsummer right in the hottest days of July. Evidently the can sloshed kerosene on his back and the sack rubbed against it and he didn't think anything of it. That kerosene penetrated and took all the skin off of his back right down to the bone. Flesh and all and you could see all those muscles and tendons without anything over it. Boy that man was in misery. He walked over to our place showing us what happened. The only thing we could do for that was give him some vaseline. Mother gave him her nightgown, a flannel nightgown and that's all that he could wear when he went around. For many weeks the only way he could sleep was on his knees and elbows on the floor.

He pulled out of it though hey?

Ya, he pulled out of it. It was unbelievable how that would heal. I never saw it after it healed but it was probably nothing but scar tissue. Because the skin was totally gone. But that didn't stop him a bit. He worked like a horse after that. He used to clear alot of land. He'd take contracts for twenty-five dollars an acre or however the farmers could afford to pay him. He'd clean the brush off until there was nothing but the stumps left. When he was burning brush he'd light his pipe from the big pile of hot embers. He'd just go in there and find the right size cole and take it like a match and light his pipe with it.

He'd pick up red coles with his bare fingers?

Yes, red coles, red hot coles and he wasn't in any hurry to let it go. He'd toss it out like a match when he was through.

And he would keep up the conversation while he was doing this?
Ya,

Did he do that as a trick to show how tough he was?

Or was he so tough that that was normal?

Ya, evidently that skin was so thick it didn't burn through. He probably held it lightly enough, but I don't see how it didn't burn that skin because those coals were hot. Once in his younger days, this same Matt had been attacked by one of his wife's lovers. The man came out to see his wife when he was working in the mines. I guess Matt threw him out and he came back one night when Matt was sleeping. He swung an axe into his chest and opened up his chest right down to his lungs. Many days he was bleeding through that opening and he also came out of that.

Did he catch the man ever?

He didn't even prosecute. He let his wife go instead. When he moved out here he was a single man. He had divorced his wife.