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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Fred Schwalm  
February 9, 1974  

Allan Lavery

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SUBJECT: Reflections of an independent craftsman who makes a living the old way-- with his hands.

SOURCE: Fred Schwalm -- a furniture making craftsman, Finnish-German ancestry. He cuts his own timeber, processes it into lumber, planes it, shapes it into furniture of his own design, and completely lives this world of the independent craftsman. He complains bitterly of the plight of the craftsman in the midst of mass produced, mass distributed commercial products.

COMMENTS: Allan Lavery

I: How long have you been living here?

R: Well, since about 1925, my dad came here at that time, but we did live in Baraga for awhile after that but that was when we first came here...1925...that is in this location right here see. But my dad was born in Baraga in 1888 and his dad was there...I think from about...well I think he was there before 1880 sometime.

I: What did your dad do when he lived in Baraga?

R: My father was a country surveyor for many years and then he worked for the County Road Commission for many years too. First he was a truck driver and then he worked up to foreman and finally got to be superintendent there for awhile and that was like in the thirties when he was superintendent and then after that mostly surveying, just surveying jobs.

I: What was Baraga like in the thirties?

R: Well in Baraga in the thirties, what I can remember it was mostly a sawmill town...there wasn't any other diversified industries there except maybe a cheese factory of something like that...it was strictly a sawmill town which it has been right from the start. I mean, it was much bigger before that...around 1900 was when it was the biggest, you know. There was two great big sawmills there before that...great big pine mill and lots of the lumber that went to rebuild Chicago, I'm pretty sure that it was sawed in Baraga at that time. That's the reason my grandfather came up in here because of the...well actually when he left New York when he got around Chicago there then he heard about the pretty good times up in the northern country here and rather than going out west which was his original intention, he was sidetracked up here, see. And, of course my dad and me we never had brains enough to go anywhere else, and my kid is here too. He's another Fred Schwalm, has the same name as my dad or I mean mine and my grandfather's. I doubt if he'll go anywhere either. It looks like he's here to stay too.
I: That was a long time ago when your grandfather came in here. What did he do in New York?

R: Well, he was a...he was a barber and believe it or not the reason he left New York is because of fuel strikes and I used to remember him telling that when it'd be real cold weather, that's when they'd pull a fuel strike in New York see and of course it was coal and wood and them days, you know, I don't know if they had oil or not but anyway, no fuel and the people would be freezing to death in the apartments, you know. And he said he thought "To hell with this place, he's gonna go somewhere where he can get a piece of land where he's got his own wood...where he can cut his own wood, he won't be stuck...at least he won't freeze to death." You know, when he's got some land he can also raise part of his food and I think that's what he was thinking of...I think that theory holds good yet today if you start thinking about it, you know. This energy crisis on now and the shortage of fuel and your food is getting so high that, not only high priced but there's a lot of chemicals in it that I don't believe are good for a person, you know.

I: What years were those around when your grandfather moved to Chicago?

R: Well, I would say that was maybe 1879 or something around in there. He was just a young guy, you know, and he walked from New York.

I: He walked from New York to Chicago?

R: Yeah...that's how he got up...he walked up here too.

I: Was there any other means of transportation?

R: Well, catch maybe a horse and buggy or something sometime, I imagine, you put your thumb out, you know which was pretty rough going, I think.

I: Were there any trains around then?

R: Oh yeah, there was trains, yeah, but he probably didn't have any money, you know.

I: Then when did he move from Chicago to Baraga?

R: Well, I would say it was around 1879, something like that. It was around either 79 or 80, I would say that he got up in here and first he went to Ontonagon and then he come back here...I think it was around 1885 when he came to Baraga, see, first. I'm pretty sure Ontonagon...I'm not really sure up on those dates exactly, you know, as a matter of fact they were all...that was
a long time before I was around.

I: That was around when pine was the only tree we cut, that was in those days...

R: If you want more proof on that, there's my grandfather and grandmother's wedding certificate up there on the wall there... 1885 when he was married in Baraga.

I: Did he buy land in Ontonagon right away?

R: I don't know... I don't think he did... there's a possibility that he may have, but I don't remember that of knowing.

I: Do you know what kind of job he had?

R: Barber!

I: In Baraga and Ontonagon?

R: He was a barber.

I: And he stayed in that kind of a...?

R: He stayed in that trade all his life, yeah.

I: Then your dad was born in 1880

R: In 1880...

I: Were there as many people living in Baraga then as there are now?

R: Well, not quite as many. I would say it's picked up here in Baraga the last few years a little bit but it's always been around a thousand population since I can remember. Now I think it's about twelve hundred or thirteen hundred, something like that I guess.

It's actually picked up?

R: Yeah! It's the only county in the U.P. I think that's increased in population in the last ten years... one of the only ones outside of Marquette County, I guess. Rest of 'em all went down a little bit.

I: What's the reason for the population going up?

R: Well, that is something I don't know. There is more industry there, see, now than there used to be. Before was only a saw-mill here... sawmills like Ford Motor Company was here and there
wasn't too much work here for the young fellows and they used to leave. In fact I hadda leave myself them days, you know, to get work. Now there's many little shops around here where the young fellows can work, see. Like Pettibone alone, I think they must have at least twelve or fifteen shops right here in Baraga Township, see.

I: Pettibone...they're not just concentrated down there in Baraga? I thought that was the only outlet.

R: Well, they have a...their big main plant is in Chicago and I imagine they've got plants all over. I think there's one in Duluth and the one in Dallas, Texas and at least I know about them, You know, I see.

I: Well, what are these offices...where are these little shops that you're talking about?

R: Well, they make parts for Pettibone...they're job shops where they make...maybe they'll make the frame or something or maybe they'll make the cab or some of the machining or something...maybe one of the shops is making pistons for hydraulic lifts, you know, and well it's mostly component parts, you know, that are Pettibone Carrylift.

I: Were these shops in Baraga County before Pettibone came here?

R: No...unt-un. There was only one here before it came here. And the fellow that invented the carry-lift, he worked in that one shop. He was a real nice guy...I know him...he was a personal friend of mine. That poor guy...I guess he worked himself to death, you know, actually...he got cancer...you know, working too hard, you know, they had him chasing all over the world, you know, on all their problems and everything...flying around and any way he could travel, you know. It finally poops you out, you know. I don't want no part of that kind of life.

I: How did he come to invent the carry-lift?

R: Well, he did...actually, the point behind that from what I understand it is that in Baraga, Michigan, when they moved the road out of town, they moved it closer to the lake, and in so doing that it ran through the mill yard there, see the saw mill where...you know where the mill is down there now...you know where the road goes right by it there...well that never went through there before, see. And the found out they couldn't skid their logs across the main highway, so they had to get something that would carry their logs across the highway with rubber tires, see. And they give this a lot of job figuring out something that would pick up the logs and bring 'em across the road to the mill and that's what he came up with and that was the start of it. And, of course, they developed it from
there and they kept improving on it and finally this big concern in Chicago heard about 'em...Pettibone. Mulliken organization or corporation or something and I don't know how they got together but anyway they got behind...the guy never had no money to do it himself, you know, but then they got behind him and they helped him and that's how he got started.

I: How long ago was that?
R: That was about 1951 I would say.
I: What did he start with as a basic idea for developing the carry-lift?
R: Well, the first thing he needed was four rubber tires...rubber wheeled tire wheels, you know...
I: Did he take an old skidding tractor...
R: What he had was an old truck I think first...I think he made it out of an old four-wheel drive truck see and then he put some kind of hydraulic-lifting arms on there and where you could pick up the logs and carry them across the road and dump them off there. I don't know too much about it...that isn't my department, generally speaking...I never worked there and so I'm really not in a position to be answering those kind of questions; but that's about as much as I can tell you about it.
T: But you knew the man.
R: Yeah, I knew the man sure...he was a friend of mine.
I: Did he ever have anything to do with working in the forest before that?
R: No...he was just more or less of a mechanic all the time and he was a good one too. Phillip LaTonkesse his name was.
I: Is he still living?
R: No, he's dead. Boy, I'll tell you, he was really a genius as far as mechanical things were concerned. Before that he used to make these old tractors out of cars you know, and things like that...that's how he got his start, you know.
I: And who started off the other fourteen machine shops?
R: Pettibone...I mean that was a result of Pettibone getting behind them and developing this thing in the county here.
I: Then they moved in and started developing in the fifties?
R: Yeah...I think it was about 1951 then when they first got behind him...he was working alone at that time, see. It was about the same time as I started in the furniture business too...that is selling furniture, see. I did sell some back in the forties about 1946 the first time I started selling a few pieces...a few chairs and things, you know, and of course he went...well he got something behind him with money and I didn't...I'm still on my own.

I: What does Pettibone make as a national...what's their...

R: Well, it's strictly machinery for carrying material like...but their main machine here in Baraga is the carry-lift for handling lumber and of course other things that possibly they can handle with it too, you know. It's mostly for loading lumber and carrying logs and stuff like that. Actually if you want to know about that you should contact...I would say Vernor Tangen from Baraga if you want to interview somebody on that. He's got a shop in Baraga...Tangen Manufacturing Company...T - A - N - G - E - N...and he's a pretty good guy. I'm pretty sure he would probably help you.

I: When did you first make your first piece of furniture?

R: Ah...I would say back about 1937...along in there somewhere...'38.

I: How old were you?

R: Twenty-one...twenty-two

I: Why did you do it?

R: Why? Because I just got tired of settin on beer cases and orange crates. Had to make somethin that was a little more comfortable, you know.

I: Had you ever done any carpentry...well you built your house when you were seventeen.

R: Well, I always have done carpenter work, yeah. But, I never made a business, you know, of building houses and working for anybody else...that's strictly something else again, you know.

I: What did you do for a living?

R: Since when? How far back do you want to go?

I: Back in the thirties.

R: Well, you want to know the first job I had?
I: Yes.

R: Okay...that was 1934 I think I got a job driving a bus...driving men to work for W.P.A and I got seventy-five cents a trip first. I used to take them out here to Pelkie in the morning and I'd go and get them in the afternoon...that was seventy-five cents so I made a buck and a half a day and of course I had to grease the truck and do other little things besides that, you know. They were all Reo buses...they were all real old...back in the twenties. So they were old when I drove them in 1934, see and they were worn out then. No brakes on em, you know, and quite an outfit to drive. I know, I used to go up the Sturgeon hill here...it was a real steep hill there before, see, it's nice now but before it was a winding steep hill and that old bus in low gear I hadda give her all the guts she had, you know, and she'd get just about to the top and she was just about jerking to get over the top of the damn hill and all of the guys would be laughing and hollering..."Feed her tar paper there Fred, feed her tar paper." They didn't know how damn close they were to coming backwards with that thing and no brakes on it, you know. I was scared to death of that thing.

I: How old were you?

R: Oh, I don't know...about sixteen or seventeen years old I guess

I: Were you still living at home?

R: Yeah, I was living in Baraga then.

I: Did you have to get that job to help out your family?

R: Yeah...more to help me out, you know

I: Was your dad working?

R: Oh yeah...yeah he was working. He was working for the Road Commission then...the Baraga County Road Commission.

I: How good were the roads then?

R: Well, I'll tell you...not what they are today. In fact when we first came here in 1925 they never even used to plow the roads here in the wintertime, you know. They were...well it was horses used to go through here, see, and some of these old Finns out here in the country, they'd have to go to Baraga...they'd pick up a hundred-pound sack of flour and carry it to Alston from Baraga...or a keg of fish or something. It was tough going them days.

I: That'd be a long trip.
R: Damn right.

I: In the winter with no road.

R: Ah, it's about ten - twelve miles, you know

I: And how were the roads when you were driving the bus.

R: Well, they were all dirt roads, you know, and of course in the spring of the year why they were pretty rough, you know. Sometimes you'd have to...sometimes you could get through and sometimes you couldn't, you know, there was lots of mud. And I'll tell you there used to be cars stuck in that mud all the time in the spring of the year. In fact, there's some of those roads around here yet today like that...the side roads; but I'm talking about the main road now, you know. And I've seen it when those four-wheel drive FWD trucks, you know, when they first had them around here, they used to get stuck in there even, you know, right on the main road in the spring of the year.

I: Was there any such thing as a State highway then?

R: At that time I think this was a County road...I don't remember when they changed it over to a State Highway Department, but I imagine it was around the early thirties when the State Highway took it over and they maintained it then after that. But even 41 was a dirt road...that was bad too. Of course that one had a little more care than this one here. They used to have more gravel on it, you know.

I: What kind of jobs were the men doing for W.P.A.?

R: Well, mostly on the roads...improving the roads like digging the ditches out a little deeper and widening and building up the shoulders on the roads and mostly hand work you know, with shovels and picks. That was during Roosevelt's era and well I don't know, I believe it was better then days, you know, actually everybody was getting a little work. Now when they fix the roads they hire a contractor to come in there and he goes in with a few machines and the damn thing is all done in no time, you know. They can build a road in a day where it took them guys maybe...they were working on it for months, you know, with shovels...picks and shovels and wheelbarrows. Like I can remember working on this hill here with picks and shovels and wheelbarrows, you know.

I: Who were those men?

R: All local men, you know, mostly married guys, they were the ones getting the work you know.

I: There was a preference for men who had to support families?
R: Yeah, sure. If they had a family, they were probably more eligible for a job than the guy that didn't...wasn't married, you know. Of course some of the single guys were there because they were supporting the family, you know, that's the way it works.

I: Did anybody go out and get married so they could get a job?

R: Oh yeah, they were getting married and making kids them days too, you know, as well as now after what some of these men in the surrounding area do.

I: What did you think of Roosevelt?

R: Well, I think he did some good things, but a lot of things that I didn't approve of either.

I: Like what?

R: Well, gee it's hard to think, but there are things...because nobody's perfect, you know. I don't think that guy...he hasn't been around this country yet anyway. He did a lot of good things...I mean he established social security, you know, which is a good thing today, you know, maybe he's old but he's got something to get along, but them days there was nothing. If you were old well you hadda...you might of got a roll of relief or something, you know, from the relief office but which was very damn small; but I think it's a lot better now, you know, they get a check and they feel a little bit...they don't feel like they're accepting welfare which is good. And you can start drawing it if you're disabled at any time...you can start drawing social security, you know, from what I understand. You don't have to be sixty-five or sixty-two...I guess it is. To be healthy and retire you can retire at sixty-two; but I mean you can retire on social security at fifty-seven or whatever you want if you're disabled. A lot of people are good yet at eighty years old where a lot of people are no good anymore at fifty some...they're worn out. That's the way life is.

I: What other good things did Roosevelt's Administration do for you or this area?

R: Well, I would say that the one good thing that he did, he established training programs...of course they got that now too, but they had training programs them days where they trained you for machinist...mostly machine work see, that was before the war see. That's one course that I took too in 1932...machine shop course at the Michigan Tech and that's on account of the Roosevelt Administration, you know.

I: When the depression started though, I'm sure a lot of guys left from this area.
R: Oh yeah, most of them went to Detroit and worked down in them shops, you know. In fact I think, most of the Copper Country went to Detroit and those areas around there and went to work, you know. Because that was the only chance you had to better yourself and I...unless you stuck around here and you maybe got into some business or something why make it go, you know, but as far as working...unless you were a school teacher or something or if you had a degree in Engineering, you made it pretty good, you know. But the average working man, he had it pretty rough around here.

I: There wasn't much activity going on.

R: No

I: When you were sixteen what did you have to get a job for? What did you need the money for?

R: Well, what do you need money for today, you know...just the main thing...I wanted to buy a rifle, that's why I wanted to work, you know, to get enough money to buy a deer rifle.

you get it?

R: Oh yeah...I still got it too

I: You still have it?

R: Oh yeah

I: What kind was it?

R: One of those Winchester Carbine...thirty-thirty, and it's still a good gun; and shoots good yet, shoots straight, but it jams once in awhile...a bullet gets stuck in that barrel. Of course I know that, and I know what to do when it does that and it doesn't bother me anymore. It makes you into a good shot, you know, you figure well if the thing is gonna jam, you better get 'em on the first shot. Isn't that good thinking...after all back in the thirties there wasn't much money to buy bullets either, you know...every shot count boy. I shot lots of deer with that gun.

I: Did you work in the winter then? Or did you hunt?

R: Ah...well, used to...pretty hard to get away from here until after deer season, you know, we used to try to stick around here until after deer season and hunt deer, and then we'd go to the city to work for the winter see. Work for Chrysler or Continental Motors...I worked for Hudson Motor Parts Company, Square D, Packard Motor Car Company, many different companies
down there.

I: In Detroit.

R: Continental Aviation Engineering.

I: Did you like Detroit then?

R: I did like it, yes. I was a welcome change, you know. Get down there and work in the inside for the winter, I liked that and it was better money than we got around here, you know. Although the first job I got down there was only sixty-five cents an hour in 1941.

I: That was the first year you went down there?

R: That was the first time I worked down there, yeah. Well, wait a minute, it could have been before that. It could have been 1940 I guess when I first went down there.

I: How did the start of World War II affect the area around here? Did business pick up or...?

R: I guess it picked up a little bit. I think Ford Motor Company hired a few more guys...there was a little more woods work and I think at one time they hired a bunch of guys to cut small brush that they used on dock or something for a buffer for big ships or something. That was a big thing here for awhile. The guys were cutting them things. There was a demand for everything them days, you know, more than there was ordinarily.

I: Well, you said you started making furniture in the forties?

R: Yes, I did...it was even earlier than that I think. It was back in the thirties when I first made chairs and benches and beds and cupboards and things like that for huntin shacks and things, you know, pretty crude stuff. I wasn't selling it, I was just making it for ourselves.

I: You were making it for yourself?

R: Yeah

I: Or for friends?

R: Well, me and my buddies, you know. Of course I was making...ever since I was big enough to swing a hammer, I was building shacks or something, you know, out in the woods...then they'd go out and burn 'em down on us. Did that too.

I: Did your dad own a lot of land when you were a kid?
No, they had more land in the thirties...it started...I mean my grandfather started buying land when he was...back in about 1900 or before that even...possible before that, I don't know, I don't remember. But he did acquire quite a bit of land and then the depression...the depression in the thirties we lost just about everything, see. Had a bank in Baraga...that went broke. The guy absconded with the funds and he lost all of his money in that for one thing and then the depression came and well it was...a lot of people just couldn't pay their taxes anymore, you know, you just have to forget about it. The land wasn't worth anything them days either. You figure, what the hell, let it go, you know, there's always other pieces you know. But it was real good land, in fact, lake shore land and there was no price for that, I mean nobody wanted it them days.

I: What did they want...timber land and farm land?
R: Well yeah...mostly timber land, you know, farms and things like that.
I: Did you ever have a farm?
R: No, not...we've always done a little gardening, you know, but never any cows...well not in my time anyway; but my grandfather used to have cows and horses. That was in Baraga. Everybody had their own cow in Baraga at one time, you know, and a horse. You hadda have a horse to get around, see, that was just like being your car today, see. And they used to travel across...when they went to L'Anse they'd go across the ice in the wintertime. That's the way they used to travel...or walk across, you know, the road wasn't kept open, see after the ice froze on the lake. He was the county...rather he was the Township Supervisor from around 1900 to around 1915, I think. He used to walk across the ice to meetings, you know, and I think he'd stay overnight over there and come back the next day. Of course I think he used to like to visit some of the saloons around there too, you know. Had a little taste for some of that good beer, you know.

I: Were there a lot of saloons there?
R: Yeah...was it...I don't remember how many there were in L'Anse, but in Baraga I think there was twenty - twenty-one or twenty-two saloons one time.
I: Sounds like a typical/logging town.
R: Yeah, well...I can remember my dad saying that they used to like to go downtown at night just to watch the fights.
I: The lumberjacks.
R: That was the evenings entertainment, you know.

I: Did lumberjacks actually spend all of their money drinking every week when they got paid?

R: Well, usually they... the lumberjack would go in the woods in the fall of the year and he'd work all winter in the woods and he'd come downtown in the spring, the spring break up, and that's when he was loaded, that's when he was everybody's friend, you know because he had money. And those that saved their money, they are the guys that still own the farms around here or else they are children of those children, you know. But the guy that drank it all up, well he's the guy that ain't got nothing, you know, that's the way it works. The guy with the bar, he's the guy that's got the farm. That's the way it works out... or his kid's kids or something, you know. But those... them guys never made no money them days... was so small you know, geez, you know, maybe they worked all winter for three - four hundred bucks, you know. Well, thirty bucks a month, you know... a dollar a day. You don't get very fat on that, you know.

I: That was hard work.

R: Damn right... you went out in the woods before and what it reminds me now they used to say them guys never seen a camp in the daytime because when they'd leave there in the morning it was dark and when they'd come in, it was dark.

I: Did you ever work in a lumber camp?

R: Yeah, oh yeah.

I: I'd like to hear about that.

R: Well, I never worked in it too much, but I'll give you one experience when I worked in a... I got a job sawing one time at Silver Mountain... me and another guy, a friend of mine.

I: Where is Silver Mountain?

R: That's about southwest of here maybe twenty miles from here. And anyway, we went to see this guy about a job... we heard he was looking for a couple of sawyers so we needed a job. So, we looked him up and "Yeah," he says, "you guys if you want to go up there, there's a good shack there and everything is in nice shape." So, we got out there with all our gear and everything and the shack was setting on the bank of the Sturgeon River up there below Silver Mountain and so we asked him, "Well, where's the logs we're supposed to cut," you know; and he says, "You gotta cross the river on the raft and you gotta walk down-stream for..." I just forget how far it was... quite a ways
anyway, lot of snow laying in the woods, you know, and we didn't have no snowshoes either, you know, with a crosscut saw on our back and our lunch, you know, and we sawed all day...we were cutting cedar at that time...we'd saw all day and come back, dragging our ass you know back to the raft and then get across the creek and to the shack and make your own supper, you know, and maybe you'd have to cut some wood or something...most of the time we were doing the cutting with a kerosene lamp out there. One guy'd be holding the lamp while the other guy'd be getting the wood. I can remember the God damn bunk that was in...I was in the top bunk...I'll tell you you didn't have no trouble sleeping, you know, after you worked like that all day. But gees I felt a drop of water hit me on the forehead...and I thought well gees, what is this now. And sure enough the roof was leakin, you know. So that was just the beginning of it. The damn thing would start to leak in different spots, you know, all over. Well first, well we were moving our bed around see to keep the bed dry, you know. And well after while it was leakin all over the damn place, you know, you couldn't find a dry spot in it anywhere and then well you put up with that as long as you...well what else could you do. It was better than being outside, you know. If you thought it was bad in there, all you hadda do was go outside and stand out there for awhile and you'd like it inside again, see. Oh, I don't know how long we worked there and then we were supposed to go skiddin logs then see, and so we said, "Well, how you gonna do it...how you gonna get them logs out of here?" He said, "Well, we gotta get a horse down here and skid them logs out." So, I stood thinking, "How in the hell are we gonna get the horse across the river." So, anyway, the boss says he's gonna take him across on the raft. Well I said, "By gees I gotta see that." Was bad enough just the crew going across on the raft let alone a horse on there too. And that's when me and my buddy decided that we're gonna depart from the loggin company when he got the horse there. Well anyway, we left there anyway. And I heard anyway that they did bring the horse across on the raft and I don't know how they done it. They got some other foolish guys to go and do it, you know.

I: How long did you work there?

R: Oh, we probably worked there a month altogether I guess.

I: Did you know what you were doing before you went there?

R: No...I don't...we weren't doing nothing, I guess. That's why we hadda go and work there...altogether and buy some groceries, you know. We hate like hell to go and hit the old man up all the time.

Stop in tape.
I: Do you remember what the name of the logging company was...if it was...?

R: You mean that we worked for?

I: 

R: Oh, it was just an individual...it wasn't a big company. You see all these...these big companies they had a lot of little guys working under them see...what they called jippurs.

I: I've heard that word before.

R: That's just about what they are...they're gettin jipped all the time, you know.

I: Oh, is that where it came from

R: Well, that isn't whatit means...but that's the way I look at it. Somebody's gettin jipped there somewhere, you know. Anyway, this guy he gotta job workin for somebody else and what he had to do was delegate the work out to us young guys, see. Ends up the guy that hired him has gotta make a living and the guy that we're working for has gotta make a living, and we gotta make a living, we're the last guy next to the horse. We're the last guy on the list, see. The poor old horse all he gets is a few oats; but...

I: How much did you get?

R: Well, I'll tell you, I think it was about a dollar and a half a day or something like that I guess...it wasn't very much anyway. Of course, you could buy beer for ten cents a bottle them days, you know, it was different than it is now. Now it's a halfa buck, you know, or forty cents or something.

I: Did you stay in that shack for a month without leaving?

R: No I guess we come to town on the weekends, you know.

I: Then you must have got your food for a week then?

R: 

I: When you came to town? How much of your money did you spend before you quit?

R: On food?

I: How much of that dollar and a half a day did you use up before you started to save any?
R: Well, we were just as broke when we quit as when we started so you can figure it out in between there.

I: Oh, you just needed something to stay alive from day to day.

R: Well, it's just an existence, you know. It's good experience, you know, you learn something.

I: Did your father ever have to go through anything like that?

R: Oh yeah... sure. Sure, he used to saw logs too.

I: Before he got the job surveying?

R: Yeah... well he did logging probably... I think while I was... before I was born I think my dad used to do a little logging. I've got some records of them days.

I: Was that pine logging?

R: UMMM... I don't remember... I believe it was. I know that he got one big pine log and he used to talk about that he got that log down from the mill there and nobody could figure out how he got it there, it was so damn big you know, and they got it going up into the mill up in the... oh I forget what they call that thing... the carries in... that carries it up in the mill there and the damn thing wouldn't go in the door... it knocked part of the door down when it went into the mill and it got jammed in there and they had a hell of a time getting it loose and they finally rolled it off and it laid there on the side of the mill there and rotted away. They never did saw it up because it was so damn big. In fact I can remember that log too myself. We used to have to jump over that when we went down there swimming see, crawl over that log. And boy it was a big one too.

I: Did your dad have his own sawmill?

R: No... strictly logging... just getting logs for the big mills, you know.

I: Then he got a job surveying. Who was he working for?

R: Well, when he was young he had a job working for the County Surveyor that time, you know, helper see... a chainman. And them days it was a lot different than it is now. They would have a horse... a team of horses would take their... pick 'em up and pick the crew up and all their groceries and all their gear and everything and take them out into the area where they were gonna work and they would stay there all week. And they wouldn't come in until next Saturday... that's when they'd come in see. So they... my dad used to say that that was an awful
life then. He'd say that sometimes we'd get out there and the horse would go back to town and would rain all week and there'd be no place to go but in that tent, you know. Oh, talk about misery...the flies, mosquitoes. And he said that they'd be there...sometimes they'd be out in the woods like that and would be some guy that would have a cow or something around there somewhere, well they'd probably get over there and see him and get some milk or something to drink, you know. But most of the time it was strictly misery out there in the flies and mosquitoes. But that's the way you learn, you know, he learned how to be a surveyor that way. He never went to Michigan Tech, he learned the hard way in the woods.

I: In there surveying land?

R: Yeah...mostly running lines...Township lines and different things like that and well there's always work in that...the fellows are...in fact surveying is part of their job.

End of Side A

I: It sounds like the area was still pretty wild then.

R: Yeah, it was a lot different then than it is now, you know.

I: Was there any land already cleared when the Finns came here and started farming?

R: Not much...not too much. The way I understand it is that...that's another branch of history of this country how it got settled, you know. When you start thinking of something like that, why it was first...the first people that were around here of course were the Indians and I think after that it was the French people come in here. And the French people were loggers, see. They come in here with the logging era and then after the French people had cut all the timber off these lands, that's when the Finns were up in the Copper Country...they'd got into the Copper mines and they got a good belly full of that and they were looking for farms, see. And that's how this country got settled. They were looking for a farm and a place to...they wanted to get the hell out of the mines, you know, they had their belly full of that and they wanted to get on their own and of course the Finns were pretty good pioneers, you know, they'd clear the damn land and they were tough ones, you know, they could stay right there and make it go with a cow and raise their own vegetables and maybe get a keg of fish once in awhile, you know, and hell they could make a go on that. Shoot a deer, you know and eat beaver and rabbits...could make a go of it in them days see.

I: What did they do with the wood that they cleared off their land?
Well, most of it I imagine they would use it for firewood, you know and then they'd have their stumps and everything they'd have to burn them out and then they used to do a lot of blasting in the olden days...they dynamite and they'd blast them stumps out. It was done the hard way and most of these farms that are cleared around here were cleared that way. They weren't cleared with no bulldozers. In fact my grandfather's farm is right down here where the airport is here...that was my grandfather's farm there on my mother's side. He had a quarter of a section there see, and everything that was cleared on there was cleared by hand, you know, and all the farms around there were cleared the hard way...grub hoe and horse and...

I: How did they pay for the land?

R: How much?

I: Yeah, well but...how much was it?

R: I don't know...then they worked in the mine until I imagine until they got enough to buy a piece of land...and a lot of them were homesteaded too, of course, and I don't understand that homesteading thing because that was before my time. I guess they didn't have to pay anything, but I guess they had to show that they were clearing land...so much land every year see in order to be entitled to declare it a homestead. And there was lots of them was homesteaded around here like that too.

I: Do you know how long it took 'em to clear the land...like forty acres of land?

R: No, I have no idea.

I: What's happened to the farms now? There doesn't seem to be much farming.

R: Well, they're growing back into trees, lots of them. You can see them right between here and Baraga is a good example for you, you know, if you look at some of those barns...there's growing up...hell there's trees on 'em maybe six inches in diameter now, you know, where they were cutting hay back in the thirties and before that.

I: What are the people doing that own the farms? They aren't making a living off that land.

R: Well, seems like every case is different, I mean, maybe the guy is too old to farm or went to the city and is just paying the taxes and is just holding on for when he retires and things like that, you know.
I: You said that you hunted. How was deer hunting then compared to now?

R: Well, there was something to shoot at them days while every once in awhile you see something nowadays too, but there's no deer today like there was then. Well, it was no problem to get a deer, you know, then. And looking back farther than my dad's time, why they were allowed to shoot as many deer as they wanted at one time, you know, was no limit. And then they cut it down to three, I think.

I: When?

R: That was back ...maybe in 1920 or something...I'm just guessing now see, I imagine it was back in that time sometime...maybe before I was born. See, I was born in 1916 and...I don't know, I'm gettin kind of weary here boys, I can't think anymore. You know, kind of wear out after awhile. I can remember back in the thirties when there was times when we had nothing else but venison to eat, you know, that was it. I can remember one time back in the thirties when they were handing out hams to people, you know, everybody was hard up, no money around, and this was the welfare agency, they would...it was government surplus food and they'd come and they'd give everybody a ham, you know. And boy did that ever taste good after having nothing but venison and potatoes, you know. Of course you get sick of ham after awhile too, you know. You know, eatin ham for breakfast, dinner, and supper...then they come around with canned meat...I don't know where in the hell it was canned whether it was Argentina or someplace, but anyway that went good for awhile too, you know, but of course you get sick of that after awhile too...after you cook it every different way you can think of...breakfast, dinner and supper of nothing but...lot of people had it worse than that too, you know. I never had it real tough, but I knew people that had nothing but flour, you know, and boy they just...all they had was bread and biscuit and things, you know, and maybe they'd catch a fish or something once in awhile. Sure was tough. I've been in homes where they had nothing to eat there but coffee and biscuits and little kids in there and it was so damn cold in that house, it'd be cold with your coat on, you know, them old shacks. The people up here had it pretty damn rough some of 'em. Of course a lot of people make it that way themselves too, you know, where they drink up all the money and things, but there were a lot of people struggling to make a go and raising their family and they never had no money for drinking or anything, you know.

I: Do you think there's still a lot of people living like that around here now?

R: There are some, yeah. Most of it's brought on by themselves,
you know...drink up everything...you know, what the hell, some-
body's gonna suffer for it...either your kids or wife or who-
ever depends on you at the time.

I: When you went out hunting, how did you go about doing it? Did you start off into the woods and look for deer?

R: Well, when I first started to hunt I wasn't too smart, you know, just a young guy and it was hard work hunting. We used to... we'd go in the worst places we could find and when you get a deer way out in the woods somewhere where we'd have to drag that thing for miles, you know. If it was a doe, we'd have to carry it out at night on our back, you know, it was pretty tough going. But you get smarter as you get older, you know. Like now, of course I don't hunt anymore, but when I did, you know, why I never went any farther away from the house than I figured that I wanted to drag that deer see. And beyond that I didn't want nothing to do with that. If I didn't get him within my rounds, I didn't care whether I got him at all, see. But you get to understand the deer, you know, you start to figure how he's thinking too, see, think like the deer does and of course you don't learn that until after you hunt for awhile...a long time. Try to explain it...you know, you get to know where the deer are traveling see, and of course you try to get there ahead of 'em and wait for him when he's comin in, see. And a lot of it, to be a good hunter, you gotta be quiet. That's one of the main things and if it takes you an hour to walk a thousand feet, that's alright because after all they're gonna hear you if you're making any noise, you know, and then the only chance you got to get a deer then is if somebody else jumps the deer and he chases him into you. Of course when he's running he don't hear you walking then and he can run right into you. I've had lots of them do that too.

I: Did you get a deer the first time you went out?

R: Gee, I can't even remember when I shot my first deer...no, not the first time, that's for sure. It's strictly luck the first time too, you know. I can't remember the first deer I shot.

I: What was the last deer you shot?

R: Well, the last one I shot was about 1970 and that was just about...oh maybe a mile from the house here. I went down the river and it was the first morning and I was walking down in my old usual haunts, you know, and walking nice and quiet and somebody had shot at this deer and scared him and of course he was coming towards me. Of course he surprised me, but I got one shot at him. I seen him run and...if I can remember this now, I got one clear picture...one clear opening where I seen him run there and I shot and I hit him in the neck and down he went
And boy was that... that was the best meat I ever had. Yup, that was really wonderful. And then you know, after you get older boys, you get so you don't want to shoot any anymore. You get over that thing, you know. You don't want to hurt anything anymore especially when the deer are getting scarce, you know, and I decided then that I don't really care if I ever shoot a deer again. It's such a beautiful animal, you know, they don't want to hurt anybody... they want to be our friend but all the people want to do is be their enemies, you know. The deer ain't got nothin going for them, nothing at all. Cars are hitting them and killing 'em and well I blame the DNR for a lot of that, they've got the people believing that we're supposed to kill all these animals. No, we're not supposed to do that, we're supposed to conserve them, you know. After all, I believe the Lord put these animals on this earth for survival, you know, not for sport or for targets or anything and to shoot an animal or kill an animal just for sport, I don't believe in it. Animals are beautiful, you know, they don't hurt us. People are afraid of animals... I'm afraid of people. Damn right... that's what you want to watch out for. Animals won't bother you... I mean a skunk will make you smell like hell, or a bear might scare you, but he don't want nothing to do with a human being either. He will run when he sees you, you know, he don't want nothing to do with you unless he's got cubs or something and you start scaring the cubs or something, he might give you a little trouble, but ordinarily they go like hell when they see you. And when they do come around they're hungry... they're looking for something to eat, you know, they're not looking for trouble.

I: I'd like to hear how you're getting along now with your business?

R: Well, the way it is today boys, I'm not... maybe I'm a success but I'm not getting rich or anything like that. At least I'm not on welfare, see. I'm making a go... I'm paying my bills and paying my taxes and everything. What I'm doing... I could make a lot of money on it if I could work at it anymore, but I can't. I don't feel good anymore. I've got asthma and sinus trouble and when I work on woodwork I can only work on it so long and I start getting problems then and I've gotta lay off it. In fact that's what I'm doing right now. I'm not working in it at all. I'm not gonna go in there for two months and see how I feel. I may have to give it up entirely... that is the woodworking part of it, see. But that is a dirty trick to play on a guy... I mean now is when I should be able to, you know, giving it hell and making money. In fact, I got all the work I need. I don't need anymore work. I've got lots of work. In fact, I've got to write to these people and cancel some of it, see, and fate plays you a dirty trick when you've spent a lifetime on research and on something that you love, you know,
it's work that I like to do...I like it. I've got so many goals that I'm not gonna achieve...I ain't gonna live long enough for that, in fact, I can't do it no more, see. And it's too late to do anything else anymore, I can't do it. I would like to...in fact my ambition always to begin with started when I was a little kid...used to be hauling trainloads of logs away out here every day, see, beautiful, all our best fine timber going out of here...logs...not even cut into lumber, you know, of course there was a lot of lumber went out of here too, but nothing was made into a finished product and I can remember my dad and grandfather used to say, "Boy if they only had something here that they could produce something out of that timber instead of shipping it out of here" see, it was all going to other markets Chicago and Grand Rapids and Indiana to the different woodworking plants and all over the country, see. And most of the work was done here...all the bullwork was done here, see, but all the machining and stuff there was nothing done around here. Of course that always remained in my crop when I was growing up, was, you know, if a fellow can develop something that you could hold that timber here and create something, you know. So, of course I wasn't very smart, I was just a kid, but I figured at least everybody's gotta have furniture. I figured that that's the thing that a fellow should get into and there's always a chance to make better furniture or different kinds of furniture, you know, and of course that was my goal. I always figured that we could get a...probably someday we could get a shop going...a regular furniture factory, see they employ a couple hundred men or so. Some of them are a hell of a lot bigger than that. Like Ethan Allan, I don't know how many thousands are working for them, you know. But, the people them days they were satisfied just to do a little woods work and maybe run the saw mill little bit, you know, make boards and stuff like that. That was as far as they went. And that's the same way with the copper mines, you know, they should have probably developed a ways of producing that into finished products, you know, right here. At least part of it anyway, you know. I believe that I accomplished something anyway, at least I'm making furniture, you know, a way that's being used and people like it and I feel a kind of satisfaction for that anyway.

I: Who's using your furniture...are they all local people?

R: No, some local people but, of course, there's lots of local people, I mean that have bought furniture from me and different camps around here and homes; but today it's mostly outsiders too that buy my furniture, you know, some people from the Copper Country, I got a letter from a guy from up in Laurium the other day, he ordered some furniture from me for next fall. next summer, and then some people from Minneapolis called me up here and asked me how I'm doing. I told them when they placed the order, I said, "I really don't know if I'm gonna
be able to do this or not. So the only thing you can do it to keep in contact with me once in awhile and find out if things are going." And that's the way it's going now, maybe I'll have to cancel them all, I don't know.

I: How much does it cost to get this wood?

R: Well, this I made myself, see...with an (???) chain saw now. And I think the logs cost me well maybe between eighty and a hundred dollars for the logs, see.

I: How many logs?

R: Well, I bought...for this little batch I got here, I bought a truck load...one truck load is about six thousand feet in there see and actually it takes...they figure you should dry lumber one year to the inch, see, air dry it...well this lumber here it takes two years to dry that. Three inch lumber it takes three years, see. And that is good lumber too when it's dried that way. Yeah, you take a dry kiln...dry kiln is good. If you're at a furniture factory, you'd have to dry it in a dry kiln because you couldn't dry it fast enough anyother way, see. And they could probably dry in I think it's about twenty-one days, they can dry that where it took me three years. Well, at least I did it all myself, you know, and I know it's good...I know what condition it's in. I've bought lumber that's supposed to be dry kiln and the damn center of it is all wet...you know, what the hell you gonna make out of that. I could have made furniture for the president of Detroit Edison if I could of got the lumber at that time, but they brought the lumber here and it wasn't suitable for building anything so I told him that I can't do it. Well, they wanted me to go ahead and do it anyway. I said, "Nothing doing..." I said, "What the hell I've got a reputation to hold up here. If I make furniture out of that and this guy gets ahold of that, what's he gonna think about me." You know.

I: How long have you been drying this pile of wood?

R: Oh, this has been dried since last year. I just brought it in here. It will pick up a little moisture see, and before I make anything I bring it back in here and dry it again for awhile. It has been dry...I made furniture out of it last summer...it was good and dry. That's probably...it's probably right now it probably seven or eight percent at the most moisture content and that lumber up in the top there, that gets down below the moisture meter...is lower than the moisture meter will register. Sometimes I need a piece of wood that dry, see, and that's why I put it up there. I always know what condition it is, see. Every part of my shop is different. The lumber will be at a different moisture content. That's the driest place up there, see.
I: What happens when you build something with wood that's not dried right?

R: Well, here's what happens. You go ahead and you spend a lot of time making a piece of furniture and it's not dry. It looks beautiful when it leaves the shop, you know, but say the guy brings it home and he's got it in his home through the winter, see. Well, of course in the winter that's when your home is the driest and the thing will start shrinking, the joints will come apart or maybe the legs will get loose from the chair or something, the rungs will get loose, and of course you can set in it for awhile but first thing you know, it's starting to get shaky and loosening up...not only my furniture, they all do the same damn thing unless you pay a fortune for furniture today you don't get very good furniture. You know, it's all in what you pay for it. If you're looking for a bargain, that's what you're gonna get, too, you know. It all boils down to the guy that he doesn't want to spend the time drying it...that lumber, so he makes it...maybe he'll say, "Gees it's been in the dry kiln there three weeks...hell, that's long enough we can't afford to have it in there any longer." See, "Make the damn furniture out of that." And it's sold through some outfit that handles poor quality furniture and maybe they're selling it in an area where they're all not too smart, you know, and that's how they get rid of their poor quality, see. See, they figure there's a bunch of dummies living around there, well give 'em that...give it to them, see. This merchandising is an art in itself too, you know. You know how different people are in different areas, see. You figure there's a bunch of farmers over there, what the hell do they know about that, see. Ship it over there to that area, see. They don't know the difference. But, they say don't send it over here because these guys are all smart over there...they're all engineers or something, you know, you can't fool them. You gotta send better stuff. It works the same way with your food. They got a poor grade of food they ship it out somewhere where the people don't say nothing, you know, they're happy to get it. Better stuff they have to ship to the city markets and things. People are accustomed to better quality.

I: What prices do you ask for different pieces of furniture?

R: Well, it all depends on oh what would you want...what would you want to know the price on?

I: Well, these chairs that we're sitting on

R: These chairs right here, I was making these for thirty bucks last...I can't do it no more...it costs...too much work on them for that.

I: How much do you have invested in the machinery in your shop?
R: Well, I hate to say anything about that place...for tax purposes. I hate to quote any figures, you know. But I'll tell you how much it is, it's all I could scrape up, you know, that's what it's worth...let's put it that way.

I: Is it adequate for everything you like to do?

R: No, not really, no. It's adequate for what I could afford and I can do the work with it, but it's...there's a lot of easier ways of doing it today and there's a lot of equipment that would make it a lot easier for me and that's something that a guy wishes he could have when you get older, when you've been in it so long, you know. It's alright to fool around when you're young with them things and then after awhile you start looking for easier ways to do it. That's only natural.

I: That equipment looks kind of new.

R: It's new...but some of that equipment in there is twenty-four years old...twenty-five years old. The oldest equipment in there...like that band-saw I've got in there, I think I bought that in 1950; but some of it I bought in '65...that's about the newest stuff I bought in '65.

I: Why is that too costly to make that chair now?

R: Well, I can't make it for thirty bucks anymore, you know, not at today's prices...it's too much work in it, you know.

I: What would it cost then if you made it now?

R: Well, I think I could get forty bucks for a chair now, you know. Say thirty-nine ninety-five...that sounds cheap. But I've got other chairs...that I can get a hundred bucks for a chair too. Why should I make one for thirty bucks when I can make a hundred dollar chair too. Here's the thing you gotta do. Find out what you're gonna make the money out of and that's the thing that you gotta put your time in after awhile. You can't waste your time in things that there's no money in, you know. If you know anything about chairs...if you sell a guy a table he wants chairs, see. That's why you gotta make them damn chairs. There's no money in making chairs...not with the equipment I've got, you know. You'd have to have a lot more production machinery. There's ways of doing it, but it takes money. Today, you see the problem up here is our winter, see. You've gotta have a damn good building up here. It's gotta be heated and the winters are cold and you got a lot of snow, you've gotta have good roofs on, you know, and it takes a lot of money just to build a building so you can work. Hell, down south they can work outside, you know, but up here it's a different story. You've got that added
expense for the building.

I: What else is up against somebody that would want to start a furniture manufacturing plant around here?

R: Well...you mean why other people haven't come in here and done it?

I: Yes

R: Well, most of your furniture companies are...they are in Carolina...South Carolina I thing...North Carolina...and out in the east, Vermont and areas like that, see. Grand Rapids at one time was the big furniture center of the world, you know, but that's not so anymore. And probably the reason for that is because of the competition for labor, see, with the automobile plants. Why should they work for two dollars in Grand Rapids when they can go over to Detroit and get Three bucks...three and a half, you know, that's the way it works...and up I'm just quoting a price. I don't know what they pay down there now. I coulda worked in Grand Rapids too, I had an opportunity to go down there as a furniture designer and well, I didn't want to live in the city in the first place...it was pretty good money at that time, it was in 1955 a fellow offered me a hundred bucks a week, you know, just to design furniture, you know. Then they were gonna produce it; but I didn't go.

I: Why didn't you want to live in the city?

R: Well, one of the reasons, my children were in school and my wife didn't want to go down there...that was the main reason I guess. Not that I wouldn't have like the job...it was a damn good...nice job. He said, "We'll put you up, your own shop and you'll be your own boss and if you need any help you can have the help you want...do your own thing in there." You know...pretty nice job, see. That guy was a millionaire...probably a multi-million millionaire, and real nice guy. He bought lots of my furniture too. He just had it down there to look at it...standing around. I went down there one time...in fact he come and got me. Let's see, I'll go back a little farther...he wanted me to come down there and he called me up and said to catch the plane and oh I thought Jesus, I've never been in an airplane before...I didn't know if I wanted to do that or not. So I didn't tell him I wouldn't go, but anyway, when the plane come in he was there to pick me up and I wasn't there see. So he called me up again. "What's the matter...you're not here." "Oh," I said, "I decided that if I'm gonna go I'm gonna go in my car." Well, my car was no good anyway so he says, "Well, I'll see you then tommorow morning," or something like that or the next day or so. Okay, well I didn't arrive again. So he calls up again. "How come you're not down here?" He says, "You said you were gonna be here." Well, I said, "I discovered my car was no good and my dad's car was
no good...I had all kinds of excuses, you know. Well he says, "I'll be up there tomorrow morning and pick you up." So, sure enough the next morning he was here, his big cadillac sedan and he had a trailer on the back to haul some furniture back, you know, so I went back with him. That's when he wanted me to come to work for him see. He wanted me to come down and look at his plant down there. So I went down there and stayed with him at his house, and geez what a beautiful place. Well, anyway, I spent the day with him in his plant there and he took me all through and explained to me every operation in the whole shop to me. Why this is so and that's so and why he's doing this and that; and he spent the whole morning with me there and then in the afternoon, one of these guys come in and he says, "Well, Mr. So-and-So, now you're...""Well, Mr. So-and-So is here to see you now"...he had an appointment, you know and he was waiting, so that guy...every minute of that guys live was for a purpose...and he had this guy to remind him. That's all his job was was to remind him that well so-and so was here and all he's ready to talk about this so-and-so business, you know. Every minute of that guy's life was like that. So, I mean, that's success, see. He's a successful man. So I started thinking, geez if he's happy with his millions and he's gotta be like that, I'm not so sure I want to get that way anymore. I figured out how well I am enough the way I have been, see. And, of course he had lots of money and he needed it too with that big house he had. You'd drive in there and you know, you couldn't even see the house from the road, you'd drive in there through the woods, see and you'd drive in that big long nice driveway like you see on TV, you know. Talk about a beautiful place, Wah! And of course that wasn't really big, I mean, you fellows have been around on Jefferson Avenue in Detroit or something where those big mansions are, well it wasn't nothing like that, but I mean, it was that way but only on a smaller scale, you know. And, of course, it was a big house. He could have a bowling alley in the basement...that's how big it was, you know.

I: In spite of everything...all the hardships of living here, you'd still be just satisfied with just living here, aren't you.

R: Well, I feel it's been a pretty good life, you know. Lots of hardship but what the hell as long as you get enough to eat, you know, and a place to sleep where it's warm and you gotta a little shop where you can go and do your thing, you know, what more does a guy want. Now, you know. I could've used more when I was younger, but you know, you've got your kids growing up, you know, boy she's...damn money is pretty scarce. Now it's different. The pressure's off, let's put it that way.

I: How many kids did you have?
R: Just two...but that one boy of mine...I think I could have raised ten girls...it would have been just as easy. That's a fact too. Talk about a tough guy, wahl Rough neck!

I: What's he doing now?

R: Well, he's gonna go to work in the woods now. He's got a job sawing logs...gonna do that...try that for awhile.

I: Does he use a chainsaw?

R: Oh yeah...naturally.

I: How did you get into the chainsaw business?

R: Well, let's see now. I was gonna buy a saw...a chainsaw...and I had taken accouple from the guy down the road here aways that was having saws to try out, and neither one of them were any good but I didn't have much money to buy one, so I hadda take one of the cheaper ones and there was a guy come along here and he seen me monkeying with the saw and he stopped. And he said, "What are you doing there?" I said, "Well, I figured on buying a used saw here and I'm just trying 'em out." So, he said "Did you ever hear of a Steel?" "Hell no, I never heard of nothing...nothing I ever heard of but McCullah and Homelite you know." Well, he says, "Take a look at 'em and see what you think of them." So, I looked 'em over and it looked like a pretty good saw but heavy, you know, of course they were all big them days, see. And he says, "You wanto be a dealer?" He says, "Buy threesaws you can be a dealer." So, I thought, sounds pretty good. You know, I figured, I need one saw for myself and if I'm any kind of a salesman at all I can probably sell the other two, you know. So, that's just the way it worked out too...that's how I got started. Of course they are a good saw, there's no doubt about it...in fact they're the first chain saw...Steel made the first saw in 1926...that is the first saw to be sold for sale and he sold his first saws in the United States back in 1936...and I never heard of a chainsaw back in the thirties...I never even dreamt that there was such a thing outside of a crosscut saw or...them what-do-you-call'em...one-man misery whip they used to call them. Every time you pushed something down the log, it would go like that and come back at you. And if you didn't know how to file a saw that made it all the worse, you know...just rubbing the damn thing.

I: What did you think of the first chain saw that you used?

R: Well, I was a little bit suspicious...as long as it cut faster than the crosscut, it was good, you know. Anything was good that was faster, you know.
I: But after awhile you must have got tired of things that your
chain saws did to you too.

R: Well, yeah, but usually they give you enough trouble that they
kept your mind occupied, you know...running the damn thing so
it'd cut. Some of those first ones I had they'd only run about
an hour at a time and quit, you know, and then they wouldn't
start anymore. I don't know what in the hell was wrong with
them saws...the McCullah especially...that damn thing, you
know, it would cut good for about an hour and maybe even two
hours you'd get out of it and then the damn thing wouldn't
start. Of course It could have been my fault, I probably just
wasn't smart enough to know how to fix it, you know; but I
know, anyway you'd get so disgusted with it that you'd figure
oh to hell with it...close it down for the winter and go to
Detroit...didn't have to saw any damn wood, you know. That's
what I used to do.

I: The wood that you were sawing...was that for yourself?

R: Yeah, firewood. Of course I cut lots of wood by hand too. Me
and my dad we used to saw wood...I mean if you're gonna saw
wood all winter, I mean boy, you're gonna do a lot of
sawing, you know, by hand and we used to sell wood even so you
know how damn much we used to saw, you know. We were sawing
wood all the time, you know...steady job; but it's a good
thing the trees keep growing, eh, you know, God damn that's
the only renewable resource we've got see.

I: Who bought those first two saws that you had?

R: My dad, he leant me the money...I didn't have the money to
buy them...I probably could have bought one, but he leant me
the money...over six hundred bucks...to buy the first three
saws, you know, it's kind of hard to scrape up. That was the
original investment, see, and I didn't really try to sell
'em, you know, too much...because there was other dealers
and I thought what the hell, they're established and everything,
I won't bother with 'em; but those guys used to...they heard
about it in fact some of the guys heard about 'em in the
service...that's the first time they ever seen a saw that was
in Germany, see, and then when they come back here they heard
there was a dealer and told 'em they wanted to get one. In
fact, one of those saws I sold...not one of them, I think all
of them I sold are still running, you know...the first ones
I sold.

I: You still have your own?

R: Not the first one, no. I sold it...I have one saw that is.
not the first one, but it was the second batch. My kid is
gonna go work in the woods with that now. That's a thirteen years old now. It still cuts good...see I got one pull, you know...boy that means a lot, you know, crank it up...crank it up...that cranking a power saw is harder than working with it you know.

I: Is it as good as the one that's made now?

R: Probably just as good...probably better, but heavier, you know. Today they made them a lot lighter and of course when you're making something lighter, you're gonna loose something there now, you know.

I: How heavy was that first saw?

R: Ah, the first one was about twenty-eight pounds, I guess. That wasn't really heavy then because the first chain saws were over a hundred pounds, you know. And then they got 'em down to about sixty pounds and kept getting them down lighter and lighter. There's one fellow's got one of the originals...one of the older saws...I'd like to get that just to show the guys, you know. Brand new, but it was a big heavy one, you know and he's always telling me...that saw's settin there all rusty and everything...that damn thing is brand new. He says, is there any difference? Well, they kept improving on them so fast that if you had it for a year it was out of date, you know. Well, that's actually the way it is today. You know, they're getting lighter and lighter all the time...they're improving on them all the time, you know. Did you have some questions you want to ask there?

I: Who buys your chain saws now? How many do you sell?

R: Well, mostly people that are buying saws...well if I look back into last fall, there's lot of people that bought saws that never had saws before, you know, on account of the wood thing, see. Lot of people are tying to get ahold of wood stoves, there's lots of them gottem...have saved them from before and they want to cut their own wood because they save a little on their fuel see. But, most of the saws are to people that work in the woods, that's their business, you know, cutting logs and pulp wood and fire wood and things like that. I don't sell, probably I don't sell as many saws as the other dealers around here, I don't know what they sell; but it could be better. I don't try to push it too hard. There's a lot of competition, you know, and there's throat cutting...but that's another thing, you know.

I: Where are these saws made?

R: Made in West Germany.

I: Do you have likesalesmen coming around trying to sell you...

R: Oh yeah
I: ...the newest thing?

R: That yellow saw over there that's made in Sweden. I handle two different makes. They're good saws. In fact, they probably... I would say that they're probably the best saw made. There're other saws that are just as good, I don't know; but like Steel they've been at it longer than anybody else making saws and they produce more saws than anybody else, and they've got more experience so they should be good. In fact, the steel saws are made in the same town that Mercades Benz... I mean they make a pretty good car too, you know. At least they're trying to make something good, you know.

I: Have you ever made any suggestions on ways to improve their saw?

R: Oh yeah... yeah... I do that every once in awhile when I get them guys on the phone down there... give them a few pointers or something. They could always make 'em better, don't ever kid yourself. It's awful hard to make a saw that will know what the lumberjack is gonna do with it, you know, for instance... I'll give you a for instance here. Was a guy come in here this morning with a saw and he drove... Well, he was working twenty-five miles out of town and he had to drive the twenty-five miles back to town and then twenty-five miles down here, see. So, that's fifty miles one way. He comes here with the saw and he's mad because the saw don't run... wanna start, see. Okay, I don't know what's wrong with it when he comes in, you know, so it fires a couple times and quits, good spark in it, so I figured it can't be that, so it's gotta be in the gas. So, I took the carbeurator off.

End of Side B