FINNISH FOLKLORE AND SOCIAL CHANGE IN THE GREAT LAKES MINING REGION ORAL HISTORY PROJECT 1972-1978
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Handy in assisting with the Baltic lode
Only dry wall mine

Open Pit

Hockey of greatest interest
Underground mining trips

Public support of the Lode

Immigration wise

Common

Communications failure
Miners
INTERVIEW BETWEEN:

INTERVIEWER:  Art Puotinen

INTERVIEWEE: K. Spiroff

DATE: June 20, 1973

A: We're here today with K. Spiroff in his home, and it is a very nice home. And we are going to begin by talking about some of the early migration into the Copper Country. Now, K. you were mentioning that the Italians came into the Copper Country around 1900, when the Baltic Mine was going in?

K: That is true and that is really very fortunate for the Copper Range Mining Company. When one considers the Baltic lode—it is about one hundred feet wide and the depth is very steep, it is about 70 degrees. What they did was to drive a drift into the middle of the lode—then hand-pick the rock and send the good copper rock to the surface—but what we call the poor rock, the discarded material—they build a wall and since the Italians, who came from the vineyards, they were very handy to construct this wall. There was a student miner there in the '20s who attempted to do the same thing—and it really was a joke to watch me try to put a rock in place of the miner who would just drop it, and it would fit in.

A: So when the Italians came—this was kind of like a craft that had been passed on for quite some time among the people and they just applied it to the mining?

K: Well—they were able to make the walls on the hillside—where they raised the grapes, so they were very useful to make these dry walls.

A: Was the Baltic Mine the only dry wall mine? ---in the area?

K: That's the only one. That's the only one that used that particular method of mining.

A: Was there any special advantage in the mine in having the dry wall method?

K: Well—that was the cheapest way of doing it—they could mine the low grade rock and pick and ship the high grade material to the surface and leave the poorer material. But, the reason for that was that the lode was a hundred feet wide—all the rest of the lodes in the Copper Country—most of them—were around ten feet. That was the maximum and they were much flatter.

A: So the special condition of the lode permitted this?
K: That's true.

A: Now, are there any other impressions about this mine that make it unusual? Is there anything else?

K: Well---I don't think so. Every mine has its own particularities and you have to activate yourself to them.

A: Well---let's talk a little bit about your own family---when did they come to America, and where did they come from, and where did they settle?

K: Well---our family came from Bulgaria and we came here just before the first Balkan war, and we arrived in Battlecreek, Michigan, on the first of July. Balkan

A: And what year was that?

K: That would be 1912. So, I started school in the fall and I had to learn enough English between the first of July and September in order to get along. The teacher was very kind to us and they didn't flunk any of us anyway. We had difficulty with the language, but like all children---we had, we learned fast. So, I started in the fourth grade. My sisters who were much younger than I was started in a lower grade and we all kept going.

A: So, how many brothers and sisters--

K: I have two sisters. I am the oldest one of the family.

A: What type of work did your father get when--

K: My father---for a while was a tailor in Battlecreek, but then the thing wasn't very profitable and he started to work for the Grand Trunk Railroad. So, for the last years, he was working at the railroad.

A: When you moved into Battlecreek was there sort of a small community of Bulgarians who lived together and helped one another, or was it just---you moved into Battlecreek----

K: Oh, I don't know why we really migrated into Battlecreek. There were about another hundred Bulgarians living in Battlecreek, but we for some unknown reason did not move with the other foreigners---we moved into a section all by ourselves. So, when we went to school---we were the only foreigners in that particular grade school, which I think was very fortunate for us---because we did not mingle. And I think this is one of the reasons we did well---we went one way---the family who came from Bulgaria at the same time with the same number of kids, the same ages---they did not go to school---they did not finish---they did not go to college. Well---myself and my sisters---we did go to school and
we did go to college. We did attend colleges and we graduated. We mingled with the right people—and the incentive was behind you—and that is where you went.

A: How did your parents adjust to the new environment——did they learn English also?

K: Well—they did! But, in a way my mother had the hardest adjustment——dad, because we was working outside, he learned it faster than the rest of them. But mother had considerable difficulties. But she managed and we had a lot of fun, and the home life was that on Sundays——during the dinner we spoke Bulgarian and the rest of the time, and dad required us to speak it. But the rest of the time we——we used the language that was convenient——let's put it that way.

A: So the hope that you could continue the language even though you were learning English——were there any other kinds of family traditions——Bulgarian traditions——that they tried to preserve? Did you read a Bulgarian newspaper, or——?

K: Well——for a while we did——my father did receive Bulgarian newspapers, but once we started to go to school we completely dropped it out. I think the reason for that is that we lived among people who did not speak Bulgarian. We just completely ignored it. My sisters even today——don’t speak Bulgarian at all. Although I can still read it and write it——but they have difficulties.

A: Well—it seems too that your parents were interested in your education and schooling——

K: Oh——very much so——they insisted that we keep on going! And they gave as much help as they possibly could. But, Battlecreek was very fortunate for me as far as I am concerned, because the high school only operated in the mornings——we could go to school in the mornings from about 8:00 to about 12:30. Then Battlecreek General Foods——known as postal cereal at that time, and Kellogg's——I could work from 3 to 11. So, when I became 16, I told them that I was 18; and I started to work for the food factories from 3 to 11. So, I was able to go to high school and also work,

A: After high school, you came to Tech?

K: Well——I graduated from Battlecreek High School in 1920 and I came to Houghton here, that fall, and I graduated in 1923. The first job I had then was to——because I was broke——was to come to the top of the hill——or just about where we are now——The Isle Royale Mining Company——and I was hired as a miner. So, I started to work underground——and as a miner——and that is the lowest form of labor there is in the mines.
A: What does a mucker do?

K: A mucker shovels the rock into the car, and then pushes the car to the shaft, and dumps it into the skip.

A: I suppose the mucker gets the lowest wage too.

K: That's true—that is the lowest wage—underground.

A: Do you recall what your first wage was?

K: Well—the first week I got three and a half dollars a day. But, then I toughened up—I remember the next day I had to be pushed out of bed—I was so sore—but, I toughened up by the end of the week and we started to make a bonus of 50¢ a day. So, we were making four dollars a day. Well—the mining captain did not like to see muckers make—hell, especially college graduates—making a bonus. So, he made me a safety inspector—he said my head sounded like—the ground sounded like an empty head. If you take ground that is broken and you hit it with your steel bar, it makes different sound than the sound of rock. I really was very fortunate to have that job, because then I could meander all through the mine. And the miners had to show me how to operate the machines and all that stuff. They were all nice to me, and I got acquainted with the underground methods of mining and everything else. That lasted about ninety days, and then I got a job to survey as a mining engineer at the Winona. King Phillip number two was being watered there, so I surveyed under water and did everything else a mining engineer is supposed to do, until about the first of September. Then I moved to Minnesota—at the Bennet Mine.

A: The Bennet Mine—that's iron, wasn't it.

K: That's iron—it's an open pit. So, the—in the spring of that year—that would be 1924—they put me in charge of the stripping operations—and I didn't know what stripping meant—but—just like all young fellows—you learn in a hurry. So, I stayed with them, and we had the largest electric steam shovel operation. We excavated—a couple of years there—about three and a half million cubic yards of dirt, and I learned many things—from the mine derriers, and the engineers in the Minnesota—let's put it that way. Well, being young and promotion didn't look too good—I moved to Montana. Tussvelt, Montana—that's in the Lukevelt Mountains—about eighty miles out of Great Falls. There we took an old mine and reopened it. We mined lead, zinc, and silver. One year we spent a million dollars down there, so—I know what it looks like to put a million dollars into equipment that is coming in. We built an aerial trangway and about four miles—and we equipped the mine modernly in every way. And I really found out that Minnesota really carried me—but, when I hit Montana, I had to carry on my own. There was a lot of things I never did know, or realized.
the value of when you work in a big mine. You are just one of the group. Well---I stayed there two and a half years, and just like all mining engineers---you move on. I moved to Anaconda, Montana, by that time I had acquired a wife and a child.

A: From Free, Montana. Oh, I see----you met your wife there.

K: Well----I met my wife in Minnesota, but I waited until I got to Montana before I got married. So, we stayed in Anaconda there at the smelter---and I'm not a mining engineer anymore, I'm a chemist now----in the research department. That was a very good experience as far as I am concerned--it was of a little different type. So, we worked, and one day as we looked out of the front porch ----we looked at the smoke stack which is 285 feet high----there was no smoke coming up----and there were no jobs either. The question was then, "Where shall I go?" So, I left my wife with her folks in Minnesota----in Superior, Wisconsin----and I came to Michigan Tech, and enrolled in the school. I came here in the fall, and in the spring I got my degree.

A: And that was what years now?

K: In 1932.

A: Right in the heart of the Depression. Right?

K: Yes, that's right. But, there was nothing else to do. There is no use in just sitting around.

A: So the Depression really affected the mining in Montana and all over?

K: All over. There was no work anywhere at all. So, all the mines were closed. I came in here, and I got my degree in geology this time instead of mining----and then the question was at the end of the year, "What shall I do?" And then they were opening the geology department, and Doctor Swanson asked me if I would like to teach----and I said that I would try it. So I started to teach in the geology department at Michigan Tech. So, that was good, and in the summers I began to work for other people and the first job I had in the summers was with the Department of Natural Resources----they call it the days of the dip needle survey. So for four summers, I started from the Baltic Mine and ran a survey up as far as Mass. So, in that little area we just surveyed with a magnetometer----which is --the depth needle is a lot form of magnetometer. We were looking out----we were trying to work out the position of the copper lodes between Mass and the Baltic Mine. So, that was worked out and I have reports on it. So, teaching and also working for the Conservation Department----that was very nice. Also in 1937, the Quincy Mine reopened--so, as they were unwatering the mine they used the same system that Ho-linen did----HOMESTAKE is doing now----bailing it. The miners there on the 85th level were objecting to the odor and the gas. So, they asked me if I would go underground
and see what is going on. So, Jim McCiene and I went inside the bailer, we put the ladder in it, and then we got down there in the bottom of it and looked around and the odor—the smell was from the rotten material that had accumulated and was never brought to the surface. So, I kidded the miners about it and I said that they should have done that before instead of:

A: Now what—what—?

K: Well—that's what you call the human box—the monkey box—

A: Oh,—all the crap was left over—

K: Yes, that's right. So then Jim McCiene asked me if wanted to work. So, I became the Quincy Mining Company's engineer, and also taught at the same time. So, that made it very interesting. I think it was one of the nicest things for me and also for my students—Because the problems we had with Quincy were—which is altogether different from Isle Royale Mine where I had worked before. The Quincy crown is very tight and also the ground is under terrific pressure, due to its position in the Keeweenaw surface. And for that reason you can only mine every other—you mine say thirty-five feet of the ground and you leave a pillar of thirty-five feet—so really the Quincy method of mining is really the Ruban Pillar—what we call it. It is a coal mine, but instead of being flat it is an angle of 35 degrees. So, it made it very interesting—sometimes I would only work one day a week, and during the rest of the time—I went underground and then the night shift.

A: That was a wicked schedule.

K: Well—no, not too bad—we made it interesting—you could go in at seven o'clock in the morning to go underground and you never worked after twelve. Well—one o'clock is the longest, because by that time you are through your surveying, and you can get up on the warp and ride out. The only thing is that you have to call the men—the flatman—and say that you are coming out, so he will be looking for you instead of dumping you out with a rock—in the bin. So, they were very nice to me in that way—they watched for me—the miners and everybody else. And the helper we had was Monticello, and we called him monkey—and he really was good help because he did everything I wanted him to do, and he was a character like I was. We worked great. So, we kept that way and in 1941 I decided I should get my doctor's degree—and went to the University of Michigan—on a sabbatical leave without any pay. Michigan Tech did not have a sabbatical leave when other schools had. So, the result of that was I found out that I was too old to learn German, and other languages, so I came back without getting a doctor's degree.

A: They wouldn't allow Bulgarians—

K: Well—they let me have Russian—that was easy. But you had to
have two languages. And I had my thesis---my doctor's thesis
all written up and that was published later. I really didn't
feel too bad that I didn't get it----we had a lot of good times
there, we had a lot of good men. I came back to start teaching
at Tech, and of course just one year of teaching and the war
started and it was a question of what to do now----I only had
three students in my class. So, I was asked if I wanted to work
for the Isle Royale Mining Company----so, I left Tech in 1942
around the first of July. July seems to be my month for many
things. So, I started to work in the mine for Isle Royale and it
was the same clerk I had in 1923. And he said, "I would like
you to fill out the employment card." And I said, "Well---you have
one in here." Sure enough he found it and I said, "Will you
change it from a mucker to a superintendent?" "From single to
a wife with two kids." We operated on Isle Royale with peculiar
circumstances during the war----it was very difficult---the
miners were really good---they really worked----we had a lot of
young fellows though who did not appreciate underground mining.
Our labor relationship was very strained----we had one fellow
named Gene Sauri who was trained to believe that you had no right
to pay dividends----and it was unfortunate that he told that to
the board of directors at the grievance meeting one day. And
that killed Isle Royale, because the Isle Royale Mining Company
was opened up by the local businessmen, and they put their money
in and they wanted their money out----and when he said you had
no right to pay dividends----I was told at a special meeting that
we wanted our money and we started to liquidate instead of what
we were doing.

A: Well---what sort of basis did Sauri have for that statement?

K: I don't know----Gene Sauri was good in his job----he really was
looking after his men. But, he really believed that----you had
no right----everything you had belonged to the men. That every-
thing belonged to labor. He was dedicated to that----I have to
give him credit for that, because he was good at it.

A: Well----were all the men in the Isle Royale Mine unionized at
that time?

K: Oh, yes. They were very much unionized. We were closed shop
We paid the dues and everything else. That part was ok.

A: What was the name of the union? Was it Mine, Mill, and Smelters?

K: Yes, that's right. So, by that time we started to liquidate the
mine----like anytime you try to mine the shaft-builders----sell
everything you had. By 1949 the mine was completely----everything
was sold----and the surface right and underground material was
bought by Copper Range. So, I went back to teaching again, I
was back and again and then I started in the summers ----went into
the Ford Motor Company----and they were interested in a large
tract of land----they wanted to know if there was any mineral of
value on it. So, I hired five other students, and the six of us, as independent contractors, went through all the Ford lands and wrote reports on them. We wrote reports on them and we evaluated them as A, B, C, and D. A is valuable land, B is get rid of it as soon as you can—and Ford sold most of the land to Celotex. Then after I got through with Ford, American Can heard about it and they wanted their lands evaluated. When I got through with American Can, I went to Oen, Illinois—another paper company came along. So, for the last eighteen to twenty years I have been busy doing that kind of work.

A: In lumbering then?

K: Well—in land evaluation. I was still in geology. I didn’t have anything to do with the trees. Mine was all mineral. So, if I come on your forty acres and—I am supposed to tell you that has mineral on it. Hang on to it, see?

A: Could you say something about the method of your evaluation? How did you do it?

K: That’s pretty hard to put down in a few words. This is the things—you have to go over the land, see what type of rocks it is made up of—and let’s take as an example the last job, The Department of the United States Government—the Munising Park Service. Well—they are the same—the only valuable land is the same—so, I went over the surface and on every section that you walked, you looked; you knew you wouldn’t see very much, but you looked anyway—look for as many rock crops as possible. The ledges of rock and get the location of them, and get the elevations. So I made two maps from that—the bottom of the sandstone and the top of the sandstone. Well—I had these maps, and I knew the height of the sand that was in there—I could figure the volume of sand that was available to be mined. And discover what the limestone and glacial drift are on top of that. So, I got the geology. Now the next thing I had to figure out was whether or not that sand in there was valuable. So, this is glass sand, and it is really beautiful white sand—it is about 98% pure—quartz. Unfortunately there is a little bit of pyrite in it, and there is also another mineral glaconite—that is a pot ash silicate. Once I took the samples of it—and I was very fortunate at Cleveland Cliffs, they had done a lot of drilling, and they let me see the records. That helped a great deal. Then I asked for some help since I had worked for Olen, Illinois—and they were glass people—they make glass—I took a sample from them and then they ran tests on the sand and told me how much money it would take to mill the sand and get rid of the impurities. Sand has got to be 99.94% pure in order to make glass out of it—you can’t have any impurities. Then after you found out the cost of that the next thing was transportation—How am I going to get it to Detroit to the market. So, you have to find a market for it, the sales,
and everything. The net result after you get all this information down is the value. That's what determines the value. You have to be able to sell it. In other words, you have to consider the amount of it, where it is, how much you have, how much it is going to cost to mine it, how much it is going to cost to mill it, how much it is going to cost you to transport it, and who is going to buy it. So, all those factors come in. And that is the same with everything you deal in in mine work.

A: Well---your life has been based so much on Michigan Tech in this area---I'd like to go back a little bit. You mentioned that you were a student here beginning in 1920---do you have any recollections of your student days here? When you first started out, what was the campus like?

K: Well---the campus was very small, let's put it that way. When I came in 1920, I think there was a hundred of us freshman---and that was the largest freshman class-----all together there were about 300 students,-----on the campus.

A: Were a lot of the students veterans of World War I?

K: Yes, there were quite a few GI's. They made it very interesting to us high school kids. They had a GI come in here who was making about $100 a month. They made life very very interesting. Some of us tried to keep up with them,--------

(End of side #1 of the tape)

A: When you said you tried to keep up with them, did you mean in the classroom or having a good time with them?

K: Well----both. In the classroom, I think we could do it; but outside the classroom we found out that we should just give up. Most of us just gave up.

A: What did--

K: Remember this is the probation days-----so you had to drink some of that core liquor in Hancock or wherever you could get it----and that was tough.

A: Were there some special places that the boys would like to go?

K: Well---we used to go in the Flaming Corn Cob, that's in the neighborhood of Ginos now--and I remember that for fifty cents we would just sit around this potbelly stove and drink a bottle of wine. We used to call it Dogo Red in those days, and if you would sit with your overcoat on near the stove----well, you felt pretty good----after you drank one bottle. Then you had to walk home because that was all the money that we usually had to spend, and the streetcar was running then----and that's about the only--
so you could follow the streetcar track from Ginos in Hancock to Michigan Tech. By the time you got home you felt good any-way—not completely on the normal side.

A: Were there any places on this side of the canal where there were little operations like—

K: Oh, sure—they were every place—you could find them.

A: Did these local operations run into any trouble with the law?

K: Well—as far as we Tech students—they never bothered us very much. The sheriff raided them once in a while, but it never involved any of us college kids. We had a good student—we had the beginning of the hockey then, so there were enough Canadian students then—we had good local kids who were good hockey players—and we played the University of Michigan and we broke even with them—I would have to look up the records—we played Notre Dame, we played one game in Houghton; and the next game we went to Calumet on a streetcar. We had to get two or three special streetcars to go to Calumet. We might just as well have gone to Notre Dame—because all the Calumet people were for Notre Dame. This was because two of their players—one who was Andersen, I think—he was a good football player too—he was also a hockey player, so he was from Calumet and so they were all for them, and not Tech. But, it was all a lot of fun. And we had our dances in the local—in the gymnasium—so the social life was very interesting. And I got involved in the student publication which started in the spring of 1921. I was first a reporter and as time went on I was the Business Manager, then I became chief editor of it.

A: Was it called the Lode then?

K: Yes, it was called the Lode. I have a copy—excuse me, I'll show you what I have got. So, here is the first issue of the MCM Lode—which I acted as a reporter. And you will notice that this is one Thursday, February 17, 1921.

A: Oh—this is really an old—

K: I think that someday I'll have to give it to the Michigan Tech library.

A: Yes, I am sure they would like that. There is only one more copy of this—you see every copy that I worked on—there is three years work here. The stenographer—there was only one stenographer on the campus, her name was Glorie Goodrow—who is Mier's wife now—she did most of the typing. Then the Gazette published it. So, I saved one copy for her and one copy for myself—and I had them bound and I gave her one and I have the other. So, there is the whole Tech life—my life, as far as I
am concerned

A: Well—you had a sense of history even then. You knew how important it was to save these things.

K: Well—not very much saving it, but I was interested in that type, and being foreign born, this made it very important as far as I was concerned—I had to write good English, or else they wouldn't publish it. There is the first hockey team—you will notice that in the center the manager is Lovel—and Andicott Lovel—

A: He was mining captain, or how would you--------?

K: No, he was a student then

A: Oh, I see. Then he later became the mining------

K: There's Notre Dame. And there's Rolly Parks, from Lake Linden—and here's from Houghton—there were a lot of Houghton kids—they were very interesting. I didn't know very much about hockey, although I had to do some of the writing. Here's Spike Lawson—don't call him Spike today—he is retired and he is the general manager of Phillips—Dodge. I hope he comes here this summer.

A: I notice here a reference made to C.H. Benedict—did you know him----?

K: Well—Benedict lectured at Tech at that time. He was a special lecturer. He was a very nice fellow and he was one of the best lecturers I ever had. He knew what to say and he said it. He had our students at heart anyway—we all went to hear his lectures—none of us ever missed any of his lectures.

A: Well—let's talk a little bit about the sports. There seems to be a great interest in hockey—how about any other sports?

K: Well—our football was only played with the Marquette Normals—we called them. That is Northern Michigan University in Marquette today. We just had a couple of games and that was all. Baseball in the spring was more important, though. They had the college teams that played with the local fellows.

A: In your classroom work did you have assignments that you went and observed in the mine? I think that is what you-------- said earlier, didn't you?

K: That's right. We all had to go underground and make mine trips. This was in the freshman year for those who took the mining course. Then, later on we went in the iron country—so, we were underground there. So, really we had a lot of field trips—not only in the copper mines, but in the iron mines. We went through all the mills and all the shops—and we had to write reports,--on everything we did.
A: What were the conditions of those mines in those early '20s?

K: Well--I don't know what you mean by conditions--

A: Ya, I guess that is too general a question.

K: The fellows were very good as far as that goes----very good employment as far as I could see----

A: No. ----In other words, the mining industry was going strong in the twenties. And ----the thirties were really the rough times.

K: Well---in the 1930's all the mines closed. There was no operation at all. That Depression was tough all throughout the United States, and when it hit the Copper Country---all the mines closed. There was no place to go.

A: Ya. You gave----in the thirties you mentioned that you were able to do some schooling. Do you have any recollections of the Copper Country as a whole----what were people doing to make a go of it?

K: Well---most of them were on the W.P.A.----they were building highway, roads----or snow statues, or what in the world not----but this is a difficult type of work. Some of them were cutting wood, for themselves or the W.P.A. people----most of them were on the W.P.A. It was a very depressing time, as far as work goes. Then when the Copper Range opened up again and the copper prices went up-----Calumet and Hecala opened up and the mine started. The things began to brighten up again.

A: No, come right in----we're just talking about the school days and beyond that. Well---this looks very interesting----you had a busy----

K: I'm glad you opened to that page. Notice the class in those days the freshmen and the sophomores seed who could cut the most of each other's hair. They had to drop this as the school got bigger----they got too many involved and people began to get hurt, so----they cut it out. All the aching in most colleges is out anyway. But, I used to enjoy that aching. I know in my freshman days, we used to get right in front of Nelsons----right there in the middle of town, and so we had a wrestling match and helped cut each other's hair. Then we swapped the locks and put them in the gymnasium on the bulletin board. So, if you had red hair, that was very prominent.

A: Well----it seems that over the years Michigan Tech has had pretty fair relationships----both the students and the school----with the community.

K: Well----I think so, yes. They really supported the Lodge. I know if it wasn't for the community buying all the ads, which the
businessmen did—most of the people in town did subscribe to 
the Lode which is a dollar a year. That is the only reason we 
were able to publish it—because 300 hundred students can not 
publish a newspaper we if it did come out every week—every 
other week. You have to have money coming in somehow—you have 
got to have subscriptions. So, the townspeople really helped out.

A: I was noticing an article here some presentation that was being 
made by Judge P.H. O'Brien. And I was just wondering—have you been active at all in local politics?

K: No, I stay out of politics of any kind. I stay to teaching and 
field and that kind of work. I am too busy to get involved in 
politics.

A: I am just curious about the attitudes of the local people. Do 
you think the political issues that have been of the most interest 
to the people—are restricted just to the Copper Country? Or 
did the people get pretty much involved in the presidential cam-
paign?

K: Well—again I have never—I have voted and that is it. Then I 
drop it right there. So, my wife and I outside; stay with the 
historical things—-we don’t get in politics of any kinds. We 
try to stay out of that. You have to be a special breed of cat 
to be able to handle himself. Along that line.

A: Did --let's go a little—we talked about the Depression—-to World War II. A lot of the men in the area went off to the ser-
vice; and then the need for copper metal again started.

K: Well—the government really wanted the copper—-so they—
if you worked in the copper mines, you didn't have to go in the 
army—-let's put it that way. Even in that a lot of them went/. We did not have enough miners, and they tried to bring an out-
sider in here to work in the local mines——but, that didn't 
prove too good. They are not practical enough. ' 

A: By outsider do you mean an immigrant or what?

K: No, they brought in some copper coal miners—they were coal min-
ers and they let them come in at Isle Royale——we had about a 
half a dozen. But, they didn't last—they didn't like under-
ground mining. They were used to coals, which is altogether dif-
ferent from hard rock mining——as we practice at Isle Royale. 
And from six months to a year they went into the army——they 
would rather go into the army than mine. We could use a lot of 
more men and mine a lot more copper, but they were not available. 
This is the trouble with underground mining——you just can't 
start——like you do with an open pit——get another shovel and 
get to it. It is a slow process.

A: Well—after World War II—you were the superintendent here, 
and as a superintendent you had a lot of men under you———-
were the miners of various nationalities—or were they?

K: Oh, yes. That's—we had what you might say a little bit of everything, and there is a book that the Isle Royale Mining Company has—if I could only get hold of it—it will show the migration of the people as they came to work for the Isle Royale Mining Company. You see, The Isle Royale Mining Company is a very old company.

A: It goes back how long?

K: Well—-it goes back almost a hundred years. As the people—it is all in one letter, all in one book—-so, if I could ever get hold of that book it would be very interesting. I will write it up and give it to you then.

A: One of the things that we have been interested in getting is the impressions of how the different nationalities got along together.

K: There was hardly ever any trouble, because there was never too many of one nationality in one place. It is really interesting if you look back in the historical history of the Copper Country. The first group that came in here were the Englishmen—-what we call the Cornishmen. They were the predominant ones. The reason for that is that the mines at Cornwall, which were tin-copper—they were going out. They were getting too uneconomical to work. So, they migrated to the United States and when they asked where they should go—you go were the job is that you know—and that is mining. So, they went into the iron country as well as the Copper Country. They went underground and the Irishmen also came in. You had the Irishmen, and the Cornishmen, and then when the Frenchmen started to come in—they migrated into the United States, and most of them came in through Canada. But they did not like the underground—that's why they went to Lake Linden and Hubbell in the mills. And when I came here in 1920 you could go by streetcar through Calumet and Franklin and get down into Lake Linden—and they talked French there. And I knew ten words of French, and I had a lot of fun. Those three nationalities—let's repeat—were the dominant nationalities. Of course the Germans started to come in, but they went into the shops. So, if you look in—you had very good shops—very good mechanics, through and through; but most of them were of German descent. The people were going into what they knew. Then the Italians came in around 1910. So, it began to get all mixed up. The Austrians came in—there's a lot of them in the Copper Country. They call themselves Austrians, but they are Yugoslavians really. But, this is when Austria took over part of Servia—through Serbina, Hungary—and those people migrated in great wards to the United States. So you might went wherever there was work, and there was all this work for low labor of that type in the mines. So they came to the Copper Country. So, really when you find a fellow Austen—you ask what his name is and you will find that he is what we call a southern slav. Then the Finns started to
come in, and then the Bulgarians came in in small flocks just before the Bulgan Wars. As they were coming in from Europe, you can notice that they only came in from one end—and they just migrated farther and farther into the depth of Europe. They came to the U.S.A. So, underground you never see too many people at once—you see one level, you have maybe four or five miners drifting and then also you have a bunch of them working in the stoke. But in the stoke you never have more than four or five men. The muckers are by themselves. So, if the mining captain is smart he will put his best men on the machines and the fellows who just came in—they were the ones with the shovels to fill the rocks and do that type of work.

A: Now was there any problem with language with these people?

K: No, you didn't have to know the language. After all you could point to the shovel—you will learn enough. But the language barrier didn't provide any difficulty at all. The Finns when they started to come in, they were the timbermen, so up in the 20's—where I am the most familiar—there were hardly any other nationalities other than the Finns that were working in the shaft. They did all the timbering—they were all Finnish people, because it was really interesting to watch them swing an axe and take a chip off and then place the timber in the right place. You and I ought to try this sometime—we would have to try for a long time before we got it in the right position. This is the way it had to be done and they did it.

A: Where did the timber come from?

K: In the local woods. They brought it in and then they cut fourteen foot timbers and they were sliced and brought in and taken underground, and cut into the shape that you needed.

A: You say that because they were so busy at work they got along ok underground—but how was it above ground?

K: Well—I guess you did have your conflicts—but, I didn't see anything at all. Like in Dodgeville number 2 location, didn't always get along, but—--------

A: Did the nationalities live in little clusters, or was it kind of an intermingling--------

K: They lived in little clusters, and then pretty soon they began to intermingle and that's how they broke up. You see you'd come in first in the boarding house, and if you were an Austrian you would call it the Austrian boarding house. Well—you started and he brought his brother and his uncle and everyone else in. And the first thing after that they began to split up.

A: Well--------there were a lot of boarding houses when there were a lot
single men, but were there a lot of boarding houses in the 20s too?

K: There were not too many, but there was always some. The single men always dominated.

A: Was there a fair amount of intermarriage between the ____?

K: Oh, yes. That came in and that worked out very nicely. In the Copper Country and in the mines you never had any ratio——ratio conflicts of any kind——well, one fellow might think he was a little better than the other guy for a little while, but it never lasted very long. If you found out that two fellows didn't work very good it was very easy to transfer them to another mine, or something else, and things would improve very quickly. At least I never saw any, either here or in Montana.

A: Did you notice any attempt by any of the different ethnic groups to kind of maintain their language and their culture and traditions, or was everybody kind of anxious to melt into the local traditions?

K: I think that in the 20s and up until the 40s, I think we all believed in the American decision, let's up it that way. Those days are not now, Most of us believe that we want to be American citizens. So that is the dominant factor——Americanization. You may have been proud that you were a Bulgarian, or a Finn, or something like that——an Austrian———but, you did not glow about it once you got out of the home.

A: Well——do you think a big factor then was the public school? Were the teachers kind of emphasizing that or——?

K: No I don't think so——I think it was just a general trend

A: Just overall——school, church, and the whole bit———?

K: Ya. I know here ———my college roommate went to Ripley——— and it was a nice school because the people wanted to become American citizens so bad. They had enough English to become one, so he literally taught night-school to those people so they could become American citizens. So, most of us wanted to be American citizens———that was the most important phase.

A: Well——that's very interesting to see the strong pull from Americanization from———

K: That's what bothers me today. Sometimes you can ask, "Are you an American citizen, or are you an Indian?" And they will say, "I'm an Indian." You can't be both, you see——you have to be one or the other. You have to be an American citizen———you can't be both. You have to decide——and if you decide to be a Bulgarian and live in the United States———you are going to be out of luck. Sooner or later———the law of nature won't let you.
A: Well----I guess that fixes the questions on the ethnic thing. There is one area that we haven't talked about and that's a little more current. We've gone up through the 20s, 30s, 40s, 50s, and 60s----you mentioned passing your contact with Gene Saurri at the Isle Royale Mine. Do you have any impressions about the strike in '60? And the circumstances that finally closed the mine?

K: Well---really I don't know. That really shouldn't have happened in the United States. Personally I think that the local union was so bitter against the copper mine----the copper management, and the management was new----and the oil company did not realize that they were dealing with a different kind of group. And they couldn't get together at all. And neither one told the other one what they were doing----I think that this is the whole story behind it. The local union was not telling the members what the management was telling the local union. Then when they did find out it was too late-----each side was too bitter against the other.

A: So really it was a failure to communicate by the two----

K: By the both sides. I think if we had someone to come in here and say, "Come on fellows, let's get together and solve this." If we had that the mines would be operating today. If we operated in the 50s at a twenty cent copper, certainly a fifty cent copper mine could operate. But, that's one of the hardest things for me to visualize----that the United States could not communicate between two peoples. To have a strike of that length----that was too long----I could see lasting six months or something like that.

A: Were federal or state mediators-----weren't they of any help in this ----?

K: In this particular area, they didn't seem to be able to get the two groups together. To spit it out in the open.

A: In this Oral History Project, we've talked to people much older than you who were residents here prior to 1920, and some of them have been part of the copper strike and some were near or in the Italian hall-----now that's something that happened years ago. Do you think that early strike still has any kind of bearing on people's thinking here?

K: Well----I don't see why it should. Because most of the people then moved out. You see, when they had that strike then----most of the western mines started to open up----the western mines were opened up with Michigan money anyway, and mining engineers from Michigan Tech were going out west; so they knew----"I need men in here, just like they do today" and so the fellows who had a lot of gumpson (sp) they went out west-----people who didn't have much in the local. To Montana or Arizona-----and they started to develop the western mines. They took what I considered the crop of the miners----the best part of them----cause those fellows had
the gumpsion—they wanted to advance and go ahead. They are the ones who say, "I'm not going to work here—I'm going where I will advance." So, the people who were left here were good men, but they would rather stay in the Copper Country than go anywhere else. So, we lost—the driving force of the new mines was lost during that strike; and we never recovered from it. It is hard to explain how that developed, but you can see—well—let's take in the athletics. You can have a football team and sometimes it takes one or two men to make it—and then if you lose those two men, you still have the other group left; but the driving force is gone.

A: Now by driving force are you referring to people who were miners, or engineers—?

K: No, I'm referring to miners. I'm talking about the miners. This is what I was asking Andrews. He says that miners are only getting so much a day—well, really in the Michigan Copper Country, you have to say that the mining employees were getting so much a day. Then you would tell them the truth, because the miners—say if you have two hundred men working at the mine—there are only fifty miners. The other 150 men—you have about 30 men which are muckers—and those eighty men are the producers. They are the key men—and they are on a contract. Now the other men are the ones who feed into

(end of side #2 of the tape)