FINNISH FOLKLORE AND SOCIAL CHANGE IN THE GREAT LAKES MINING REGION ORAL HISTORY PROJECT 1972-1978
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SUBJECT: Activities preceding the formal organization of the Coop (Pelkie), early Communist activity, problems early Finnish farmers faced, and the early days of the Mineral Range Railroad.

SOURCE: Bill Weisnam

COMMENTS: The source is 82 years of age and he remembers very well. By many people he is regarded as a sage - a source of wisdom and a natural "folk" historian. This is high quality oral history data.

I: I was wondering if maybe you could tell me something about how the early, early phase of the Co-op got started, like who was involved in thinking up the idea of the Co-operative and why did they have to get it started here and sort of telling me about that. I've heard that it started with the idea of buying feed.

R: Well, I can't remember exactly what year it was. Do you mean the store or the creamery?

I: The store.

I think that store was opened in 1917.

R: That's what I've heard. Why did the farmers feel that they needed something like that?

I: Well, they felt this way, that the stores was running away with the prices. And when they organized the Co-op store up here, well, that kind of checked their hoggish.

I: What stores were opened at the time? How many stores were in Pelkie?

R: Matt Oja's store and then Ruona's store.

I: Ruona's was across the street where the building supply warehouse is now?

R: Yeah, where the Co-op lumber warehouse is there.

I: There were only two stores at the time then in Pelkie?

R: Yeah, and then one across the street there, Suomela ladies, that used to be the post office there, too. That was the first store in Pelkie.

I: Well, I heard that Ruona and Oja were secret partners in that at one time. Have you heard anything about that, that Matt Ruona actually owned Oja's store at one time, or owned a good share in it?

I don't know. Might have been afterwards. Anyway, when Ruona went out of business and Pesola and Oja bought the store and Maki, they bought Ruona's building then.

Pesola and Maki?

Yeah, Pesola and Maki.

Who were some of the men who were the primary movers of this Co-op idea who got it started? I've heard El Pelto, John Erikainen, and I've also heard that your father was....

R: He was a member of the Board of Directors. He was a member of the Board of Directors. He was not the original starter of it. But there was a fellow by the name of August Juntunen and Erikainen, Pelto, Simonen.

I: Who was this Simonen?

R: August Simonen, he was a farmer...and I just can't think, my memory is kind of bad.

I: In the early days there was some kind of a Socialist movement there in Pelkie, right?

R: Yeah, Socialist movement first started that Co-op idea...and there was, what was his name
Now, he lived down there close to Walitale's...

I: Maybe it'll come back later. But there were quite a few of them around?

R: Yeah, oh yeah.

I: But even the non-Socialist Christians thought it was a good idea, right?

R: Yeah.

I: Lots supported it, eh?

R: Yeah, and then were the ones that kept the money then afterwards, you see, it was after the First World War, then there came a rift, you know there came this Communist name and Communist idea. First it was Bolshevik and then after First World War Russians changed it to Communist. They took that name Communist, and there was quite a few, I'd say about 50 percent was Communist.

I: Of the members?

R: Of the membership...with Communist ideas but still some of them was supporting the church. Then during that depression what we had, then there came a rift.

I: When was this, now?

R: That was around 1934 or '35, something like that. There came a rift in the Socialist, or the Communist Party, so there was two kinds of Communists there then...that kind of slowed down that for awhile but then this other party what they belong now here, they start becoming then. They had a nice store in Bruce Crossing, Mass, Ontonagon, Pelkie, Watten, and Maple Ridge up in there, they start going. They had one in Marquette, one in Negaunee, and I guess they had one in Ishpeming, too.

I: When did the creamery start?

R: And when did it end...does '56 sound pretty good?

R: I think it ended around...let me see...I think it was around '28 or '29, something like that.

I: That it ended?

R: Yeah, then Matt Oja, Ed Pelto and Ed Pelto's brother August, and what was that ( ? ) butter maker's name...

I: Was he German?

R: No, he was a Norwegian...well, anyway, they get together and they rented that business and the building for $15 a month and that there Co-op business, their store was this Co-operative ideas too, you know. Well, there came...after they had some bad luck there, so then they didn't get as much support from the people anymore. There was a fellow by the name of Kananen, he was a manager and he done some foolish deals and people didn't trust him anymore, very , as finally these people that rented that cheese factory, Matt Oja, Ed Pelto, Pesola...

I: Was this a private thing at the time now?

R: No, it weren't, was a Co-operative...same plan as the store almost.

I: Oh, they just owned the building and rented the building.
R: They owned the building...all the machinery and the building, farmers owned. They were in debt so deep. Even my dad got one of those notes...$50...he paid that. And there were several others went jointly...went good for $100 but there's quite a few of them didn't pay that note...all they promised but didn't pay...so then they I spoke about...they took over the creamery then. If there was anything coming from anyplace, well, they kept the money, too. Then, there were...Plough, he was the head of...and he got little tee haggish...so then the farmers get together and decided to put up a cheese factory. I think that became around about 1934 or '35.

I: Until then it was the creamery, right?

R: No, creamery was where the fire hall is now in Pelkie, that's where the creamery was.

I: The cheese factory was in a separate building then?

R: Yeah, it was ever there...behind the Co-op store up there on the left there where the machineries are...that's the old cheese factory ever there.

I: Is that a stone building now, that one?

R: No, it's a wooden building...frame building...and that was going good...that cheese factory was going good.

I: Local farmers would take their milk there?

R: Yeah, and that put competition to these other milk buyers...they were skimming the farmers right and left. Then when these government inspections came so tight, well...the war came in...after the Second World War, the farmers began to sell their cattle away, and their kids, sons and daughters, began to go to big cities...so then they decided to close this creamery, been closed since.

Wasn't there a little union activity at the time, too?

Yeah, there was.

I: Let's go to something you just mentioned. You said after the Second World War farmers began to sell their cows. Why did they...

R: It's around 1950, something like that, when they start getting rid of their cattle.

I: Why was this?

R: Like I said, after the government cut out the supports, the government used to pay as high as 10 cents a hundred-weight or was it butter fat...something like 10 cents. Then when Eisenhower came for president, then they started going way out and that's when the people start selling their cattle.

I: So up until that time the government had paid a certain price support?

R: Yeah, for milk and cream.

I: And this helped the farmers quite a bit?

R: Yeah.

I: When did the price support system start?

R: During the Second World War.

I: In the early 40s or the late 30s?
H: Just a little before the war started, it began.
I: When Eisenhower came in he stopped it.
R: Yeah.
I: Did the price of milk take a downward trend?
R: Everything went down just like that when the price supports came off.
I: Do you recall how low it went?
R: No, I don't recall.
I: It was pretty bad though?
R: Yeah.
I: Do you remember farmers around here selling their cows?
R: Oh, yeah...we sold our cows after my brother died in 1964...pretty good prices then.
I: Were there some other reasons why farmers were beginning to drop out of the business of farming?
R: Of course there could be. But like I said, when the young folks went away from home and left the old people home, that had lots to do with it.
I: Why do you think so many young people left the area?
R: Well, they got bigger money up in town. Automobile factories was paying pretty good, mines was paying good...always looking like...they even came from Ishpeming over here looking for miners...they thought farmers were good workers and knew the game of handling machines and like that, I suppose...that's only my idea.
I: Was the government at the time also making it kind of rough for the farmers by inspections and laws?
R: Well, the Democratic Party was good to the farmers. But just as soon as Eisenhower came in to office in 1953, it start going...we were buying pigs over here, dressed pigs for 5 cents a pound from Pelkie...they were coming from the packing house...that's how it went. They were bringing pork from France, even 12,000,000 hogs they brought from France over here, cut down the prices on the farmers...in Eisenhower's time they took these here price supports away.
I: I remember that there were also some laws passed in the 50s--the milk house law.
R: Yeah, there was laws and people quit spending. State inspectors come around your barn, getting tighter every time, pretty tight right now.
I: Do you remember when inspectors would come by? Do you remember any of these inspectors?
R: No, they didn't come to our place at all. But they came several places over here. There was a fellow by the name of Jack Tauriainen...his wife was in bad shape...she was very sickly and the kids were gone away so he couldn't keep up with all the work as the inspector went over there and told him to do this and do that so Jack was already disgusted about it as he said, "I'm coming back in six weeks. I want to have this all fixed up, this barn, so and so." He said, "I fix, I fix them, I fix them." So he came back a little earlier than six weeks...omes up the house he says, "Did you fix the barn?" "Yessiree, I fix them."
Meantime he had sold all the cattle. So then they went into the barn and he said, "Where's your cows?" He said, "I sold the cows." "So you fixed the barn that way."

I: That happened quite a bit, didn't it?

Yes, but you could tell... like Bob Peterson ever here, he was with the government in Triple A, you know. Well, he was ever here around Nisula and Alston and a lot around here... there was 139 milk shippers... now there's about 5 or 6. That's how much difference it means.

I: That's something. You know it's more than just the fact that people aren't making money farming. When they stepped farming, it changes the whole way of life, I think.

R: Oh, yeah.

I: Have you noticed any changes in the way of life around here? You've been here quite a while.

R: Yeah, there's lot of changes. 'Course we're getting old, we're not able to work any more so we had to give up farming on account of that... but we're here, we didn't live only on the farms, we had bush... wintertimes we worked in the bush and helped the farming that way. I mean, we didn't make our living on the farm alone... and sometimes when we didn't have any jobs cutting out of our own, wood cutting of our own, we used to go to lumber camps and earn our money.

I: I heard that one time there was a lot of pine in the area.

There was.

I: Was there pine ever here?

R: Not while we were here. Pine was taken away before we got here.

I: Were there big stumps all around?

R: Oh, yeah. We had... where that garage is that's across that ditch there, there was a stump on top of the knoll there, that was close to 5 feet thick. Then we had one tree over there-- pine tree-- that was about close to 5 feet thick near the ground ( ?? ). That was on our land but before we got here somebody had put the line around it and his name was Gidding. He took that pine away and shipped it away.

I: Who was Gidding? There's a place, a siding, named after him.

R: Yeah, there was Gidding. He had a farm this side of Baraga... you know where the Grandville Saloon is... you go towards Baraga, there's a little gas station there, too, when you come... well, the first building from the gas station, that's Maki's farm, and then the farm towards Baraga from there, the next one, that was Andrew Gidding's farm. That's where he used to live.

I: Is Ed Kauppila living there now?

R: Yeah, I guess it's Kauppila.

I: How come the siding was named after him if he lived way over there?

R: He used to log here.

I: Did he have big operations going?

R: Yeah, he had sometimes... well, he wasn't always out making his own... he used to be a
camp foreman also.

I: There was a camp right out here?
R: Yeah, a mile away from here, there was a camp.
I: Where was the camp located?
R: You knew where mine crushing plant was there? It was just about 500 feet from the gate down towards the east. That's where there was a crossing, a siding there... across the railroad tracks.
I: The pine was gone when you came here.
R: Yeah.
I: Do you remember pulling out any of these stumps or working on them?
   Well, we didn't pull them out, we blasted them out with dynamite.
I: How many sticks would it take to get one of these big ones out?
   'Course I blasted one stump, it took 30 sticks.
   Then you had to do a lot of pulling, too?
R: Yeah, we had the teams pull out the roots.
I: How many horses would it take to pull these roots out?
R: Team. Team of horses.
I: Devil's work, wasn't it?
R: Oh, yeah.
I: How does it make you feel when you drive by an area and you see that they're planting pine trees in these clearings?
R: Well, I think it's a good idea. Some of the clearings get poor soil and pine grows on light soil... on sandy soil and like that... although down here, too, what they call clay country ever here, south of the West Branch River there, that's all clay but there used to be a lot of pine there. When the fire went through there it was all white clearing... there wasn't a tree there, only lot of pine stumps.
I: What about some of the soil that is pretty good that's being brushed in. How do you feel about that?
R: They shouldn't let it grow. Even our place we get some of that brushes are growing. I don't agree with that but my brothers, they says, "To hell with it".
I: How does it make you feel to see the brush coming in after you knew what it took to clear it?
R: Doesn't make you feel good 'cause it's hard work to clean it... and get it into... if 'twas in shape for grain and for grass and potatoes and like that, you knew... lot of hard work. Like we used... my dad... we used to blast lot of stumps. A 50 pound box of dynamite cost $10, sometimes $11, and then a roll of fuse cost $2 and sometimes we get them for $1.75... and then caps... they were $2 for 100 caps.
A: Around what year were these prices?
B: That was 19...well, it really begin 1907.
A: So it was kind of an expensive operation just to get those stumps out of there?
B: Oh, yeah, yeah. Cost a lot of money.
A: In these days that was a lot of money.
B: A dollar was big them days...then after First World War...government was selling that dynamite that they didn't need anymore and they were coming in on 100 pound boxes—we get $7 a box. Gidding was setting them ever there and selling them near Baraga on his farm there. One time I went and get a ton of it from them. 'Course they wasn't all for us, our neighbors get a few boxes out of it, too. They doesn't call it dynamite, they call it Picker Acid. It was that kind of stuff when you handle it, it's awful greasy and they had a bad smell on it.
A: Could you hear blasting these days when you'd go outside? Could you hear blasting in the distance?
B: Oh, yeah. In the spring, especially, when the farmers were working on their farms...and then again in the fall when they began to plow. They were doing some land ( ?? ) before they went in the woods.
A: How do you think your dad would feel if he saw this place brushing in?
B: I don't think he'd be feeling very good.
A: Do you think he'd roll over in his grave and he'd like to come up and start pulling out some of that brush?
B: Yeah, if he'd seen on the road side the fences laying down, he would go hot under his hat.
A: He put a lot of work into this place, didn't he?
B: Oh, boy, yeah. First he done some real long days here...from sunrise to sunset he worked. But he didn't work on Sundays, though...only when there was a case of have to.
A: Do you think today's generation could do what was done then?

They could if they want to. Get to have a lot of ambition. Nowadays the young people ever here, they just want to go to school or have mini-bikes and like that...we didn't even have a bicycle when we were here.

Times were a little harder in those days, right?
B: Oh, yeah. Well, we came here we didn't have no road till...well, only road we had was the railroad. But we were better off than the pioneers were, they didn't even have a railroad when they came here. Only they had that Ontenagen road it was nothing but a trail.
A: M-38 new? The Ontenagen trail. Just a trail through the woods?
B: Just a trail through the woods. The company that made that road, for making that road they get sections and sections of land from the government just to make that trail.
A: What company was that that made that, do you remember?
R: I forget the name of that company ( ?? ).... Fox bought that.

(Side B of Tape)

I: When I was here the other day you were mentioning when the railroad came into Hamar.
When did that railroad come all the way up to Hamar or did it come to Froberg first?

R: It started from Keweenaw Bay and then kept on coming...there was two or three contractors.
There was one contractor had his camps here where that next farm is ever there. They
had their camps there and then there was another one ever there on the other side of
Nisula...they had their camps there, and I guess they had one contractor around Mass
ever there. One contractor was ever there by the name of Butler...that was on the
other side of ( ?? )...

I: What year did the railroad get as far as Hamar?

R: Oh, from Hamar? Well, I couldn't tell you about that but they started building that
railroad 1899 from Keweenaw Bay. Copper Range was building there, they build that same
time from the Copper Country ever there to Mass. Then at the time just before the
crossing was, well Copper Range was the first to get across the St. Paul track...so when
the Mineral Range went across Copper Range tracks, then the Mineral Range had to pay for
the flagmen and the crossing...crossing name was ( ?? )...

I: Did a lot of guys find employment building that railroad here? I heard there were
section crews.

R: Well, there was these contractors, they had their own crews.

I: But weren't there section crews after the railroad was built?

R: After the rails were laid out, then they get the section crews.

I: How many men were on a section crew, generally?

R: Well, all depends. The first years they had 12 men and a boss.

I: What section crews were operating around here?

R: There was starting from Keweenaw Bay was Section 11, Section 12, here was 6 and 13, and
there was Section 14, 15, 16.

I: What kind of work would the section crews do? Did you ever work on one?

R: Yeah.

I: What kind of work would they do?

R: They put in ties and lifted the joints and tamped the ties and changed the rails and then
there was some other odd jobs besides that, too.

I: What was the hardest work there?

R: Tamping ties, that was the hardest.

I: What was so hard about that?

R: Well, we had to get the sand under the tie...and you had to push with the shovel blade
like this...and that was hard on your feet...and them hard on your shoes. But nowadays
they get machines to do that.
I: That was for replacing ties?
R: Yeah, even if a track sank a little bit, well, they had to raise them ties up and put some more sand in there underneath it. Then again when you put a new tie in, you had to tamp it, too.

I: What tamping means is just packing sand in there real hard?
R: Tamping sand under the tie.
I: And hard, too, eh?
R: Yeah.

I: Did these early railroads require a lot of repair?
R: Yeah, well, they did quite a bit...frost done lot of damage in the winter months...and that's what caused lot of that track as it wasn't level.

I: It would heave just like the roads do?
R: It would heave just like the roads.
I: These section crews, then, would probably work year around?
R: Oh, yeah, except in wintertime they only had...like this section here only had two men besides the boss.

I: Do you remember any outstanding characters on that railroad? You knew what I mean by character--you knew, just sort of outstanding personality, in either way, you knew, just these colorful people that we call characters.
R: Well, there was one fellow, his name was Charlie Warren. He was quite a character to my opinion.

I: What was he like?
R: He was very naughty and he was a great man for females and he had some of the rettiest stories but you wouldn't want to listen all to them...but otherwise a good fellow...he treats you right...but he had some other weaknesses like that...and then he sometimes he act pretty tough, too...and just an account of his mouth he get fired from the railroad.

I: How did that happen?
R: He went over there and there was a sawmill up here in Alsten and this sawmill yard foreman wanted some switching to do...spot cars so they could load their lumber in...well, he wouldn't do it, see.

I: Was he just being belligerent?
R: Something like that. This one day he goes in there to get cars and set out cars...you know, they used to bring legs from the ether way into the mill...and then they'd pick up the leads and they'd bring them to Kewenaw Bay...well, he went in there with, I forget, 5, 6 guys with legs there and this Matt Philippi, the foreman, he wanted Charlie to do a little switching in there so he said, "No, I don't want my men to work in the rain like this," he said, "and I'm going to get out of there." And he wouldn't do that, see. So he reported that...I don't know if he reported that or if the manager reported that...so when a few days later the superintendent from Calumet...he came over here and he went up
up the mill ( ?? )...on Baraga with his car...and he was over there working for ( ?? )...over there bring the logs in and loading cars out...then there came the mill manager over there to ask him to do certain things and he opened up on him with a loud voice, you know, and this here superintendent was behind the doors and took it all in...that's when he got fired as a trainman...but they give him a job as a flagman over there in Hancock...where the rail cross the street over there, he was a flagman over there...so they didn't kick him out entirely 'cause he was such an old employee and he done good work...I suppose he done some mistakes, too, you know.

I: Do you remember any other stories about Charlie? Would you remember things he did?

R: Yeah, well, he was in trouble one time with a young girl over there in Mass...I don't want to tell that.

I: Oh, that'd be a good one...as long as you don't mention the girl's name, it'd be all right.

R: Yeah, it was a girl of 16 years old...she was working in a rooming house there...he got a hold of her and raped her. It was a funny thing, he didn't have to serve a day for that.

I: How did he get out of that?

R: 'Cause the old folks didn't press on it, they didn't have money to press on it.

I: He was some character, eh?

R: Yeah, he was a character.

I: Remember any other stories about him...like any jokes he would play on people?

R: No, I don't remember that.

I: Were there any other local characters, maybe some lumberjacks that everyone knew that were real characters?

R: I don't remember...

I: Some old loggers?....Were any of them famous for their strength?

R: There was a brakeman who got killed...he was an Irish guy, a very nice fellow, too...he was conductor, also...he was one of the latest hired conductors so you couldn't call him steady job as conductor...he was a brakeman...he was an Irish fellow...he was a very strong man...I was a pumpman on the railroad then...I used to go to Mass and I took care of this pump at Hazel here...and one morning I was up bright and early at the station there. The train used to leave 7 o'clock from the depot there...well, I was one of first ones at the station there...I was there before the brakeman even came. Well, there was one of those pile drivers...you know what a pile driver is...that was about that high and it had a little chain on there about that long...so he tells me, he says, "Bill, he says, "lift that." I said, "No...I think that goes about 300 or 400 pounds." I says, "I can't lift that." So he came there and he lift it...about 3 or 4 inches off the platform. So he says, "Try it." Well, he lifted it with his one hand...see how powerful guy, that fellow. So I went and tried it. But I couldn't get it off the floor, I could bend it over a little bit like this. So then the other brakeman, his name was Peteski, Billy Peteski, he was a Frenchman...he came there and he was one of those orabby guys, you know, you never see that guy laugh...so he came there and he had his dinner pail in the other hand...so he tells this Peteski, he says, "Lift that pile driver there." "Who the hell can lift that," he says. He said, "Wisconsin lift it, you ought to be able." Well, I was only 19 years old, then. So he tried it and tried it...and the First World War was
in on already and the French and the Germans and the English they were fighting to beat the band, you know... and the Frenchmen were getting a beating over there... so he tries and tries and he couldn't lift it, you know, with two hands he couldn't lift it so he tells him, "It's no wonder," he says, "the Frenchmen are getting licked over there."

I: What did that Frenchman say?

R: He didn't say nothing, he went and brought his car... ( ?? )... ended, you know, and they starts working... same fellow, that same brakeman, that Peteski, he was a great man for hunting... and they used to be good hunting district over there what they call Motley Siding up there... there used to be good hunting up there. Well, he used to take sometime two weeks off to go hunting. This time he came... that was in 1916... he took off two weeks and he went hunting up there and he was staying at McCloskey... fellow by the name of McCloskey... his homestead house is on side of the road there yet... so he was out hunting and he shot a deer... at the meantime he got cramps in his stomach so he had to go and relieve himself... and he left his gun standing against a tree by the deer... and he went out a little ways to take a dump... and he didn't stab him or nothing, see... so he thought he was dead 'cause the deer was laying still there... so while he was doing that job of his, well, deer got up... oh yeah, he put his license on the deer horn... and while he was doing that over there, well, the deer got up and he went... and the deer was... he was about... they say about 25 feet away from the deer... but by the time he got by the gun, the deer was out of sight... so then all the trainmen... there were two train crews here that time... well, the railroad men had got wind of that... so this was a Saturday morning, then... I was coming back from Mass... and then there was what they call Otter Siding over there. There was a big camp over there, Houghton ( ?? )... Camp, there was four or five men coming on the train there... so then there was other men to see that other five go, see... take off... so Louis Virje was the conductor, then, on that train... so this day this Peteski was what they call a flagman on the train... he was working... he was a brakeman on the baggage car and carried the ( ?? )... on the train... so Mr. Virje, he says, "Say, fellows, any deer around here?" Fellow says, "Yeah, there's deer over here." "Have you seen a deer running around with a license on his horn?" You know, they got puzzled then. "Not yet," they said. "Well, if you see it, don't shoot them, that deer belongs to Billy Peteski." So he heard that and he says, "Shut up, you son-of-a-bitch."

I: That's a good one. Anything like that ever happen to you?

R: No, no.

I: Did you ever recall the old folks using the phrase 'Tois kielmen'?

R: Yeah, oh yeah.

I: What did that mean?

R: Other tongue.

I: I knew that's the translation but how did the old folks use it if you saw someone walking up to the house and one of the kids said, 'Tois kielmen'. What would that...

R: Well, they knew that it's not Finnish... it could be French or could be English or could be Swede or something like that.

I: Was there a bit of suspicion or mistrust in the early days?

R: No, no.

I: Or maybe were they put on the alert?

R: No, not... they'd come around and maybe they spoke in English or French... there some come
who they spoke in French but we didn't understand French...but then some come Polish but we didn't understand Polish, we couldn't help them out...but then they started trying to talk English...sometime we could help them out and sometime we couldn't.

I: When did the hardwood market open up around here? When did men start...
R: Hardwood start moving around 1907.
I: Who was buying it at the time?
R: Well, ever here the only buyer was Wooster Lumber Company and Thomas Messmer. But most of the hardwood was bought by the mining companies.
I: Oh. When did the mining companies start buying it?
R: Well, that's about 1906 when they started buying it.
I: What were they buying--what kind of wood?
R: Oh, they were buying hemlock...and cedar was used for flat timber and like that...and ties, hemlock ties...but hemlock ties was for railroads.
I: What was the flat timber used for in the mines?
R: It was used for on the top of these drifts and like that, you know, to keep the loose dirt from falling down on the workingmen.
I: Like in the ceilings?
R: Yeah, and also on the sides.
I: And what was the cedar used for?
R: That was the flat timber.
I: And the hemlock was used for ties.
R: There was hemlock flat timber, also. Yeah, and spruce flat timber...but the hemlock...what you call 7 inch ties...that was for railroads...and there was mine ties...some mines had 4 foot ties...some had 3 1/2 foot ties...some had 5 1/2 foot ties.
I: In the mines?
R: They called them mine ties.
I: And for the railroad--how long were the ties?
R: Eight feet.
I: This gave the farmers around here a chance to make a little money, didn't it?
R: Oh, yeah, yeah, that helped them.
I: Did you and your father and the boys here make ties?
R: Yeah, and we made cordwood, too.
I: Where was the cordwood? Who was buying the cordwood?
Hancock, Houghton and Calumet.

I: Was this the mines or the miners' homes?

R: Yeah, and then they were using...some of those stores and like that, they were using...before the coal started coming in.

I: What could a man make off the hemlock mine ties in the early years? How much money?

R: You mean hewing or selling them?

I: Hewing.

R: Well, they used to pay 5 cents for 5 foot mine ties, 4 foot mine ties. I don't know what they paid for 3 1/2...we never made 3 1/2 foot ties.

I: What about for hewing railroad ties?

R: It all depends on...well, the early days like the time when we moved in here, they paid 10 cents a tie.

I: How long did it take a man to hew an 8 feet railroad tie?

R: Well, I couldn't tell you in minutes but they used to make 15, 20, 25 ties a day...all depends on...some people made high as 35 ties a day.

I: Do you remember any men who were real good at making ties?

R: Yeah, we had one fellow...he died here two years ago...he'd be about 86 years old now if he was living.

I: Who was he?

R: Matt Kerpi.

I: Could he make ties?

R: Yeah, sometimes he made as high as 50 a day.

I: What was his secret? How come he was so good?

R: Well, he knew how to fell trees and he knew how to hew it. He didn't drop his axe 2, 3 times in one place. He was a big, powerful guy...a big guy that could go a feet at a time and like that.

I: Describe how you hew ties. I've never hewed a tie and I probably never will.

R: Well, you fell a tree...and then trim them...take the limbs off...then you gotta...there's some call it cornering...you gotta chop holes on there so you can cut the slabs off...gotta go about that much apart and some bigger trees you gotta go closer...you gotta de a lot of chopping, they call it scarring.

I: You can get a lot of ties out of one log sometimes, eh?

R: Well, some trees you got as high as five ties...but when you sawed it in a sawmill, then you could get two ties out of it...but by hewing by hand, well, there you have about that big face on the tie already.

I: About a 2 feet face, eh?
R: Yeah. There's lot of timber goes to waste when you do that in a saw. In the sawmill you can get two 6-inch ties or two 6 1/2-inch ties...you knew, in fitness.

I: So a man would have that log down...would he stand on the tie?

R: Yeah.

I: Men ever hit themselves in the foot?

R: Oh, sometimes...not very often, sometimes...I knew I hit once...like that...I hit right here.

I: Right on the inside of your foot, there, eh?

R: But that was a bad accident with a regular axe. Got cut on the limb and that didn't go to the place where I aimed.

I: O. K. What about cordwood? What would a man make for cordwood? Well, no, let's go back to ties. What about for selling ties?

R: Well, during the First World War...that's the time the tie prices went up...they got some...I forget now...some of the best ties were $1.15 and like that.

I: A piece?

Yeah.

I: What about in the early years around 1906 and '07?

R: Well, when we first came in here, well, we got 5 cents for a cull.

What's a cull?

R: That's too small. So there was some face on it, say about 4 or 5 inches of face, so they accepted that as a cull.

I: But they had to be 6 inches generally?

R: Yeah. But they use them in side tracks, them culls, you know...not on main lines.

I: What about a regular tie?

R: Then there was what they called a reject. Them early days there was no rejects...they made three kind...cull, No. 1 and No. 2. And that No. 1 hemlock was 20 cents and No. 1 cedar was 22 cents, yeah...and the cull was 5 cents.

I: What about No. 2?

R: That was about 5 cents cheaper.

I: About 15 cents for hemlock and maybe 17 cents for cedar, eh?

R: About 18 cents for cedar.

I: How many ties could one man make in a day if he had to do it all by himself?

R: Well, this man, like I say, he made them 50 ties all by himself.

I: How did your family operation work? You divided up the work, didn't you?
R: Oh, yeah, each man had their job to do, yeah.

I: What jobs were there?

R: Like I...we had two team of horses...I was driving one team and my brother Adolph that died here, well, he drove the other team...Matt, he took care of the cattle...and then Art and Louie, when they didn't do...so they were able to work, they took care of the other works.

I: Who was cutting the logs?

R: Well, we were cutting the logs, too, me and Matt...we were skidding logs, we got them with the teams...yeah, we all had a job to do.

I: What would a man get for hardwood in those early years around 1906? What did hardwood...

R: $6 a thousand...for maple...birch was a little higher...oak was a little higher...we didn't have no oak so I don't know what the price was.

I: What was birch?

R: About $7.

I: O.K. $7 a thousand. What do you mean by thousand?

R: Thousand feet. Beard feet.

I: In terms of cords, what would that be?

R: I couldn't explain that 'cause cord was 128 cubic feet.

I: But you didn't split this cordwood, did you?

R: Oh, yeah, yeah.

I: That took a lot of work, eh?

R: Oh, yeah, and that was the hard work, too.

I: Splitting it?

R: Yeah, wedges was so deep in there...and then there was what they called a 16 inch wood...they called it short wood...that was counted as 128 cubic feet...there were (??)...here...8 feet long, 16 inch wide, 4 feet high...they would call that a cord.

I: What would that go for?

R: For stoves.

I: And how much money was that sold for?

R: That's about 50 cents and a $1 a cord higher...about $3 a cord. Three tiers...$1 a tier.

I: How long was this other wood that we were just talking about?

R: Four feet.

I: Four feet. And that was used...