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An Incident

Baseball

Incident

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Here we are at CaneCourt, a senior citizen's housing project in Ontonagon, Michigan, talking to Dell Woodbury, full name: Edsen O'Dell Woodbury, commonly known as Dell. He is a fellow with a vast storehouse of memories, largely of the immense logging operations that have been going on here and particularly about the disastrous fire in 1896, a fire which wiped out most of Ontonagon, and I'll let Dell tell more about that along the way.

You were born in Ontonagon, is that right?

Dell: Yes, yes sir.

Your occupation for most of your active life was what?

Dell: Working in the woods, you might say.

Hap: Cruising, maybe?

Dell: Cruising.

That's quite a skilled operation, I would say, to be able to cruise timber and to provide to the buyer an accurate estimate of how many feet of logs there is.

I started running compass in 1898. I was working, getting a dollar-a-day and my dad came home this day and he said, you want to go run compass for me? I said, gee, dad I know what a compass is but I don't know anything about it. He said, I had to learn, I'll learn ya. He said you'll get two dollars-and-a-half a day and all your expenses. I was wealthy right away!

Hap: How old were you when you started on that job?

About 18 years old

About 18 years old, OK, your dad broke you in as a cruiser, commonly you were called Land lookers.

Dell: Yes, yes that's right.

I have seen some of your equipment, I understand, from memory, I seem to recall seeing on display some of your equipment, your little one-man or two-man tent that you carried with you and the kit of cooking utensils, pots and pans that nest into each other for convenience and packing, and you were, judging from that, you were out in the woods quite awhile on certain of these trips, what do you recall as being the longest time that you stayed before coming back for more supplies.

Dell: Two men, the way we figured it, with their equipment, gotta have a couple of blankets and their tents and their knaps, they can carry food enough for 10 days, they gotta very big load.

I guess so!

That's about what we used to carry. When that was gone we had to go back and get more But our longest time, we served in land in Canada.

Hap: Oh, you got around quite a bit then.

Dell: Oh, ya. I left here the day after Christmas, that was in 1906, and then we went to the Canadian Soo, there was 4 of us, I had my compass learning from a Cruiser in Ontonagon from his compassman, we got our information there and we went to Blind River
That's about 100 miles east of the Canadian Soo. Then we went north there, way up into the woods. And we camped to keep us, because we didn't want to camp out in the winter, real cold weather, but we had a little stove, I had a little tin stove that folded together and pipes that collapsed, pushed into one another, so we did camp out about 4 nights I guess, that's what we had to do.

Hap: Well, you married your late wife, her name was Maria and she was born in Norway in Europe and you told me she was, taught school for a short time but much of her time she was a bookkeeper and clerk for a certain provision company.

Donnelly's store

Hap: I see. Then later on of course she was just a housewife. And to this marriage then was born one daughter, Lucille, who was born in ONtonagon, and she was mainly a housewife and she's still living, too, isn't she?

No, no she died; I lost my wife and my daughter in one year.

Oh, I'm sorry to hear that.

Three years ago since they died

Hap: And you mentioned here a little earlier that your father was born in New York state and your mother was born in Rockland, Michigan, and from then on except for you working out in Canada and other places, your life from then on was spent in ONtonagon County in the town of ONtonagon. Your father was a professional cruiser and landooker and

Dell: Well, it seems there's, I don't why, but he knew the job pretty well, He was rated as one of the best. Lots of 'em would say. Any company would take his estimate on the—he spent all his life running camp, on the drier, cruiser,

Hap: He was a man of many special abilities, then, and now then, living here in ONtonagon with your family, you, of course, had a doctor available in case of illness, we ask this question because in many cases some people, like the people who lived in Green they were—12 miles from ONtonagon?

Dell: Six

Hap: Six miles, still quite a ways for a doctor to go but I understand the doctors called on them by horse and buggy

Ya, that's right

So they did have facilities of a doctor and the toughest problem you faced in your life here in ONtonagon would by all means be that fire, wouldn't it?

Yes, I think that was the toughest for awhile, I don't know, in my way of thinking I couldn't say that was the tough problem at all. For the simple reason: that the outside world was so terribly good for sending everything that there was to eat, drink, wear, sleep in, and all in the town, and I don't think as I said before, my other recordings, I'm almost sure there wasn't a soul ever went hungry. There's a couple of nights maybe someone slept out by a blind or in the hayfield which was nice warm weather and they probably didn't have to, but they just, one step 1??? fall asleep.

Hap: Ya, well, then it's certainly very refreshing to hear about that, about how the world in general really pitches in to help people in tough situations, so despite the fact that you were about 15 or 16 years old at the time of the fire, you were
then already working on an island mill you called it?

Dell: I was working on the island mill the day of the fire, putting on a chain.

And your father was away at this time and I seem to recall that the responsibility of taking care of the family, your mother and sister, fell upon you, and you had the foresight to dig a hole in the ground and put some of your most prized possessions and I recall you wrapped up some bread very carefully.

Dell: My mother had baked that morning, 4 loaves, and when the fire whistle blew, I went as far as the , it come to me, this is going to be something. I don't know why, I just thought, I turned right around, went home and took my shovel and I told my mother and 3 sisters I have, now, I'm going to dig a hole in here, and I said to my mother, you get the girls', all of their clothes, don't touch mine, I said, my clothes will be all right, I said, get all of their clothes, their shoes, and every dress there is, I said, we'll stick in that hole and there's a little sand down there and it won't burn and we'll still have the dress. Well, I kept digging and digging 'cause that was just a few minutes after 1 and we buried quite a lot of stuff and all of it was OK.

Did you have any money to bury? Did you bury any money?

Oh, no, no money, how you going to have any money them days?

Ya, I guess there wasn't too much of it around.

Dell: That day I was getting 75¢ for working 10 hours so, and I knew very well when I gave my mother the check at the end of the month, I knew very well I eat more than $26 worth.

Hap: So, you went to school here in Ontonagon?

Dell: Oh, ya, the school right where the Manor House is now, Maple Manor House.

Hap: Did you complete High School?

Dell: Well, yes.

Hap: 12 grades?

Dell: ya

So from your high school days do you remember

Dell: I only went the 8 grades, I was in the 8th grade

8 grades. OK, then from your school days, do you remember any particular teacher or superintendent of schools or anyone that was of particular help to you in growing up, was there anything special about your teachers that comes to your mind? Either good or bad or different.

Dell: One of the best teachers that everybody in our surrounding communities thought in those days, that is before the fire, her name was Miss Chamberlain, Miss Ella Chamberlain. And another one was Miss Della Wilson, who would be an aunt to Mrs. Jim McKeever and Mrs. Glen Trevarrow. And the last teacher I went to, her name was Miss Ellwell, a wonderful girl and a fine teacher. But us kids, we didn't know
enough to take advantage of her knowledge, you know you get smart sometimes in school and you have a year you don't learn and she kind-of gives up on you then.

Ya. Well, was there any incidents then like I recall going to a country grade school, 8 grades in one room, and the teachers when they couldn't cope with us kids, they'd say, you wait until Mr. so-and-so, the superintendent or the school commissioner, wait until they come here, because

Dell: Ya, there's always the principal of the school, a man,

Hap: Did he

Dell: No I never had to go to him

Did he use the belt or a strap on some of the kids

Ya. No, the teacher had that pointer, about 3-feet long and when she hits you with that, you know you got hit and she didn't have to hit you hard either.

Ya. Well, the hours that you worked in those days, from dawn until dark, doesn't leave much time for recreation but we've been asking people the question, what did you do for entertainment in those days? Nowadays people got what you call the boob tube, the TV, and particularly young people who had quite a bit, but in those days you had to invent your own fun and excitement. What did you do?

Ya. Well, in the town them days there was, now say like up on the hill, where I lived, that was what we called the Mud Rats, that was mud hill; downtown, that was called the Sand Rats, that was sandy. Well, all summer long I belonged to the Mud Rat ball team and we used to play them fellows down there and we'd go to Greenland or go to Rockland and play and we'd hire a rig and us kids, all we'd have was 50$ the 10 of us to pay for the team, going up there and there was no place to eat in Greenland or Rockland or hardly any ever in ONtonagon, that was in the early times, and when you ate your little lunch about 10 o'clock you didn't eat anymore until you got home. But we played ball just the same.

Hap: No hot dogs and ice cream cones and stuff like that.

Dell: No

Hap: They came much later.

Dell: Oh, yes. Sure

Well, you started on your own then having worked as a provider for your family, your mother and sisters along with you helped your father provide for them, but then in your time you got married, about what year was that?

Dell: 1907.

Hap: 1907 you married Maria.

Dell: Ya.

Hap: And you said she was of Norwegian origin

Dell: Ya. She come over here when she was 7 years old. She went to school at Normandy

Hap: And had she picked up considerable English then by herself?

Dell: Oh yes, sure, she could talk, you wouldn't know anything about that
Talking about her being of Norwegian origin, she would have had a great deal of enjoyment out of listening to the fellow who was a Suomi College, Dr. William Wyatt, a young fellow but such a brilliant man, he came over to Suomi College to help Suomi formulate the program for this history research that we're making now, and he did a similar project in South Dakota, in that area that got flooded out recently, all through that area, at least that's where he was living now, and they conducted this kind of a program amongst the Norwegian Lutherans there, Norwegian towns and farms, and they had wonderful results so Suomi College and other places were encouraged to go ahead, conduct the same kind of a program, only, where these other s were pioneers, William Wyatt and his assistants sort of pioneered in this kind of a research work, oral history report, well they were able to pass their information on to us who are doing it for Suomi now. We're supposedly to benefit from their mistakes because they were bound to make mistakes and we're bound to make mistakes.

Dell: My would could talk Norwegian, course she fluently talked Norwegian, why I applied to Social Security, why she had her birth certificate which was from ?? Norway. We took it to the agent down here and we had to send it to Marquette to get somebody to read it.

So then after you worked as a land looker and worked on other jobs in the lumber camps and on the drives, then you went into business on your own somewhere.

Dell: Yeh, I had a store from 1910 to 1923.

Hap: And you got to know a lot of people from Green and White Pine and Rockland and Greenland, of course, you were well acquainted with them from the days of the fire those people from Rockland and Greenland, but I understand that one party, Mrs. Heikkila from Green, told me that she used to shop at your store. She has many fond recollections of those days when she used to come there for shopping, how did she come into town to shop, by horse and buggy?

Dell: Horse and buggy. That's the only way the could unless they walked. There was no cars yet you know.

Hap: She also told me that she had quite a time probbing with the food problem until she learned how to order by mail order from Sears Roebuck.

Dell: Ya, that was in World War I I probably.

Hap: I don't remember when that was.

Dell: You see you had, if you lost so much flour you had to have so much substitute with it. Corn meal and rolled oats and all of that kind stuff, had to go with it.

Hap: So, your naturally have been born here, a citizen by birth, do you recall the first time you voted for United States president and who was the president you voted for?

Dell: I'd by 21 in 1900, I don't know who was president then, the only thing I remember is in 1892, Cleveland and Harrison were running for president. Cleveland on the Democrat ticket and Harrison on the Republican. And now they come out with a& and they had/hats for each kid, one would say Cleveland, the other Harrison. Well, in my area up there everybody was Democrat but me, so they all had their caps and I said to my dad, gee, I wonder can I get one of them caps, he said, sure go down to ? Ford at the Diamond Match and he'd give you the right cap, well, I went up and had this Harrison cap on, at night somebody just grabbed the cap and destroyed it. Well, I went back to Ford and I told him what happened and he give me another one, and I got back, I said, now you fellows ain't going to take this one. That was in 1892.
Hap: Do you recall anything special or particular about local people like doctors, or the local ministers, did they have any particular problems?

I don't think so. No. We always had about 2 doctors in Ontonagon. And they come and called on you, it was about a dollar, I guess.

Hap: Now then as young people just before getting married and right after marriage as young couples, what did you do for entertainment in the community? Did you have square dances and things like that?

Dell: Well, they used to have—these firemen and the different churches always had their time of the year, the firemen always had the Fourth of July dance and some churches had the New Year's Dance and another church would have the Easter dance and like that. That's how it went. But there was, like I say, up on the hill where the Mud Rats were, when we were going to school we used to have our little party, one kid would have a birthday party, girl or boy, there would probably be 10-15 kids there, we'd play some kind of games of one kind or another, have a cup of coffee or something going.

Do you recall anything in particular that the people might have ever got riled up or got really steamed up, anything that happened, closing of the mills or mines or something like that, sort of anything that was the makings of a mob ever.

No, we never heard of anything like that. In the early days in the '80's when the mill shut down in the fall, 80% of the fellows that were here, around town, that was working in the mill, they'd probably go to the woods.

Hap: Do you recall any particular feeling of excitement or anything when the mine opened up in White Pine? That opened up about 1912, or 13. Do you remember that being anything special, a big thing?

Dell: Everybody was pretty much elated over having the mine open up, it was going to create labor and bring business, if it kept going.

Just the building of the buildings for the stamp mill and the bunkhouses and the galleys and all that, just the building of that took a considerable construction.

Dell: Oh, I say, sure!

A fellow told me, you probably know him, he worked for Heikkila, Anselm Maki, he worked in the woods over there just before Calumet & Hecla started that White Pine Mine, and that he told me about a highway, about a road, a tote road up high, a trestle, do you recall anything like that, at White Pine? to the White Pine Extension or somewhere?

Dell: Oh, no

Was there any, you don't recall anything about a

they had a trestle, they had a bridge across Big Iron River, yes, because they went to the Nonesuch and came into the White Pine that way, there was no other road. And that was a bridge for horse and wagon, not railroad or anything like that.

Dell: Sure. Oh, no, no, there was no railroad in there

Hap: Well, then I got my wires crossed here, I thought there was a longer trestle that led to some area,

Dell: I don't recall anything like that, no
Now, How long did that last, that mine that opened in 1912? 1913? About how long did that provide employment for people in that area? Did it last just a couple years?

Dell Oh, no, more than that. It was still going in 1930. I think, well, we'll say 1928-29. Now, when I figure, it was going a little farther than that too.

Well, when that mine finally closed, I remember one party told me that her husband went to work at that White Pine Mine on a certain day, but that following day, no mine, the mine was closed permanently.

Well,

Hap: That was kind of a surprise and do you recall any of the reactions of the people, and what did they do to cope with the situation, here they were out of a job now, no more mining

Well, there was quite a few of them--course the Diamond Lumber Company was logging, you see, not the Diamond Match, the Diamond Lumber, and I suppose if any of 'em wanted to go and work there, they could and then they sold quite a lot of land as the Diamond Lumber Company cleared off their logs, there's fellows ready to buy some of them vacant lands, see, there was quite a few bachelors that had bought pieces of land and there was some of them up there till not too long ago, I believe there's one fellow there yet.

Hap: Well, then I heard somewhere along the way, that they had a community ice box over in White Pine, a drift that, one of these inclined shafts that went into the ground, and water running down there in the fall and in the winter, would freeze and that made it a tremendous icebox and I heard that the people shot deer and other game and brought it in there and people who were starving, who had no food for their families, no meat, maybe there had a garden, many of them, but they could get meat for their pot from this community ice box. Did you ever hear of anything like that?

Dell Well, that could be. But I still can't understand, like they say here, we got some poor people in Ontonagon, I can't understand and I don't know who they are. For the simple reason I don't know how--if he's up in years and anything at all, he's on Social Security, and if he's disabled and he got a big family, welfare takes care of 'em or Social Security takes care of 'em, but it seems to me--of course I suppose I shouldn't say it, but some people don't want to help themselves much maybe

Hap: Ya, well, that's something you'll find all through history, so then

(end of tape)

Hap: Did you have any special man or it could be a young in the community who you thought is about the greatest person ever come out of Ontonagon County?

Dell Oh, I don't know, I don't care who it is, I think you have a lot of friends and you also have some people that don't like you. Everybody can't like you, you know. I never had any special one, but oh, there's people that you chum around with more than you do the other one, but there not any more of a friend than the other one.

Hap: And they haven't done anymore in the way of accomplishment anymore than your neighbors, you figure that a great deal of community effort all the way through, what do you consider the best of the year here through the years, what has been your best season of the 4 seasons,

Dell: Well, of course, the spring is a beautiful season, but as you grow up to be a man, want to go hunting birds and stuff like that, why your fall is one of them. We've
had some wonderful Octobers and like that way in November. But it seems in late years they've cooled off a lot, they don't last so long, the good weather and of course I don't hunt no more, my legs don't let me hunt no more.

As a woodsman, a man who has been in the woods, you've hunted deer and birds, too, what is your opinion of this terrible controversy that's going on in Michigan and Wisconsin and Minnesota, now, why don't we have the deer any more that we used to?

Dell: Well, I don't know, I couldn't really say, we haven't food to keep and take care of the deer anyhow. The food is in the woods but it ain't down like it used to be in the logging business. I've seen camps up there, right at Greenwood, two miles up where that old camp was and when that crew come in at night, I was right there and saw it with my own eyes, 10-15 deer walked right across the river. Come right in, I ain't got the picture now, somebody got it and they don't bring 'em back, you know, well they're right back of the barn, here's a whole bunch of deer. The barn boss was feeding them all the time, it was only natural they come in after the crew; when you're hungry you go home to eat, so do I, and it's natural to deer.

As a woodsman, what do you think of clear-cutting as opposed or compared to selective logging? Which do you think, or do you think there's a place for each one of them in their proper place?

Dell: Oh, I suppose, I don't know, the selective logging is all right I guess. The minute, I don't know, our knowledge of the woods we just picked up ourselves, we never went to school or were taught anything like that.

Hap: Well, that's why the big controversy rages now because they claim that these Department of Natural Resources which we used to call Conservation Department, they claim that they have the biologists now who know what the deer eats, how much he has to eat to stay alive and to produce off-spring, there's large clubs of sportsmen, they don't buy that story at all, there's many people take the attitude that the big lumber companies, and the other companies that own timber, they claim that they want to kill off the deer herd, they have lobbyists in Lansing to make sure that the deer never get a chance to build up into large herds anymore, because they eat their young aspen, their pople

Dell: Well, I don't know, their feeding, the deer feeding and like that, why when you're hungry you'll eat most anything.

Somebody told me a deer is stubborn in this way, it's born and raised and it never leaves that certain part of the country, certain part of a section or wherever it is used to ranging.

Dell: That's what they say

Hap: That you can put food outside of that perimeter, a little ways off there and though he should be able to smell it or somehow or other get wind of it, he will rather starve in this place than move into another part of the same section where there is food waiting for him.

Dell: Ya. Last winter down here east of town around 1/4-mile point around the snowmobile time, 3-4 snowmobiles took corn down there, they'd run over the path and then lay the corn out, see, there's one fellow, there was 2 snowmobiles, one Sunday and there were 3 deer I think they said, they was about 15 feet off the trail they were, they were eating on some little low brush or something. All they done was get up and look around at 'em. Never moved. Well, they left the corn, then they went to some cabin or somthing there, when they come back, the corn was gone. But they say that ain't the right food for deer.

Ya, that's what they say, that they have a hard time digesting it
I thought they could digest anything, the deer, to tell the truth. They would if they could digest twigs. The tender twigs, that's what the biologists claim they can live on, not as a prime food but during the winter time when it's either that or nothing. Actually they prefer—I've seen how hunger drives a deer to go into places for food where he wouldn't think of going otherwise. Cutting pulp, the first time you cut pulp in the spring and your peeling and you fall a tree down and before you get one stick of pulp butt off there, there's 2 or 3 deer chewing the tender leaves and branches off the top of that tree and they're not a bit afraid of you if you near them.

Dell: Had some logging up in the mountains there, around the neighborhood where the ski slide is and a little up above, Penegor had a job up there, and you ought to see the deer around there! We were surprised up on them logging roads with our own car on Sunday and watched the deer around. Well, as summertime came and course, they figured there was a thousand deer in that yard. And all at once, Bud Watt was the head man of the Sportsman's Club and I was pretty good friend of his and I go along—yeaah, the deer in the mountains were starving. That's why I said, no the deer ain't starving. I said if you got a thousand men, one man is liable to die in that thousand. And then somebody comes, said there's a deer up there, big doe deer that's dying, can't get enough to eat. We had 2 doctors come from Lansing. I went with 'em. There was about 10 of us. We went up there. We got to this deer. She was laying right in the brand new big green hemlock top. Now, if she was hungry, she'd eat that hemlock. They killed her, she had pneumonia. But she had two does and you could see the does working like that.

Hap: What do you think of Ontonagon County and this part of Upper Michigan in general today? This copper mine we have up here, they keep telling us that that's very marginal in its operation and a few cents drop or too much drop in the price of copper and they could close the mine down for a second time.

Dell: Well, it's happened to all mines pretty near.

What do you think of tourism as a substitute for industry? They claim that a certain number of tourists coming into the area bring enough money into the area with what they spend so that in effect it has the same effect as a small industry.

Dell: Well, last night's paper said that the tourists had dropped down some. They lay it to vandalism.

Hap: That could very well be.

Dell: Ya, that's what the paper last night laid it to that. If you leave your car out some place somebody is going to throw a rock or something through the window or take something off the top, you don't pick up a paper that it ain't full of that stuff. But what good it does, I can't see. We were all kids, and we all got a little wild once in a while but we never destroyed anything.

Hap: Well, the kids are undoubtedly mixed up this war that they feel that we should have no part in

Dell: I think sometimes it's more than kids.

Hap: Oh, ya. Is there anything that you should—what is your prediction for the future of this area? What is going to make this area grow bigger than it is? What one thing or several things do you think will do it?

Dell: The only thing that will do it is for the mines to open up probably again; if your Copper Country mines all went and iron mines went, then of course, they're pretty old mines now but the fellows that worked in them mines all say there's copper and
silver still in them mines.

Ya. We've even had gold mines in Michigan, but I don't know too much about where.

Dell: I'll show it to you

Michigan gold mine, you mean?

Dell: Ya, where it was.

Oh, so then in fact we did have substantial gold mine as you showed to me in that picture from your scrapbook; that wonderful scrapbook you have there, that's really represents many hours of work.

Dell: I've been at it pretty near 15 years

Well, where do you get your clippings for that, do people sent them to you or bring them to you?

Dell: No, I cut 'em out of papers. A paper comes along, I cut it off. Now look it, I got hundreds of those things. Here it says, what country claims to be the largest, have the largest fence in the world? That's Australia, see, it tells you there. 3,334 miles. When I come across that stuff in the paper, I cut it out. I get a bunch together.

Hap: Do you know that that's worth money? Do you know that newspapers and magazines pay for that kind of stuff?

Dell: Ya.

Hap: There's lot of people make a few bucks coupon clipping like that?

Dell: I got lot of them in that book and I pasted 'em right in. Like ol' Mother Ontonagon and all of them, I got all of 'em.

Hap: What's your feeling about life, now you've lived 93 years, and you would say that it has been good.

Dell: Yes. I won. Well, Hap, I think life without friends would be like a garden without flowers. When you got friends, I think you got a lot.

Hap: I noticed too the relatively few years that I've known you that every once in a while you put on your poet's cap and you write a poem or two. I remember in particular one or two that you wrote to your wife on the occasion of your wedding anniversary.

Dell: The last one that I wrote I didn't get no response from anyplace

Hap: I don't know if I even saw that, we don't subscribe to the Herald, we buy it on the newsstand and sometimes I miss a copy.

Dell: But you mustn't say anything about poems for me when I'm talking to you because you can "poem" me off the road right away, look at the one you wrote about us in Ontonagon fire. Whole page.

Hap: That was easy to write because I was copying you, just putting it in a little different frame, but I followed your interview; the interview in the Ontonagon Herald, I followed that right down the line as I made that poem. So there's a lot of views in that poem. So if I would have to grab that out of the clear sky, I would've had a very difficult time, see you had the theme there and all I had to do was to express it in a different language. But I particularly admired—I said to myself and to my wife, now how many men in this world would think of writing a poem to their
wife, after they've reached the age of retirement. You can see when you're young and love is in bloom, a person can be moved, but it's something real wonder-
ful where you can have recollections like that and put it into verse.

Dell: I don't know, I don't know what poem you're talking about now

That's quite a few years back.

That ain't the one there, is it?

No, I haven't seen that before. We'll have to look into it some other time. What would be your prediction for the future of this area? Supposing that this war if finally—supposing our boys could come home from Vietnam and the people get their minds off of war, and other wars, what do you think will happen to this area here and —there's one thing about war though that's not pleasant to think of, it's a source of income to companies and to people. It's a big loss to them too. For the future generations.

Dell: But we've had wars before and they were over and the boys come home and everything went along all right.

One thing we haven't had here since the Civil War is a war on our own soil.

No

Hap: That's where we've been fortunate.

Ya. That's why we went to foreign soil to keep war away from our women and children. That's what they say.

Hap: So what would your prediction be, knowing what you know now, and the future being what it appears in your mind to be, what is your prediction for ONtonagon, for Michigan, and the United States?

Dell: I think there'll be an ONtonagon as long as there is anyplace else. There's one thing about ONtonagon—there's no other ONtonagon in the United States. No other name.

I got a kick out of a lady I heard on the radio last week, they had taken this trip around Lake Superior, the complete circuit, and she said, Jan Tucker was talking to her and I think or was it Bob Olson from WMPL, said, where did you stay last night? They had a car and they were pulling a trailer or camper. She said we stayed in a place we can't even pronounce the name of it. Then she said Ontawnagun or something like that. And Bob then told her the correct spelling of that, pronunciation of the word; she liked the country but

Dell: Ontawnagun is what this ol' Indian woman when she dropped her bowl, that means a lost bowl, Ontawnagun, that's Indian part. Everybody uses ONtonagon.

What do you think about this project at Suomi College and others who have tried and tried it before, about collecting these memoirs of these senior citizens and in many cases of younger generations too, where we can't talk to the older people because they're gone, well, then we have to try to glean from the memories of the children. What do you think about this kind of a project.

Dell: I believe that this is wonderful, as long as the colleges—this is only allowed to colleges, high schools can't get that grant, high schools ain't allowed to have it.

No, I don't think so, but the college students will be interviewing.
Dell: I would say that that's a very nice thing. For the simple reason that there's a big percentage of them people and we go to college and read that stuff, OK, lot of attention to it, everybody won't do it, but lot of 'em will. I know right here in our town now, there's some of our younger generation, they don't pay no attention. As years go by they're going to come out of it.

It just occurred to me, I wanted to ask you a little bit more about your store, you operated that store, when?

Dell: '10 to 23

Hap: 1910 to 1923. How big—how many personnel were in the store? Did you and your wife

No. My wife, she came in when I went away or something. We had to deliver, we delivered then. I had a horse and a wagon and a young fellow delivering and I had a young lady in the store who came to work in the morning; 3 of us done the work.

Did you later on then, in your final years, the Model-T was already available, did you change from horse delivery to car or truck delivery?

Dell: No. I was the White Pine in '18 or '19 maybe, that the International people had a delivery truck, I brought one up there for demonstration. I think it was only $1100 and there was 10 of us went on that truck from here to White Pine; it had a chain drive, a chain on each side, after we left the Iron River road, it was all full of mud. And every once in a while there'd be so much mud get under the chain, the chain would come off. So I guess they sold one, I guess Donnelly's store bought one eventually, a few years afterwards.

This fellow who was master mechanic at the mine there, he mentioned that International it was the first truck or car to make that trip, gasoline-engine vehicle from Ontonagon to White Pine, I don't think I can recall anything else in particular that he said, but that of course had the solid rubber tires.

Dell: Hard, solid tire. And you cranked it from the side of the car. You didn't go in front or behind, it was right under the seat like on a side.

And what else do you recall about your operation of that store?

Dell: We just had a common little ol' country/store

Hap: Where—the meat, you butchered it yourself?

Dell No, we didn't have no butcher. The stores didn't have no butchers then. The butcher shop was by itself then.

Hap A special shop, then

Dell: Ya, well, I used to sell ham and bacon, that's all. Salt pork. But outside of that no meat. Just the general store, everything to eat

Hap: Clothing, overalls,

Dell No, no, no clothing. And you didn't have to have beer and wine to take out then either

Hap: That must have been quite an interesting operation. Just the same in those days. Oh, here's something I wanted to check up on, a certain party told me, we're not taking one person's opinion and weighing it against another one, to make one person right and the other person wrong, that's not our intention at all, we want a multitude of opinions and then the researchers will work on these, study them over there,
they can maybe get a certain story line and follow that for a special article plus what I want to find out, is this party told me that she recalled only 2 other Finnish families when she came to shop at your store from Green, she didn't have occasion to meet with many Finnish people because she only know 2 Finnish families in Ontonagon at that time, so I was under the impression that there was a lot more Finns in the area than there really has been. Course maybe they were more out in the areas like Green and all the White Pine area, the area from White Pine to Bruce Crossing and all through there, Ewen, Bruce Crossing, there's been a lot of Finns in the area,

Dell: Oh, my, there's been piles of 'em. After the Calumet strike, years ago, a good many Finnish people, they bought land pretty cheap, all the way along the military road from Penegor farm to Bruces. And I know that that was all just pine trees, and when I drive by there now and when I see them farms, them big fields all cleared up, I thought somebody musta done a lot of work. Because they were all pines one time, the stumps. When I started running the woods in '98, after you left the Penegor farm on the Military road, there was no more farms till Bruces. Solid timber. Just that Military road, a ribbon of mud through the trees is all it was. That was supposed to be finished in 1864, I guess they did finish cutting it out, that's all. There was no finish to it.

There's a couple more questions about you, your experience in the woods. About the wild animals in the woods, other than the deer. Were there a lot of bear, did you run across a lot of bear when you were cruising during the berry season?

The wild animal in the woods, I think man is his greatest enemy. He don't have to carry a gun. We never carried a gun or nothing at all. And of all the times that we pitched our tent in the different localities, all through Wisconsin, all them rivers down there and all through over here in Canada, we never had our tent touched once by a bear or anything. Well, that was out of the ordinary because I know some of 'em did. You always had to have bacon, that's the only thing you could carry, a slab of bacon and we'd wrap it up good

Hap: They must have had plenty of food available because that's the only time that they changed their ways of living.

Dell: They never bothered man.

What about timber wolves, was there any number of them, you must have in the wintertime at least seen evidence of their tracks.

Dell: I only had an experience with one timber wolf and it lasted about half-a-second. We were in back of the mouth of

@end of tape
Well, here we are at Came Court in Ontonagon, Michigan, at the residence of Del Woodbury; and today Del will narrate to us the experiences of his family in the disastrous fire of August 25, 1896, which destroyed most of the town of Ontonagon. And now, Del will give you his personal experienced version of those events.

Well ladies and gentlemen, the morning of this fatal day, why Ontonagon was in full bloom, going nicely. Terrible hot day...high high wind. I was working on the...at the sawmill pushing logs on the big chain and it seemed as though as the day lengthened, why the wind strengthened. Well all was well all morning. We went home and had our dinner and I generally had just a little of my own affair, why I used to go up in the mill if I had a couple of minutes and talk to the men. And sit there and just talk to them and when that little "toot-toot" whistle blew for to start up, why then we'd always go back to our place to do our work. Well ladies and gentlemen, little did we think them that before the sun set in the west that night, we'd all be homeless. Our earthly possessions would be the little clothes we had on. We went to work at one o'clock and at one-fifteen that whistle blew for fire. Something came to me that I couldn't understand every time that there was a fire, why the mill don't stop. Like a volunteer fireman in Ontonagon...if there's a volunteer fireman there, why somebody takes his place until the fire's over and then he comes back. But this day, the mill shut down...solid straight right there, never to run again. We didn't know that then, of course. Well, I went down to the bridge at the slough there and I got about halfway across the river and I could see all the people coming back over town and the smoke and all the...there was about twelve fifteen houses over on the West side right across the road from where the Paper Mill is now, and they were all afire. There was a big boarding house, about sixty rooms in that boarding house, and that was afire. And what was going on with that wind and once that got into that forty million feet of pine lumber there, what could save the town. Nothing, I guess. So I went home and my father wasn't home, he was out looking land north of Winona someplace, and I said to my mother, "This looks like a bad fire." I said, "The wind is in our favor so far, but should it ever change, why it'll take us too." So I started digging, I said, "I'm gonna start digging a hole out here in the back yard and you get the girls to bring all of their clothes, their dresses and shoes and stockings and all of that stuff that we can just throw in there and cover them up with dirt." I said, "If we don't have to go from our house on account of the fire, why there will only be a little dirt or something on the clothes." So I kept digging and we buried all the clothes and we buried a lot of the kitchen cooking utensils and stuff like that, towels, you know, and stuff that they have; and my mother baked four loaves of bread that day and as we was carrying on why I told one of my sisters, I said, "You tell Mother to put that bread in a flour bag and put it out by the gate." Everybody had a fence all around their property then. Well, we kept digging and about three-thirty I gets a little whiff of cool air. "Oh-oh," I said, "that's it!" And before we could hardly get out of that yard, the dense smoke was there and the fire cinders were coming. Our
house, the front porch, there was a piece of board about a foot long or so better than all ablaze and we had to get...the smoke, you know, you can't live in smoke too long either. And I took the bread when we went and I had my sister...three sisters and my mother was ahead of me. I thought well, if them sparks light in her hair or something, I can see it and put it out. Well, we had to go on the East side of the baseball park, that's where the high school is now, you know, the old high school, in order to get around as the fire was too much on the other. And we landed on the Greenland Road, now that's 45 going out, and folks, I know I'll never have the words at my command to explain the scene that was on that road. Everybody...the place, the road was just full of people going up...we didn't know where we were going because the smoke was so terrible, we was just wishing to get out of it. And there was wheelbarrows on the road, there was a fellow leading a cow, there was one fellow with a horse and a little wagon. There was a number of women with baby buggys and all they had in that baby buggy was something that they were trying to save, and kids with little carts and everybody, their face black and dirty; but nobody was saying a word. They were just that much, I don't know, they were scared or what. I couldn't tell you. What this one little instance when that wind changed I have to tell you about. A lady by the name of Mrs. McDermott, she lived down at the foot of the hill by the roundhouse and she had an infant baby and that infant baby died about twelve o'clock that same day. Well, the baby was still home, of course, and when the wind changed why she knew that she had to go too. So she took the baby in her arms and was going up the little hill there by the Methodist Church now, and some man...I've forgotten his name...he come along and he said, "I'll help you Mrs. McDermott. We'll put the baby in the Catholic Church." So they took the baby and they put it up on the altar in the Catholic Church; and when they come out of the front door of the church, the church was afire. So the poor little baby was cremated in the church.

Well, as we were going along in that smoke on the Greenland Road there and trying to get out of it, we got up as far as Mr. Virgin, that's where Kid Rittenbaugh lives now and we was out of the big percentage of the powerful wind. The smoke, oh probably fifty percent, eased up on us. And we kept gathering together more of the crowd as they'd get out as they'd get a little relief on their breathing. And all at once some fellow said, why the train was gonna leave from the Sweenland Crossing to Rockland. Well, my mother's folks lived in Rockland and I never dreamed about...thought about Rockland. My God, I bet I grew four inches when I heard that, you know. "Oh" I said, "Oh girls, we'll turn around as fast as we can get to that crossing up there. We'll try and catch that train." Because I knew if we ever got to Rockland, my three sisters and my mother, they'd be well taken care of. They had a big house up there, so that's what we did. There were two cars, two coaches in that train and they were loaded with people and they all got off at Rockland. The Rockland people just opened up their gates and doors and everything they had was welcome to everybody from the Ontonagon fire.

Well, you know, when we landed in Rockland, why there, of course, was
the hugging and kissing and a lot of crying and stuff like this and it was out of order at the time, but that's how it goes. So we had something to eat finally and at bed time I said to my grandmother, I said, "What time does Grandad get up in the morning?" "Well," she said, "He's supposed to be to work at the National Mine close to six o'clock." "Well," I said, "You wake me up and I'll have breakfast with him." And she said, "All right." So, she did; and during the night she found a couple little pieces of underwear for me...all I had on was my overalls pants and overalls jacket. That's all the clothes I had on. No socks, just a pair of shoes on, sneakers. Used to buy them sneakers for fifty cents a pair at the Diamond Match and they lasted pretty near all summer. Well after breakfast she said, "Well, what are you gonna do now?" I said, "I'm going to Otonaona." "Well," she said, "You gonna walk?" And I said, "Sure!" So she give me a sandwich and off I went. I walked down three miles, that was as far...and Miswells were already loading up a wagon load of stuff...they had a farm there, you know, and they had eggs in there and lots of vegetables and stuff and bringing it down to the people in Otonaona. And, of course, the Miswells were a very big loser. They had bought the old Catholic Church down in the sand and had remodeled it into...for a brewery and they were just about ready to...another few days they said that their beer would be on the market; but that old fire come along, that was it.

Well now, going back to where the fire started again, there was two boats in that day loading lumber. One was the Huron City, the barge...the steam barge...was on the north side of the bridge and the Hartoe, the City of Straits, was up above the bridge. Well when the fire come, of course, they couldn't open the bridge because people coming across all the time and if they opened that bridge, why the people behind them, the fires'd drive them and they'd push the other fellows and just mass suicide. So they wouldn't allow the bridge open; therefore, the City of Straits burnt and she's in the bottom of the river over there in front of the Wilson Fish House now. The fish boats used to bump here every once in awhile. Some of the kids used to dive down into her; but I suppose she's all covered with mud by now. Well, this smoke was so dense and so strong when going back there by the jail area, Mr. Sighe Corbot, he was the Sheriff of the County at that time and he was away. They had two men in the prison supposed to be held in there for murder. They were supposed to have killed a lady...was what they said anyhow, down near the stockade at the time off of the park. Well, Mrs. Corbot with the smoke getting worse and worse and she couldn't find the key to unlock...to let the men out; but all at once a little lady appeared, her name was Mrs. Redpatch, she was the wife of one of the men in the prison or in jail, and they found the key. And they all come out and the smoke was terrible by that time and fire, so the only place they could go would be up toward the Episcopal Church, that's where right now, the same spot the Episcopal Church was on down the hill. But that road down the hill then only went to the...one block. The rest of that swamp was all just Alders. We kids used to snare rabbits down in them Alders a lot of times. And when they got down there...there's just trails here and there...and pretty soon why Mrs. Corbot and her two children, she got pretty well bewildered. She did know what was going on, she didn't know where she was, you know, all the smoke and everything around her. So, all at once a firm man took her by the arm and said, "Mrs. Corbot, don't worry." He said, "We'll take you
out too. We'll see that you get out safely." Well, that was one of the men that was in the prison. He stayed right with the family. The other fellow, he just about carried the older Mrs. Emmoms out to safety. And that was the two fellows that was held in jail for murder; but they said afterwards that they figured it was their duty to stay right with them two and children and to see that they landed safely.

Well, Redpath and this Mrs. Redpath, I guess, he was the wife of Redpath, why they didn't know what to do...so that was what they said, but they found some old box or old trunk or something and they set on that perrnear all night. Well, the next day why somebody discovered them there and they took them up to the Sam Youngs house...well that didn't burn...and they were having breakfast or something...coffee or something to eat there then. And later on, those fellows were taken to Bessemer. But I guess there was never nothing done to them. They couldn't prove that that girl died and that they killed her. They said they had nothing to do with it.

And the next morning, far as eats was concerned, why early in the morning right after the fire, why one of the Nestor tugs and a scow from Baraga County loaded with everything...was said that they just about cleaned everything to eat out of Baraga that there was there. Even had Midland corn and hay and oats on for the...so they could feed their animals if somebody didn't have anything left. So then they took this food and they served it around. Every farm house and place was just loaded with people, you know, and nobody ask when it was distributed, nobody asked if you wanted nothing, you just dropped what you had. Like when the flour came in the second day, every road...the farmers had teams, you know, and they'd bring their teams in. And a committee was formed to take care of each road. Well, when they'd put a load of flour on when they started up the road, they didn't run and ask you if you wanted some flour, they just took a bag and brought it into you because that's what the flour was sent in there for, you know. Or maybe where there was four or five in a family the day before the fire, why there would be twenty-five and thirty staying there and maybe fifty people would come in there to eat. Everybody was helping one another to cook and so, that's how those things went on.

Well, the afternoon after the fire, Mr. Menturn, he was the Superintendent of the Superior Division of the St. Paul, he and two telegraph men come in and, of course, the telegraph was still going or the wires were still there, and they hooked on and then they said that again Omagom was hooked up with the outside world. Well, with them they brought in one sleeping car just about full of blankets. I don't know how many blankets there was in there, sleeping car blankets, you know, that ain't too wide; and I was one of the kids that helped distribute them all around. Just everybody had their road to work on, so...because, you know, if any family don't have too much bedding ahead or enough for eight or ten or twenty people to come in, so then grab an arm full of blankets and take it into this house and drop them on the floor and go.

Then that evening, Mr. Joe Haite, he was the President of the
Village, he called a mass meeting at the old Arom Store. That's be the Davison Market now; and in the meeting he wanted to know if everybody that had a relative or friend or someplace to go for the time being, to go and stay with them if possible, to wait until the smoke kind of got out of the officials' eyes so they could kind of adjust things and see that people were really fairly taken care of. Well, at this meeting, Mr. Menturn, the St. Paul man, he said, "I'll make that a little better." He said, "It's all arranged with the St. Paul." He said, "Anybody that wants to go, all he has to do is have a card signed 'fire sufferer' and signed by the Village President and you can get on the St. Paul and you can go any place on the St. Paul that you want to go for the first five days and there won't be no charge. You don't pay no fare and you can go to the West Coast in five days." And he said, "That's what's arranged." And he said, "That's the same thing with the freight that's coming in." He said, "The whole St. Paul system it's understood that any carload of anything that comes into Ontomaga, comes in free. If a carload is loaded in Omaha, Nebraska or Chicago, Milwaukee, Greenbay, Iron Mountain or wherever it is, it all comes in free to Ontomaga the first five days." Well ladies and gentlemen, on the third day, train loads I think used to come in...car after car after car of everything. Pillsbury's had a whole carload of flour plus some middlings and bran and stuff for the cattle, you know. Gold Medal had another one like that. Of course, Diamond Match was an awfully big buyer because of all them logging operations they had. And, things commenced to kind of smooth out a little bit in a couple of days. And then when that stuff came in, they hadda have some place to unload it and distribute it; and the first "gimme" house was a big red barn just across the railroad track up there on the long end of Spowman's Crossing. That's where the Rockland Road crosses the railroad, right on the left was this big barn. And you know the big hay barns them days hadda have the big wide driveway because they'd bring a load of loose hay in, and that was good and wide.

I was up on the Greenland Road kind of late one evening, and I looks in one of them where this big driveway was...everybody was sleeping in there. Just put in like sardines, head and tail, men, women and all sleeping on the hay in them places.

There was one thing that seemed to be...hit me quite funny. Not funny, but real swell. The attitude of the people, I never saw anything like it because there wasn't one soul every started talking about the fire hardly after, just what they're gonna do, well where we gonna go now, I guess I'll start and see what I can do around my lot and they commenced to talking that way.

Well, then the lumber came in and they built a bigger "gimme" house down right back of where the Holly Property houses are on the Rockland Road. There wasn't only two or three of them down by the railroad track them. That was all a vacant place. There was one hose house there. A fellow put a piano out in the clear there, oh about fifteen feet from the hose house and the piano burnt and the hose house didn't. So that's just how freakish the fire went.
Well, as the lumber came in, they had to build a bigger place, bigger just a shed place for the...to distribute the food to the community and, of course they named that the "gimme" house which that was the right name. Everything in there was gimme, and was just a rude affair with a tar paper roof on it to keep the rain off. And the Diamond Match store workers and the other store workers, they were put behind the counter. Had a long counter where stuff was layed there and first you went and took what you wanted, that is, that you could use. And there's one thing about that, the people were awfully awfully...pretty careful. Just because they could take it, they didn't grab an armful and go with it, they just took what they wanted because maybe they wanted to leave something left for the other fellow. That was the attitude all the way through after the fire.

Well then after awhile, I think it was a week or ten days, they had you write out your list that you wanted from the "gimme" house. So they'd write out a list but then that went in at the office and the fellows in the office, they'd check that out. If there was something on there that they didn't think you needed, they'd scratch it off. They had no right to do that because everything that was brought in was brought in for the fire sufferers and just because they took that different system of operating the "gimme" house, why we didn't like it. So, one smart guy, he had a carbon paper and when he'd send his list in and they'd scratch it out and sign it, why he had a double list made and sign there and copy it right over. So, he'd go to the "gimme" house and get the whole list. And I guess I was one of them too. We all were in the same boat...because we figured that those fellows in the office had no right to cut that off at all. And well that's just the way it worked there. Everybody was every day they was down there, oh they opened up about ten o'clock in the morning I guess and then everybody was down there for some-thing. But one day I happened to get a...this was later on...I happened to get a bag of flour...ninety-eight, now it's a hundred pounds. Used to be forty-nine and ninety-eight them days. And gees, I was a half a mile from home. That flour was gonna be pretty heavy. So up on the road, the Rockland Road, I see a horse and a little wagon there, one-horse wagon. So I just take my flour up there and put it in the wagon and take the horse and off I rode. The farmer in a short time was looking for his horse. Well, he was getting pretty excited. Somebody had stole his horse. Well, in probably a half hour I come back with the horse and put it up and tied it up. Then I hunted him up and I told him. I said, "I didn't want to carry that flour all the way home, so I took your horse." Well, it was all right then, that was fine.

Well about that time, that was oh a week maybe after about when the militia came in. Well they came in and they pitched about fifty tents for the people to live in. Now they come complete equipped. They had their tents...they, of course, all hadda come in by train.. well they had all the flooring, wooden flooring, just rough boards for the tents, and they even had the well...the pipe which you'd drive a well with and they had little pitcher pumps. And everything that they thought was needed, why they had with them. And they also had with them, two big tents. One was a mess tent that the people
went to eat and the other was a cook tent. Well, the cook tent was not quite as big as the mess tent maybe and all of them just were rough tables, you know and just a plank. And the ladies that went in there to eat, why they hadda do like the lumber jack does, lift their leg up over the bench to get in to sit down to eat. The first meal that was in that mess tent was pea soup. I helped serve it and any kid that was around there and walking around doing nothing, the soldiers grabbed him by the shoulder and say, "Come on, get in there and work." And you worked, one of them soldiers told you and you went and done it. Well, there was lots of food them, you know, but actually the cooks, I don't know, were three or four of them around the big tent, there was plenty to eat for everybody of everything from them on. And about that time...and the tents filled up pretty good too...and about that time it was reported that the Diamond Match had bought the mill in Greenbay and all the logs that come down the river were gonna be loaded on cars and taken out of Ontonagon and shipped to Greenbay and sawed into lumber there. Well, they did that, see, and...just a minute, I think I got some smoke in my eyes for a second.

Well, they bought that mill and somebody said that Mr. Comstock had said, he was the Superintendent of the Diamond Match at Ontonagon, had said that he was wishing that the grass would grow in the streets of Ontonagon. I don't believe he ever said that. He was too smart a man to say anything like that, but somebody, you know, when there was a big guy and somebody don't like him, they say something about you. Maybe it was true, but I doubt it. So they built hoists and loaded them logs and the like of that and so on and so on. And there was a Chicago paper, the Chicago News, printed with...the day after the Ontonagon fire...and had a complete description almost of the Ontonagon fire there and that paper sold for two cents on the streets of Chicago. There's one paper in our town here now, Mrs. David...Aristo David has it or Mary Miller, And Mr. Eddie Carrol used to take the News and I saved that paper. I've had it for records for a number of times. And in that paper, the good reporter for the News, he had one...oh, part of the item in the paper of the column was maybe three inches or so long...and you want to see the vivid description he gave of the people and how they were suffering up here in Ontonagon; that every house in Ontonagon was burnt; there was nothing to eat; there was no place to sleep; all the people had to just trails out in the woods to go; and to get out of the hot sun, they'd get in the shade of a tree; and all this. That was all hooey. Nothing like that ever happened; but he was a good reporter, of course, and that made him a good story.

Well, as time went on and the Diamond Match bought their mill, there was a number of people living in tents...oh say, they were millwrights and engineers and like of that, and lumber inspectors and like of that that were employed by the Diamond and as they wanted to, they could go right to Greenbay and go to work, which they did. Well, when that happened, the militia would take that tent down right away, just fold it up because I happened to be there when the first one was taken down, and I said, "Well, what you gonna do with the tent?" They said, "We put them away now so we don't have it all to do when everybody goes." I said, "Well, what do you do with the
lumber?" Well they said, "We're gonna leave the lumber here." And the women said, "Well, why did you ask that?" I said, "My dad's lot is only a block and a half from here and I could use the lumber." They helped me take that lumber that was all on the floor of that tent over to our lot and then we had some lumber there because, you know, here it is pretty close to the first of September. You can't live in the open in Omtonagon Country in the winter. You gotta have someplace to go to live. So we got the lumber over there, that much anyhow. Why our pump was out in the back yard and one of the...the top pipe out of the ground was bent over and one of them said to me, "Is there water in that well?" I said, "Yes sir, there always was." Well he said, "Tomorrow morning we'll come over and we'll fix that; we'll bring the pipe and a brand new pump." And that's what we did, fixed that all up and so finally, had water. And just as the people went to the different places to go to work and like of that, why that's what happened up in the tents. They'd take them down and leave the lumber there and some fellow would come and take it away. And, of course, all of their equipment had to come in by train too. Well they had some of the tents were pitched double, one behind the other, you see; but the front tent...then when you went to the back they split that right down the middle and folded it together with the flap on the other tent was open part of it, see, so then you had two tents long like two rooms. We lived in one for a little while. One day I was at the "gimme" house and a fellow said to me, "Is your dad home?" And I said, "Gee, I believe he is. I think he come home last night." Well he said, "You go and get him and," he said, "there's a couple of carloads of lumber there." He said, "There's teams hauling, will be to haul and you fellows unload them two cars and you take enough lumber home to build you a tarpaper shack to live in." So we did. You know, there's a lot of lumber on two cars. I don't know if we dome it in a day or not, but we unloaded them anyhow; and that was our pay, enough lumber to build that tarpaper shack. And tarpaper, there was cords of it. And also one day, a half a carload of them little box stoves, you know. Oh, they used to sell for about three and a half or four dollars, but they were good heaters and you could cook on them if you had to. It was better than nothing. And then all that stuff like that, everything that you ever had in your home to want to work with or eat or cooking in from the outside.

Well, then the militia finally got her going and we finally built our tarpaper shack and we got a cook stove from my Grandmother Burns in Rockland and a couple of beds, I think they brought down that day too; but I'm kind of coming to the end of my story. The fire was kind of blown out; but that night, the night we went to stay in our place and when we set down to our supper that night, I believe I was one of the happiest kids that you ever saw because I thought well, we went through the whole thing, we got a little roof over our head, now we gotta hustle up to get something more permanent for winter; but we were kind of lucky in a way. My dad was out in the woods cruising all the time and was pretty good paying and then lumber commenced to come in so they could buy it and all of this stuff. But when we set down to the table that night, folks, I
asked the family for a moment of silent prayer thanking the good Lord for keeping the family together and giving us our health in such trying times. I also asked the entire village to bow their heads in a moment of silent prayer thanking the outside world for the wonderful contributions of everything to sustain us all through this hard time that we had. And ladies and gentlemen, all of those things doubled our strength and our courage to help rebuild our stricken village. Thank you.

Well that concluded then Del Woodbury's narration of his and his families experiences in the disastrous Ontonagon fire. I would like to call to your attention here that as Mr. Woodbury narrated this, he did it without notes. He's not a miracle worker, he does have his own account of the story recorded in written form in newspapers and he will occasionally will read through that to refresh his memory for detail. The amazing details of his account I'm sure, there's not one amongst us who listened to Mr. Woodbury, I'm sure there's not one of us half his age or even one-fourth his age, who could remember something in such detail, remember the facts in such detail over so great a period of years.

I've known Del for about twelve or fourteen years and I've always been amazed at his keen recollection. He is now coming up to his ninety-third birthday, isn't it, in November?

September

Ninety-third birthday coming up in September. I'm sure all of you would be interested in Del's scrapbook. He has a wonderful scrapbook here that...

got that from my...see, that is what I said at the golf course

Yeah, un huh. And this is all of items of those of us of the local area, Ontonagon area, Upper Peninsula, and is a very well compiled scrapbook of articles. It's a pleasure to go through this and I do hope sometime to sit with him and go through the entire scrapbook with him. Here is an article on hay-day of the lumberjack, and I'm sure that Del could tell us a great deal about life in the lumber camps. You worked mainly on cruising or land-looking, but you have also been around the lumberjacks a lot and you know a lot about life there. Well yes, one thing I would like you to explain to us now, you mentioned the logs were left on the Ontonagon River and in the woods around Ontonagon after the fire, and you mentioned in your narration about them being loaded onto cars and being shipped to the sawmills in Greenbay. For the major rebuilding of Ontonagon...I don't know how many years it took to build it up...but where did the lumber come from? Were there some semi-permanent sawmills set up around Ontonagon or Ewen or somewhere that sawed lumber for rebuilding?

Del: You mean for building up the town?

Hap: The building up of the town
Del: Well, there was an awful lot of lumber come in. It went to the "gimme" house and, of course, that was all distributed around; and shortly a couple of lumber yards sprung up and they'd get lumber from outside and buy it and sell it, see. Then Mr. Jim Pendigore, he started a little sawmill and, of course, that was very nice. The logs come in, got sawed up and I don't know where that all come from, but it seemed to spring up pretty much. Now I'll tell you a couple of early parts there that I might not have exactly right; but you see, that was in ’96 and ’98...I went right out in the woods with my dad and run compass, so only had that one year be...a lot can happen when you're gone thirty days at a time. And then you come in and you wash up and you get out of the mosquitoes for awhile and then you go right back again for another thirty days probably for. But as far as the logging is concerned, there's one little item I'd just like to put in...I don't know but a lot of people have never heard of it. Now every camp that was in Northern Wisconsin and Northern Michigan and I suppose Minnesota too...the Sisters out of some hospital visit them camps every winter. Now there was two Sisters always came together and they had some intern from the hospital with them. Well they...say they were going to the East Branch Camp, well they'd go to Mass City and the livery man there...was a livery stable in every town, you know...well they'd give them a team. They wouldn't charge them anything. Doorbell)...Come in!

Stop in tape

These Avon ladies really get around...and so now we'll continue again with Mr. Woodbury's narration about the Sisters from hospitals that came around to provide insurance...selling insurance to them.

Every camp...see they hardly ever come to the camp before supper. What I think and my dad told me, he was a foreman in some camp, that they had been in there. That's they'd get a little early, come in a little bit early, the cook would always have them a little meal before they'd feed the crew; and they were...the hospital ticket was five dollars a year. If you were a lumberjack and broke your leg, you went to the Menominee and Marionette Hospital for that five dollars and you were taken care of. Now that was pretty good.

That's for sure

And there's one thing, my dad always used to...they'd know the nights the Sisters were coming, see, and they'd put the team in the barn for them and everything, you know, there was always somebody willing to wait, but my dad would be sure...he'd say, "Now you fellows," he said, "This one night I'm gonna ask you to do this. After supper tonight, don't smoke until after the Sisters are here." Because every time they came, they went into the men's camp and offered a little prayer for the men, see. And after they went then, of course, the old Peerless would get going again then.

Hap: That's a very interesting sidelight on that and that can't be duplicated in insurance deals.

Del: What?

Hap: That can't be duplicated in insurance deals anywhere.
Del: Oh no, no, no! But that's all it was, five dollars, see. Of course you must understand, I had been there before I...I went in the camp this winter with Frank Sheriff, the tailor here. They always use to visit the camps to take measures for clothes for spring, see. Now they haven't any tailor shop. But Dad's short a man on the landing and why didn't I stay the winter. This was after New Years. So, I stayed and worked on the landing the rest of the winter. You see, but he'd have about forty men, well pertain every one of them fellows would buy a hospital ticket and you know how many men there'd be in Northern Michigan and Northern Wisconsin and they covered all of them. But just think of that, if you were taken sick they'd take you to Menominee and that was what this area covered...Menominee and Marquette Hospital. You'd be taken care of for that five dollars.

Hap: Yes, I myself knew a fellow who got shot by his hunting partner and he had this type of insurance that you're talking about. He was a cookkee at a lumber camp, and well you probably know him...I'll bring up his name later, but anyway he got shot in the eye, the bullet gouged out his eye, passed through his hand and into his leg. And he was about twenty miles from town, he was taken to town then and got emergency treatment the following day after the accident after his eye was shot out of his head. Then he was shipped from there to Milwaukee and all this was covered by that five dollar ticket you speak about.

Oh yeah, why it was wonderful. And there was hardly any of the fellows in the camp that didn't have a hospital ticket. They couldn't afford to be without it. Like now, I can't afford to be without my Blue Cross & Blue Shield.

Del: Yeah, that was a complete carload of Peerless. Now I had some...I said I thought that that was chewing tobacco, Spearhead and the like of that that you used to buy, you know, marked off ten cents worth in the store. You'd stick it in there and push your tobacco knife down and cut it off. But some fellow told me, he said, "No, that was a whole carload of Peerless. That was sold by the American Tobacco Company." Of course, you must remember that all the tobacco that was used in the camp was Peerless and when you bought a quarter pound, you got four ounces. When you bought a half a pound, you got eight ounces and when you got a pound of Peerless, you'd think you had a package of rolled oats pertainear, it was that big, you know. Of course, they had thirty-five camps in this town...in this county in one winter. So you know when they distributed that all around and in the store...that wasn't so much. But there was never again a sale made like that one, a complete carload of tobacco.

Hap: And what became of Diamond Match Company? Do they still own timber around here?
No, no they don't own anything around here. They're at Chico, California now.

Oh!

Del: But they're still making matches.

They're making matches and that's what they've always done.

Always done, make matches.

Hap: The beautiful pine from around here went into making matches.

Yeah.

But it's a good wood for a match stick.

Stop in tape.

Well, when I made the tape recording for the Lions, I had this little block made to show. Now, all them great big pine plants that were cut on the West side mill, were put out in the yard and dried and then went through the dry kiln and come into these little tables there; and all of them big plants were cut into blocks just like that. That's a perfect duplicate. Two and a half inches each way, see. Now I piled them blocks in '91-2-and 3. We got fifty cents a day each one of us kids for working ten hours there; and when our little container that we put...little rack we piled them in, why a fellow come and took it and put it in the car.

Hap: Well then those blocks of wood, they were shipped from here.

They were shipped from here to Oshkosh.

Oshkosh...and were they...

They were manufactured into matches in Oshkosh.

They were splintered into matches and tipped and headed, you know, headed and tipped into the complete match as we can even buy them today yet. Are they still made by Diamond Match though, those that you buy?

Del: Oh yes.

Stop in tape.

Del: This is the information we got. Suppose this is a big plank, sixteen foot long and maybe it's eighteen inches wide. All that plank was cut into blocks just like that, put into a boxcar...

End of tape
Suomi salutes the people who make this area great

Mother
a.
b.
c.

Father
a.
b.
c.

Mothe
a.
b.
c.

Child
a.
b.
c.

Child
a.
b.
c.

Child
a.
b.
c.

E. O. "Del" Woodbury
Edson Odell Woodbury
Name of person
Born Sept. 18, 1879
93 yrs old next year
-72
Edson Woodbury, area pioneer, passes Monday

ONTONAGON — Edson Odell (Del) Woodbury, 83, a pioneer Ontonagon resident, passed away Monday afternoon in the Ontonagon Medical Care Facility.

He was born Sept. 18, 1879, in Ontonagon and attended local schools.

At the time of the fire which destroyed Ontonagon in 1896, Mr. Woodbury was employed by the Diamond Match Co., and it is his remembrances of the Ontonagon fire that survive in historical archives today.

On July 10, 1907, he married the former Arabia Kostad at the Holy Family Catholic Church, Iron Mountain. She preceded him in death.

He worked in the Ontonagon area and for a long time worked as a timber cruiser with his father in the Upper Peninsula and Canada.

Mr. Woodbury retired from woodworking in 1952 and became custodian of the Ontonagon Community Building.

He was a member of the Ontonagon County Historical Society, an honorary member of the Ontonagon Volunteer Fire Department, and for the past 14 years, worked as a guide at the museum for the Community Action Agency.

Surviving are a sister, Mrs. Vera Verrier of Ferndale, a son-in-law, Ted Sommer of Ontonagon, two granddaughters, seven great-grandchildren and several nieces and nephews.

The Lenge Funeral Home will open for visitation Wednesday at 3 p.m.

Funeral services will be Thursday at 11 a.m. in the funeral home, the Rev. John Lust to officiate. Burial will be in the family lot at the Riverside Cemetery.

The family suggests memorials to a memorial fund which will be established for a memorial at the new Ontonagon County Museum, in lieu of other expressions of sympathy.