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**FINNISH FOLKLORE AND SOCIAL CHANGE IN THE GREAT
LAKES MINING REGION ORAL HISTORY PROJECT 1972-1978**

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INTERVIEW BETWEEN:

INTERVIEWER: Wallace E. Anderson

INTERVIEWEE: John Bigando

DATE: July 7, 1973

W: This interview is with Mr. John Bigando of Allouez, Michigan. And it was made by Walley Anderson on 6 July, 1973 in Allouez. Mr. Bigando is a musical from the local area. He is presently retired, and is also known throughout the area as Jack.

J: Better known by Jack.

W: Better known by Jack!

J: The jacks used to always call me Jack. They are the ones who put that name on me. Then the radio station used to say that he is known better by Jack, than by John.

W: Mr. Bigando, where were you born?

J: The town I was born in Italy was

W: Is that close to southern Italy, northern Italy?

J: Yes, that was in northern Italy. Just about 20 miles out of Torino.

W: What year were you born?

J: 1885. Did you know that today is my birthday?

W: Today is?

J: I'm 88.

W: 88 years

J: I am 88 today

W: Well---Happy Birthday!

J: Thank you.

W: Everything is on your birthday!

J: Right on my birthday, yes.

W: Well---let's get a little of the background when you were a

youngster over there. Your dad, I think we were talking before. You said your dad was-----

J: He was the military director, he organized military bands.

W: Did he travel all throughout Italy doing this?

J: Oh, he used to be away most of the time, yes. And at last before he came to this country he wanted to go to Brazil, Buenos Aires. And, I found out that when he went down there and there was nothing to do, he was firing a locomotive. And, I don't think he liked that. As soon as he got home, I didn't even get a chance to get acquainted with him, and he said that we were packing up to come away here. We got up there, and we were past the Torino Heads, from Torino we had plans to get the boat----that's where we got the boat, you know. I don't remember how long it took us to get there, of course.

Probably Marseilles.

J: Yes, you fellows who went in the army probably know better about that than I would.

W: Yes, and what was your mother doing then,---when your dad was away?

J: My mother was like a nurse. She nursed that kid from a baby up.

W: A nursemaid?

J: Yes, a nursemaid, for a count. A count, I think it was a Manuweilla-----I can't think of the name. Well----anyhow, he was a son to the king, one of the kings. He was a big shot. He had a palace there, my mother-----sometimes they would take us over to see them. It was like a palace. When you are renting that place, you think you are renting a big building in Detroit or something. You had to climb one stairway to another. Big stone buildings. It was right in the Square of Torino, like the Cadillac Square in Detroit. When I got a couple of stairs up I could hear an organ playing, it was just like a church. There was a big room, you see---and there was a hall, and you could hear organ playing coming through all the walls---playing all the time. To get in that place----they had one of those fellows behind a big iron gate, you couldn't get into that palace unless they knew who you were, see? There were these fellows with these blue, long coats-----what do you call them, guards! You had to pass them to get into there. And, after you got in there, you had to walk 500-600 feet before you struck the house yet.

W Well---in what year did you come to this country?

J: Well----I'll have to figure back, then. I was only three or

four, four at the most. Well,--it was just about this time of July when we left too, that's right. I would say about three years old.

W: You are 88, and you came to this country when you were three, 85 years ago-----that would be about 1889.

J: I can't figure anymore, you figure.

W: About 1889, that you came here. And, when you came to this country, where did you-----

J: We went right to Spring Valley, Illinois

W: Your dad was working? Working in Spring Valley?

J: He was working in a coal mine.

W: Your dad went to work in a coal mine there, then?

J: Yes, he worked in a coal mine

W: What kind of work was he doing?

J: He was digging coal. You would go down the shaft about 200 feet, and then there was spread all over-----drifts here and drifts there. They had the mules pulling the cars. I was even down there myself, one time. The fellows that my dad was working with----he was there, you see----and he took us down, they wanted us to go down. I was there the whole day. I could see the mules coming in the drifts, and they would push the cars in----maybe a 1000 feet of drifts, you know. They used to pick the coal in those days. They were soft coal mines, they didn't have to blast----they used to pick them. And the vein was only about four feet of coal, I know I used to pretty near reach the top.

W: Well---the miners must have had to go on their stomachs and their knees?

J: Yes, they used to have two men at every place. Two men at every drift.

W: Did they work regularly then----or did they work a couple of days off sometimes?

J: No, they worked all the time----but, they had to wait a whole day for the whistle to blow to see if they had to work the next day, or not. They had a big stock outside, and I guess they had to take a day off every once in a while.

W: What kind of whistle system did they use? What kind of whistle system---remember you were telling me about, did one whistle mean stop, or----?

- J: One long whistle and there was no work, that's what it was. You would hear these sirens coming down the road, and you could hear them all over the county----you could hear them for miles, you know. There was a mine whistle at that big housing agent house. It must have been by steam to make that much noise. I have never seen a whistle blow, but I used to hear it plenty. (laughter)
- W: Well---how long did you stay there then
- J: Three years.
- W: You moved up to Calumet then?
- J: Yes, we moved up to Calumet
- W: Where did you live in Calumet?
- J: Oh, we lived in Ramble Town. That is where I was raised
- W: Did you start school then in----
- J: Right next to where my house was. There was a school there that had only four grades.
- W: What school was that?
- J: It was in Ramble Town, but that school is down now, you see? It was right on the corner----at the end of Calumet Avenue. When you get to Calumet, right straight to the end, and then you make the turn. Well, when you make the turn, and that field there was the school there----with four rooms. That's why I started there. From there then, I went to the----after a year or two I went to another school. It was called Hamilton School. There used to be a Hamilton School right by the Hecala Church. Do you know where the Hecala Church is? By the track up there? You know where McNaughton's home was!?
- W:
- J Well---across from there. Across from there there was another shaft---fifteen shaft, you see.
- W: I suppose Hamilton was there?
- J: Hamilton----the school was right behind the mine.
- W: Oh, I see. Then, where did you go after Hamilton?
- J: After Hamilton, I went to Hamilton until I got and gave up. I didn't go to school anymore!
- W: Well---how many grades of school did you go to?

- J: I think I went between 5th and 6th I think it was 6th grade
- W: Sixth grade----you quit then to go to work?
- J: I started working as a shore-lineman.
- W: Yes, you were telling the other day. Do you want to tell me again about being a powder boy?
- J: Well---I wanted to, make some money to pay my teacher after that, after he bought me a trumpet. On the occasion he sent to England, he sent for a trumpet from England for me, a B trumpet. And, I still have the picture of that trumpet when it was in my personal hand.
- W: Well---how did you get started playing the trumpet? You must have started very young.
- J: Well----my dad taught me a year before, he taught me a little music before. He bought me----I played an alto horn. It was just like a French horn. It was the old silent alto horn. I borrowed an alto horn from a fellow who lived down the street there, he lived right by us. So, my dad taught me on that. After that I used to like music, and every time the Calumet and Hecala band was going out on the road I was hauling the mill all the time, so the director says to me, "Hey, kid, do you want to carry my suitcase, to the park----we are going to the Tamarack Park. Outdoors, with the band." They used to use a 16 or 20 piece band in those days. So, I put the strap over my shoulder, and I was along side of the band, following them up. So, after a while, the first thing I knew----I was interested. He knew I had an alto horn already. I could hear him tell the older people, "I should put this kid on trumpet, he has a solid lip. With no red lip sticking up, it makes a good trumpet player." So, I got interested and he started teaching me on trumpet. He had a regular system. It was a system of a 100 lesson course. I went through that, and that is the advanced course. I went through that and I started playing in the advanced course. Before I got through with the first course, I was as good as they were already.
- W: So, you got a job to pay for your trumpet, then?
- J: Yes, and I got in the band for a while. I started playing in the ice rink. This was where VanCook said to me----he said to the band---the Polessa, you know that _____ in Marquette now----that wasn't up yet. They had an old rig, in Agasie Park, do you know where Agasie Park is now-----down there where they play ball. It was about as high as this house-----only one floor, you see? They had a skating rink there, and we used to go down three times a week. I used to make two dollars a time when I would go down there, see? I used to make money that way. That used to pay for my lessons.

W: Then you got the job in the mine?

J: Yes, then they got me a job----they didn't get me the job in the mine, I got the job myself.

W: Oh, how did you do that?

J: Well-- when our show closed down that time, and I passed by the mine they said, "Where are you going, kid?" Oh, I said, "Just walking around." He was dressed all in a white suit and a cap, you know. They always dressed in white suits. And he said, "You want a job?" And I said, "What kind of a job do you have?" He said, "Drill boy." And I said, "OK, OK, Cap!" He told me to get ready and he told me all about it and that we leaving tonight already. That was only about nine o'clock. I was walking around the shore, around the office then. "I don't know," I said---"I have to go home and tell my folks about it." My mother said, "OK, that will get you a little pay." I said that there was a circus in town and I had to see it---where the old church is now, in Red Jacket. The circus was in town and it was called the Pearl Circus. I wanted to see that circus, and I had to work tonight at 6 o'clock----go down the mine. I hanged around the circus, until they got their pants up, and the fellow who feeds the animals, you know---he gave me a job carrying water for those animals. He said, "You carry water for this, and I will give you a ticket so you can see the show this afternoon." I could see that they were lining up to have a parade, now they were going to have a parade. Then he gave me a long rope, and the ticket was in my finger, and that thing looked like a cow----it had one of those things that stuck up like that, you know. (gesture)

W: A rhinoceros?

J: Yes, they were as big as an elephant. I was afraid of it----I went from here to the other room, I would give it a lot of slack, you know! (laughter) I would give it a lot of slack! He had that big mouth, though, and when he turned it up I said, "Oh, my gosh!" (laughter) And those eyes, if he ever gave you a rise with that horn, it would raise you up in the air!

W: Yes, that big tusk!

J: Well----I had seen the circus and I rushed home and I said, "Mom, I have to get ready to go to work now, I have a new job tonight." Me and my little bucket. A little tea or coffee, I can't remember what they were drinking now.

W: How old were you when you started this?

J: Fourteen years old.

W: Fourteen!

J: Yes, I was fourteen! I went to work in the minery.

W: Do you remember what they paid you for this?

J: One dollar a day. We went down at six o'clock in the night, and it was six o'clock in the morning before you would get up.

W: And, what did you have to do then?

J: Well---I had to get, the first thing--- we would haul a couple barrals of water, two or three barrels. They had these cars on the track that would run into the drifts where the miners were working. I had to fill the water from the shaft from the pipes that were running. Fill the barrels and push them in 1500 feet in the drift. That was hard labor. Those tracks in the mine were all twisted, like that, and the cars didn't want to stay on the track. Once in a while they would get off of the track, and you would always carry a bar to raise them up. I used to raise them. They would slip one wheel going in. Then I used to make clay rolls. When the miners blasted, they had these clay rolls. When you put in the powder, you make clay holes about three inches long, half the size of a powder safe-- and then they would push in with that long pole. The pole would go into the hole and bring it right up to the fuse. It would pack it in there, pack it. I used to have to make about 30 to 40 of them a day, every night. And, I had to get the drills ready for the miners. From the shaft, I had to haul those drills in, and then pick up the old and bring them back, and put them in the skipp when they sent them up to get sharpened. Those days they didn't have those short picks. Then they had those long drills.

W: How heavy were they?

J: Those drills? They were two inches thick. The starter was two feet long, and then there was a four foot drill and then there was a six foot drill, there was an eight foot drill and there was a ten foot drill---and maybe as far as twelve sometimes. Those twelve foot drills, you would carry them on your back, like that.

W: They were heavy, then?

J: Oh, my shoulders were really flat. It isn't like that anymore either. They don't carry those drill around like that.

W: Did you have to carry black powder around too?

J: Well----when we carried the powder. We would go down the shaft, number 3 shaft, that is the first mine. They just use it to haul the people down---that doesn't house any ore anymore. They just use it to haul the people down because the number 3, 4, 5, and 6----they didn't have any more. They all had to go down that one mine and cross over until they would get to the place on the third level. Then we had to cross to-----number three, that is all down. Number 4 and 5, I was working in the number 5

shaft. They was still more ore in the number 6 shaft. That's all that there was there then. The salt mines weren't there.

W: This was all C&H?

J: All C&H.

W: Did you have to carry this black powder then from shaft to shaft, or up and down?

J: When we crossed the shaft we would, when we crossed over--- there was a place where they used to keep powder, see? It was a powder house, we had to go there and certain fellows would be there already. "How much do you want?" Eighteen 6ths of powder or twenty 6ths of powder, I would put them in my bosom, I would fill up my bosom. And, I had to slide down a ladder 600 hundred feet.

W: Woo----slide down?

J: Sure, slide down----go down the ladders, keep going down the ladders. You were at a 45 degree angle and you had to keep going down step by step, you know. I was pretty handy, hell---zip,zip,zip----I would take two or three steps at one time when I would go down. Yes, my bosom was always like that. Once in a while they had the caps that would go on the ends of the fuses---they used to have fuses. Once in a while I had to take a box of caps, they gave me a box of caps, and I used to put them in there too. That would have exploded if I had ever fell down bumped. I took a lot of chances with those things. One dollar a day.

W: You went down pretty fast, but it must have been quite a job to come back up!

J: Oh, yes. But, I was used to it---but, now I wouldn't be able to make one ladder. One ladder, and I would be all in. I never would take notice, I used to up and down.

W: Did they have many accidents?

J: No, I don't ever remember having seen an accident, while I was there.

W: How long were you there?

J: I was only there three months.

W: From there where did you go to work, then?

J: I worked for C&H. I was a drill boy for the number 13 shaft, that is the last shaft. That was the last shaft.

W: And then you worked in----?

I only had about 300 feet, then there was a drift. We used to all go down ladders, never take no skipp or case to go down. I would always hold my ladder, and they would come up my ladder. After I looked at it it was about 3600 feet deep. Just like this one here, they have no shaft up here now, 3600 feet.

W: How long did you work as a drill boy, then for C&H?

J: That didn't last very long either, they closed that thing up-- what the hell--copper went so cheap that they couldn't run it. Lumber was only 14¢ a pound at that time.

W: Well---where did you get a ob then?

J: Then I came to the Hecala Mine. The old mine, the conglomerate veins---the big veins. I got a job there as a drill----no, I was a timberman already then. I was getting near 16, 17 years old at that time, so I got a job there as a timberman. They hired me as a horsing boy---to horse the timber up the shaft. You would hook up the timber, and horse they up to the drifts. As they went up the----we used to call them stokes at the time----the vein was only about 9 feet, if you would go 85 to 100 feet, after you get near the 100 feet---you would break into the next one, there would be another one. Every 100 feet it was a level. Yes, that was tough work in those days. It wasn't bad at Hecala, but what I didn't like was that they wouldn't pay me because I wasn't old enough. Captain San Richards said, "Well, John, I can't pay you, I can't give you full wages yet." I can't remember what I made there, but I think it was a little more than half of what they made. I was making, I don't know, it was close to a dollar difference a day, they were getting a dollar more than I was. In those days the wages were about 2 dollars a day, 2 and a quarter, 2 and a half were the highest wages.

W: No unions or anything like that?

J: No, there were no unions. You didn't dare talk unions around them. C&H was all Republican, you would never get a job if you would tell them that you weren't Republican! (laughter)

W: Did you stay working in the mines, then?

J: I stayed there until I had a big accident. At the Hecala Mine I was working on the 23d line, werwere timbermen, and we were up in the air about 85 feet one day---here's you^u drift, you see---we were building up about 85 feet in the stope already, and the vein was anly about 9 feet long, high. They had a----the ground was bad, you see. We were putting square timbers, 12' x 14' square timbers, oh, just here and there and then we would criss-cross them. You could go up just as if you were going down a shaft in the mine---every 8 feet there was a stoke

They used to build up and hoist some timber up through there. So, one day, an old man---a boss called Adams---he used to like me, he knew I could pull better than any man he had in the mine. He used to use me for---whenever those skipps would come up with a load of timber, he would put me with the hooks, those hooks that you grab the timber with, like that. He used to put me at the head of that. Those old fellows, he used to say, those Europeans, they don't understand that. I could take that and throw from here to the other room, and catch a timber, WHEE---. He gave me that job when they used to lower down timber from the shaft to bring in. One day the boss said to me, "John, you go to the stoke and take my place up there." "Help those fellows up above land those timbers." I didn't want to go up there, and the boss was going to take my place, be the hoist man. I said, "OK." And, I was there for about 15 to 20 minutes, maybe a half an hour---and the first thing' you know---he said, "You go down there, and I will catch the timber up here." I got half way down the stoke going down, and a big slab of vein came down---it was about 2 feet thick and about 40 feet across---and it landed right on those timbers that we were putting up. They were laying right there, and he got caught on timber where I was there, two minutes before that. He got caught in there, and I could see when I looked up the stoke, I could see with my light, theirs were all dark already. The air came down and blew everyone's light out. I went down 12-15 feet before I could see his brains dropping off of his forehead---dropping down like guts, you know. They squashed him in that timber, it squeezed his head, it squashed it like a board. I was moving next to his second man, the man that was next to the boss. He had a second man, and he got caught---he fell down, and his legs were like that, rocks were around his legs like that---and he died like that. Then a little while after, another fellow---there were three of them, there were four of us most of the time. The boss said five or six men most of the time. And, then there was one more called George Crucivitz---he had just started there, he was a Yugoslavian. He was a nice looking guy, and that slap struck him on the head, but he was in the middle between where the timber wasn't crossed--and he just pushed them down, way down-----. It didn't hit him so bad, but he died before he got up. There was three that were dead before they got up. Well---about 200-300 feet there was another set of miners, they heard that draft, there was dust from the cave in, you see. They hollered, "Don't move, don't move-----stay right where you are!" I was out of there, down at the end near the track----I was going to get out of there. They came over, but they couldn't move them either---. It took a long time, I didn't go back when they came down, they were caught in there, you see. I stayed down stairs. I went up when they hoisted them up and they were dead. All gone, three of them were dead. They wouldn't even ask me, when they had an inquest about what happened, you see. They wouldn't ask me, and I was the only one who could say---talk about how it happened. They braced that block up with a lot of timbers, and wedges, and I

said, "Hell!" Hold that blocks up, that was just too heavy for them. It just bent those posts just like that. They went down and they just snapped.

W: Did they have people, John, who were really trained, or learned this in the old country----this timbering or that?

J:

W: Oh, they just learned it on the job

J: There was nothing particular about it, you just had to be a pretty handy man. Someone with no education could have done that job, anybody could do that. They all cut the _____ before they would go down, so they just fit, and one would lap over the other---they would close them right in. You didn't have to put any nails in, all you had to do when you get them all up-----they had fellows with wedges and cross-knives, and that's all they did to hold them still. To hold weight on them.

W: You had Yugoslavians, you had Italians, and I suppose you had some Finns-----.

(End of side #1 of tape)

side #2 of tape

W: We were talking, John, about Italians and Yugoslavians, and you say you had Finns. Did everybody get along well together?

J: Yes, yes---all the people in those days.

W: How about when they were living-----after work, around town and that?

J: Oh, yes.

W: Everybody got along pretty good!

J: Oh, in those days----you wouldn't know the difference between one and the other. If one had a picnic, everybody had a picnic. If the Yugoslavians had a picnic we would go, if the Italians had a picnic everyone would go. The Finns used to have most of their picnics by that river, what do you call it----that river up there by Bruce's Crossing. By that park, what do you call it----I have played there many of times.

W: Ah, I can't think of the name either.

J: I don't know how many Finnish picnics they had up there, that were celebrations.

- W: Picnics were a great thing back in those days, weren't they?
- J: Oh, yes. We used to have them at, what do you call it, Three Lakes----?
- W: Twin Lakes!?
- J: Yes, Twin Lakes. There was quite a thing at those Twin Lakes.
- W: Well---after that accident, did you quit working in the mines?
- J: Oh, yes, I quit. I didn't go down anymore after that. I turned everything down. I said, "No!" They got me a job in the paint shop.
- W: Oh, when did you really get started with the music then?
- J: Oh, after I studied six months, I was in the band---I was making money already.
- W: You were playing the same time you were in the bands, as you were working underground?
- J: Yes, sure. I was playing----they just used me in their rehearsals at that time. I didn't go out on Sundays yet----not the public jobs. The first jobs I got to go out----it was at Park Ice Rink in Red Jacket.
- W: Well---when you were playing with the band---that was a C&H band, wasn't it?
- J: Yes, that was C&H.
- W: Did they pay you, as the band members extra-----for playing?
- J: No, the managers do all the booking. Every month you would get your pay----once a month. They had everything down.
- W: They paid you for playing in the band extra, right?
- J: Yes, that's right. Do you know what I was averaging at that time----in music business?
- W: No
- J: I used--the manager would call Fred Collie, he was the solo coronet player of the band----and that's where I finished up working with him. I was the assistant to him. He was the first, he was the soloist, I was just his assistant, in my kid days, you see. That's where I made my first money----I used to make an average of---for the whole year---of 108 dollars a month. And, when I started at the mine I was only getting 26

dollars a month. At Calumet and Hecala, hell---if you got a dollar and a half you would be getting big money.

W: So, then you got started more in playing music and in the bands.

J: Yes, what I made was music, and that's why I got into it, I got independent. A lot of the small bosses around, they didn't like me-----especially _____-----they only place I got along good as with old man Larson at the paint shop. He and I got along very good all the time.

W: I suppose that they didn't like the idea that you were making a lot more money than they were.

J Yes, that was the whole thing. They didn't want to see me get out. We had an Englishman called Jack Bastian---everytime the band would go out, we would be on the job, and we would say, "Hey, Bastian----tomorrow we have a picnic to play at, we won't be here tomorrow." He would say, "You can't go--you can't go!" I said, "Hell, don't worry---when the band goes, I will be right there!" Oh, he used to get so-----he used to go back and report it to the old man, the boss. Gus Larson was the big boss----oh, he was a beautiful man, a wonderful man to work for. He was nice--he knew he couldn't do anything. He couldn't do anything with me at that time---I was too independent. One day when I was cleaning the paint shop, the office---it is closed down now. They had a big draft room there, that's where the guys did all the drafting work. Well---we were supposed to----we started to paint that all up on the ceiling. He came along one day, and said, "Tomorrow, Lan is going to White Pine and he will be gone for three days--." And they didn't want to let him go. And the boss said, "You can't go away for three days--you have to finish that job!" I told him that that job was here before I was! Then he said, "You will get fired!" I said if you want to do me a favor, go right ahead! I told him I was only kidding, but I used to sas him back---because if I was to leave that job I could get another one. We went three times in the office room, with all the big bosses----we used to down to their office and complain about it. I said that they got me here for the band, didn't they! The band got me the job---with the understanding that when the band is out, I am with the band. When there is no work, no playing-----I am with the paint job.

W: What types of music did the band play, basically?

J: Oh, in those days they would play anything. Of course, in those days we were in a lot of parades and we would play marches. We used to have six man orchestras that would go out and play at night----five or six men here, and five or six men there. Out of the 35 or 40 men the band had, they used to divide it up. They didn't tell you anything. They had a sleep boarder all around that band room, just like it was a school. We will go to Painesdale tomorrow night, and maybe the next one would go to

Chassell, the next one would go to Barage or someplace like that.

W: How did you get there----to these different places?

J: Oh, we used to get there---if we had to go further, we would go by the trains. The evening train---or later when they started to get these cars, Ford cars and Maxwell cars----we used to go by car then. Old cars even way back then. WE all had cars.

W: Did you have to play different music----for instance, if a bunch of Austrians were having something---did you have to play Austrian music?

J: No, it was always the same. We all used to play the same music. They had to take what we had.

W: Well---when did you quit working at C&H then? What year was that, do you remember?

J: The last time I was working for C&H was---let's see----I was 24 years old. That's why I was hired. Besides, I was booked to go to the Ringling Band. I signed a contract with Richard, he used to be the director of the Ringling Band. They were resting all winter in Ohio---and they were going to leave the 4th of March and go to the coasts see---go straight to the coasts. I had my papers all filled out, signed and I passed the exam. I had answered all the questions they had asked. And, they said, "Be here for the 4th, we're leaving on the 4th." Well---when the 4th came, I was all hooked up to get married. I had to wire them back just the day before, and say that I couldn't make it. I told them that something was wrong, or I was sick or something like that----I had to pass it off. So, I don't know what they had in those days---but, they had to get another one, that's all, to fill my spot, you see. Oh, they would find plenty---I got in with him because I was redommended by someone who played at the Dolby House, you see?

W: Were you working for C&H then----during the time of the strike?

J: Yes, I was working right up to that time for C&H.

W: Were you working here when they had the big strike in 1913?

J: Oh, when they had the big strike in 1913, no. I was here already, but that's when I went to work for Ford ~~that~~ that time. In 1912, I worked for Ford, you see? I came back in 1913, and I didn't play with the C&H Band right away, I was jogging around. There was a lot of _____ to see. Laurium had a band at that time. And, where that Quality store is now----that used to be Vivian's store. Vivian had a store there---a grocery store. They said that Mr. Vivian would give you a job in the

clothing department. I was working in the clothing, and I don't even remember what the pay was. I know we weren't making much at all.

W: During this time did you do any playing in the Calumet Theater?

J: Oh, yes. All those big shows that came through here in those days---I never stopped and took pictures. I just waited for the big shows. I was in with the Calumet and Hecala band. Fred Collie, he was the manager of the band---he was the solo coronet player there. When he couldn't go he sent me in his place--I used to take his ~~place~~. I don't know how many shows I played in there. I could name you 25-30 different shows, all those big companies used to come here. Moe Henry, and Eddie Canterna---and the big shows like that used to come in here. And, I used to play Irish Rose and all of them. Most of the time I would be in it--because they need two trumpets, first and second. And, besides that---those shows, when we they used to play here a day or two, then they would go and play at the Caraseea in Hancock. Do you remember that theater there?

W: I remember hearing about it

J: Well---we had to go down and play that show, because we had rehearsed it here before. If that show started in Hancock, we would have to go down there and rehearse it two hours before it was time. Yes, two hours before time we had to be there and rehearse it---just the top of rehearsal, that's all---just the top of rehearsal. Then in the next two days we played here again. That was our job, you see?

W: Well---you came back up here then in 1913?

J: Yes, that's right.

W: Then the strike happened.

Oh, the C&H didn't like it. They didn't give me that job unless I was staying with the Laurium band at that time. I only had a couple of months to go, that's all.

W: Was this a village---a Laurium village band, or what?

J: Yes, t he Laurium village band.

W: Did each of the villages have their own band?

J: Yes, they used to give them a band room and everything, and a lot of things, you know.

W: They must have had all kinds of bands?

J: Oh, yes. The first was the C&H, then there was the Red Jacket band. Then there was a Finnish band. Art Kiddie's dad used to run the Finnish band. There was an Auslin Band and then there was even a _____ band in my kid days. Ameke had a band, Mohawk had a band----they all had pretty good size bands, 18-20-25 men.

W: I suppose that they all had uniforms----and every parade and holiday they all played and marched.

J: Yes, that's how it was. When that strike came out here, they were all going to be in these parades. They had that Italian Hall there---you heard about that diaster in the town hall there!?

W: Yes!

J: They were holding all of their meetings there. Then, the Mohawk band used to come down and play for the parades. And, I wasn't playing with the C&H band for that couple of months. I was holding a job, and I was with the Laurium band.

W: Well---did you stay in the Copper Country then, or did you leave, or---?

J: No, I didn't leave for quite a while. Then the C&H band was after me again. They said that they would get me a good job with better money. So, if I was going to get 2 dollars a day, and maybe I was only getting one dollar a day at the other place---and I was just married, you see. And, I said, "Do you want to go into town?" That was with my first wife.

W: When did you finally leave the area, then to go to----you went to Chicago, I think you told me, didn't you?

J: Oh, I was rambling around, But I never did stop in Chicago, I just played there at a certain date, I can't count that. That was just a pick-up.

W: Did you play in the Adam's Theater down there?

Oh yes. That was my longest job---I played there

W: When did you go down there?

I started at the Adam's Theater in 1919. And, when I would get tired of one theater, I would jump to another. But, I never like to stay there in the summer time. When the union used to send a sub in my place for the summertime, the summer months, and I would go back and play with Bob _____. You have heard of that haven't you?

W: Out of Detroit, yes.

- J: Yes, 18 miles out of Detroit. I would take the boat and play while going out----hell----I made big money then.
- W: Well----you went down there in 1919.
- J: 1919----well, I worked at the Adam's Theater for four years.
- W: Is that where you went from the Copper Country---to Chicago?
- J: Yes.
- W: Why did you go down there, was it for the money---or?
- J: No, when I went down there first, I didn't strike good with the Adam's Theater----I went down to Saginaw, there was a director that I knew down there pretty good, Art Amsen, and he had a band down there. I got to play with him when he was playing for the strikers, a military man was here when the strike was on----out in the field. And, his solo coronet player had to backwards---he was a theater man, you see? In Saginaw, so he had to go back and I took his place in that military band. He was in Florida, and one time when he heard that I was in Detroit at the Adam's Theater---he sent a French Horn player up and he wanted me to review him. He would pick me up and he wanted me to go down there. The fellow who played horn----I played with him in the Ford band in 1912. He was playing in Miami Beach. He said, "John, Art sent me up--and he wants you to come down and play with him now." Well--I said, "What's in the job---what's the most that they pay?" Oh, he said, "Fifty-five dollars a week." I said, "Hell, I am making eighty-five dollars a week right here!" So, I turned that down.
- W: Well---you were pretty closely involved with that fellow from Suomi College who was a musician too? What was his name?
- J: Nisson---Professor Nisson, yes, he was a great man. That is one of the best musicians that I ever-----we never had anyone like that here since. Too bad that that man died young. He would be there yet. Yes, he was a great man of music. And talk about directing---you ought to see him direct a band, an orchestra----he was so quick, full of life. You could see that---I think he died from being a nervous wreck, that is my idea of it----I heard something like that. His nerves got shot, you see? Too much excitement. He was a great man---boy, I really helped him a lot and he helped me a lot. When there were times that he didn't have enough men he would call me, and he would say that he would like to have so many men, a couple of trombone players, or a couple of clarinet players----we had a lot of violins in the orchestra, pretty good ones too. And, Mr. Nisson had a couple of concerts to give in, what was it,--Negaunee or Ishpeming---they used to play quite a few concerts every now and then. He used to take us down there all the time. We used to like him, he was a man who knows his _____. Like I said,

when it comes setting harmony. They had a lot of decent harmony, but no one had the time to take it in like he did. "When I studied harmony," he told me once, "I could write music for 12 or 9 hours a day." I had to go not only 2 years, but I had to go about 7 years before I got the Doctors'. You could learn to be a doctor before that, after you learn all of that stuff. He used to say that the harmony was too far apart from this part to that other part. You have got to fill it in between there, that's what you call close harmony, you see. Just like if you take a short cut, you take one road----but, if you want to take everything in, you have got to cover everything in the middle. Cover every spot, and then you have the whole thing. That's the same way with music too. That's why I got to like him---that was him. I knew he had that harmony down perfect. We used to play at that Finnish -----

W: Sebalian? (sp?)

Sebalian, yes. Boy, he used to go over big with that. He used to make us play it too.

W: What years were you connected with him?

J: Let's see, I will have to think back now. Right up until the -----right up until WPA. I left in 1942.

W Oh yes

J: I left in 1942, and I was wondering----I used to send him a card for Christmas while I was down there all the time, but suddenly he died. First thing I knew--the last time I wrote to him, I forget what year it was--I didn't get any answer back. Then my brothers wrote to me, and they said that he was dead. He died, his wife died a little before him just.

W: You were back up here during the Depression days, then?

J: Oh, yes.

W: WPA?

J: Yes, I left in 1930. I was working in the theaters, and there were only three theaters which had music when I left. The music was all gone. Adam's Theater had music yet, the Cablough, and the Madison Theater, and a few other theaters around there. They were the only ones who had music. They told us a certain time, when they gave us a date----well, when it was over----. John Kotski, John Kotski and George Tunnel----they used to own all the theaters. Tunnel was a great lawyer, he was a lawyer down in Detroit. They sold those theaters the last year that I was there. Around 1930 they sold those theaters for 53 million dollars. All the theaters, there wasn't much except for the Adams'. We had about a 36 man orchestra playing down at the _____ there. In Michigan they had about 50-55 men playing

down there. And, John Kotski----and they took us. After that when I came away the first thing I knew was that he came up in Eagle River, Wisconsin, under the name of King. That wasn't his name, his name was John Kotski----a Russian Jew, and he changed his name and came up here because he was--he-- very much for sports. There was the sporting business up here, and he would put all his money into something like that. And, he had a big place in Westmond----a big home, a palace. He took us out to his cottage for three or four days. There were cooks there, a place to sleep, everything to eat----he fed us for four days. Trap Rock, around the lake between Port Huron and Detroit--and an island there. He had a cottage there, and it was a big place. Oh, he had all kinds of cooks there. It was just like being in a big motel.

W: Music must have really been important then to almost all of the people back in those years----in the early 1900s?

J: In the 1900s, yes. 1900, that was the time of the bands, that is the time that the C&H had the best bands here.

W: But everybody must have been interested in them?

J: That's the time. My brother started in 1900 and I started in 1901. My brother was in the band a year before me, already. When they went to Milwaukee, that band would tour. There was 36 bands and the parade, and this band was up there. They would count the prizes----you didn't pick your own, you know. They would put up a number, and they would have all the judges sitting on the chairs----and they would take everything down. Do you understand that I mean by that?

W:

J: They would judge for every section. They would have a man for every section, a brass section, a clarinet section----whatever section you had there. Each one was supposed to study all they wanted while you played the number. This band took the prize away from 36 other bands, the Calumet and Hecala Band. You didn't see them when they came back, they went down with the train there. When they would come back the train was just covered with flags---trimmed all around the cars and everything. It was decorated like a Christmas tree. Boy, when you got to the depot, you couldn't even stand on the street there were people so close down there in those days.

W: Much different from today?

J: Oh, yes. There is a big difference from today, yes. You can come up here some other times, if you want some more little things.

W: Yes. It works out pretty well, I think, doesn't it?

J: I didn't know we were that long. I'm not educated enough to know.

(End of side # 2)
(End of interview)