



Finnish
American
Historical
Archive
and Museum

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

(Funded in part by the National Endowment For The Humanities)

F.F.S.C.G.L.M.R. DIGITIZATION PROJECT 2010-2011

*(Funded in part by the Keweenaw National Historic Park Advisory
Commission / U.S. Department of the Interior, National Park Service)*

CONDITIONS FOR USE OF .PDF TRANSCRIPT:

Finlandia University, formerly Suomi College, holds the exclusive copyright to the entirety of its Finnish Folklore and Social Change in the Great Lakes Mining Region Oral History Collection, including this .pdf transcript which is being presented online for research and academic purposes. Any utilization that does not fall under the United States standard of Fair Use (see U.S. Copyright Office or Library of Congress), including unauthorized re-publication, is a violation of Federal Law. For any other use, express written consent must be obtained from the Finnish American Historical Archive: archives@finlandia.edu.

PREFERRED FORMAT FOR CITATION / CREDIT:

"Maki, John", Finnish Folklore and Social Change in the Great Lakes Mining Region Oral History Collection, Finlandia University, Finnish American Historical Archive and Museum.

Note: Should the Finnish American Archive be a resource for publication, please send a copy of the publication to the Archive:

Finnish American Historical Archive and Museum
Finlandia University
601 Quincy St.
Hancock, Michigan 49930 USA
906-487-7347 - fax: 906-487-7557

Rose A. Butala
August 8, 1974

Betty Fisher

<u>Topic</u>	<u>Page</u>	<u>Comment</u>
Born in Calumet	1	
The 1913 Strike	3	
Fire in Italian Hall	3-4	
Recreation	5-8	
Transportation	9	
Apprentice Dress Maker	10-11	
First Radio	13	
Working for Michigan Bell	14-15	Early Swithboards &
Hazards of a Telephone Operator	116	phones
Pay Rates	18	
Company Unions	20-21	Striking
Clerical Work	23	
Registering Calls	24	
The "Dial" Phone	25	
Work Shifts	28	
Coffee breaks	29	
Complaints from Customers	30	
Attitude Toward Retirement	30-31	

INTRODUCTION

This is a personal interview with Rose Butala of Laurium. She was a career women of her era and worked steady for the Michigan Bell Telephone Company from 1918 until her retirement in 1959. She was a very dedicated and faithful employee. I was impressed with her loyalty to the Company throughout the interview.

DIRECT INTERVIEW

Betty: How old are you Rose?

Rose: I am 80 years old.

Betty: An/ where were you born?

Rose: I was born in Calumet and I lived in Calumet all my life.

Betty: Were your parent's born in Calumet?

Rose: No, my mother was born in Ontonagon and my father was born in Europe.

Betty: What part of Europe was he born?

Rose: He was born in Austria but when he was eight years old he moved to Germany and he lived there for the rest of his European life.

Betty: Do you know how old he was when he came to the United States?

Rose: Twenty-nine.

Betty: What brought him to this country, do you know?

Rose: No I don't know, I suppose for better work and better wages. They all thought this was such a wonderful country and they all came for better.

Betty: How about your mother than, you said she was born in Ontonagon?

Rose:

Betty: How did they meet then? Did your father land in Ontonagon?

Rose: No, when my mother was four years old they came to Calumet, and they came on New Year's Eve and it was very stormy and they came by stage, and on the way they could see all the Indians around the fires and the reveses. When the horses got tired they changed horses along the way; they had stables along the way. Well, anyway they all ended in Calumet and C&H was just first starting then and they lived here. At first they lived in Red Jacket for two years and then the whole street burnt down and after that they got a house up in Sweettown and they lived there for the rest of their life. And my father, he boarded some where up in Sweettown and they got to meet each other that way. And my grandfather, he took an interest in my dad and he wanted him for his son-in-law so he insisted on my mother marrying him. So they were married and they had eleven children. And at first they lived up in Sweettown and from there they moved to Calumet Avenue, and now were living in Laurium.

Betty: Did your father work for C&H?

Rose: He worked for the C&H, he worked all the while he lived in Calumet.

Betty: Was he a miner?

Rose: No, he worked in the rockhouse in his younger days and when he was older he worked on surface.

Betty: There's alot you hear^d about the 1913 strike. Do you remember anything about that?

Rose: Oh yes, I remember that very well. The strikers would parade every morning. They had marches and the strike lasted quite long. It lasted way until next spring and it had started in July.

Betty: How old were you when that 1913 strike started?

Rose: I was about nineteen years old at that time.

Betty: Oh well, then you would remember pretty vividly. Was your father involved in the strike, brothers or sisters?

Rose: No he wasn't. One of my brothers was working, but he was no striker. When they first started they went all around to all the mine workers and those that were working they got them off their jobs. And of course, my brother was working and he had to run home with all the strikers after him, but some women was standing by her gate and she opened her gate and left him through her yard and closed the gate so that they couldn't get in. So they had to let him go.

Betty: How about your Dad now. Was he involved in that 1913 strike at all?

Rose: No, he was a deputy

Betty: And there's alot said about that time when they had this disaster at this Italian Hall. How old were you then?

Rose: I was nineteen. That was terrible. I think it was around Christmas Eve and they were having their Christmas party at this hall and I don't know, they claim someone came in there and hollared FIRE and of course, everyone rushed to the stairway and they were all trapped in the stairway. And I think there were 35 that were killed at that time, they were smothered.

Betty: You remember vividly anything about it? They say there was a funeral ~~possession~~
profession.

Rose: Yes, there was and they buried them all at once. And they were all buried in one big lot.

Betty: How come you weren't at that Italian Hall if you were like nineteen, or any of your brothers and sisters?

Rose: Because we didn't belong to the Union, it was only those that were on strike and belonging to the union that were able to go there.

Betty: Oh, I see. What sort of things do you remember about your childhood, Rose?

Rose: I started school when I was five or six years old. At first I attended the public school and as I grew older I attended the Sacred Heart School. In those days teachers were very cross and strict, and also my parents were real strict too. We weren't allowed to do anything, but at the same time we would get away with a few things.

Betty: What sort of things do you remember about getting away with?

Rose: One day when my brothers and sisters were coming home from school they found a can of paint, and they started to paint the rocks and they got their cloths all full of paint and they came home like that. Of course, mother got after them.

Betty: Mother was pretty strict, hey?

Rose: Yes, she was, and we had alot of chores to do when we came home from school. Each one had their work to do And we had alot of homework, we did quite a bit of that every night.

Betty: Were you in the middle of the kids? There was eleven in all, were you situated in the middle?

Rose: I was in the center. There was five older and five younger. Three girls and two boys were older and three boys and two girls were younger.

Betty: Were your brothers typical boys

Rose: Oh yes, they got into mischief every now and then. We had a large garden and we planted our own vegetables and we had one or two cows. We had our own milk. My mother sewed and my father was very handy too, he fixed shoes, he made his wedding shoes. He fixed everything around the house so we never had to have anyone else to do anything for us.

Betty: Did he repair things

Rose: He repaired everything.

Betty: The jack of all trades.

Rose: Yes he was, my father he made different things. He made sleighs and he made a wagon, he even made the wheels. He cut them out in four sections and wedged them together on a hub. He had spokes in them too. He made the spoke. He also made shoes. He made his own cobbler bench. He made a seat on it and in the box he had all kinds of nails, and each different kinds of things that he used. They each had their own compartment. He had every thing as neat as a pin.

Betty: What sort of things did you do, like for entertainment

Rose: Well, in the winter time we had our own ice rink in the back yard. We skated and besides that we had a big hill and we used to sleigh ride. We would go down a big hill and we would go down so fast that we would come up another hill.

Betty: wow, that must have been exciting!

Rose: Yes, we enjoyed it very much. And once in a while we went to a show, but not too often.

Betty: What kind of shows did they have

Rose: They had movies. They were silent movies

Betty: Charlie Chaplin I'd bet?

Rose: Yes.

Betty: Who was your favorite? Did you have a favorite?

No, I didn't go often enough to have an favorites

Betty: Were shows expensive?

No, they were only 10¢ in those days.

Betty: Not like now-a-days, hey

I would say not

Betty: What about dances

Rose: Well, I didn't go to many dances because our mother was to strict. She didn't want us to be out. We had our entertainment at home.

Betty: What sort of entertainment did yo have at home?

Rose: Well we had music. We all played. Our mother played too. We each played a different instrument. We had our own orchestra. Then later there was two of my sisters that taught music lessons. One taught on the mandolin and the other taught on the guitar, and they had very many students.

Betty: What instrument did your mother play?

Rose: She played the organ

Betty: And what did you play

Rose: Well, I played the organ and I played the guitar

Betty: What other sort of instruments did you have

The violin

Betty: Who played the violin

Rose: One of my sisters played the violin, and also one of my brothers. And then I had another brother that played the mandolin too. We had more than one mandolin.

Betty: Were the musical instruments you used, did you buy them?
Or were they made?

Rose: No, they were boughten.

Betty: Were they expensive in those days

Rose: Well no, not like now. But they were very good instruments.
But they were not expensive like they are now.

Betty: What about your dad did he play an nstrument too?

Rose: No, he didn't play.

Betty: Did yo sing?

Rose: We all sang.

Betty: Well, you didn't have to go out for your entertainment

Rose: No, we had our own entertainment in our own home.

Betty: You said your mother didn't like you to be out. She didn't like
you to go out and mix with others?

Rose: She prefered us to be at home. I belonged to a school orchestra and
we had many programs and I also belonged to the church choir, and
we also had entertainment there. Different parties and that.

Betty: How many times a week did you go to the choir?

Rose: Once a week.

Betty: And then you would sing at the services on Sunday?

Rose: Yes.

Betty: Did you live in a wooded area? I mean did you have a lot of
neighbors?

Rose: Well, we had neighbors, but it was in a wooded area.

Betty: Was there a lot of fields around and grass?

Yes, there was a large field around the whole place. After the field there was the woods.

Betty: Did you get out and pick alot of berries?

Well, I didn't do much berrie picking. The first time I picked everyone in the crowd got lost and it stirred me up so much I never wanted to go berry picking anymore.

Betty: How did you get out of it when you were lost

Rose: Well, I don't know, we happened to get together and one of my Uncles was there and he got the bunch together again.

Betty: Did you see any bears or anything like this?

There were ~~know~~ bears in the woods in those days.

Betty: I wonder why

Rose: Well, I don't know, but then there was a time when a bear did come. C&H Company had a hunter out there to watch for that bear, and too get him and he did. So we hadn't had any bear until later years.

Betty: Did your brothers and your Dad hunt?

Rose: Yes, my brothers and Dad both went hunting. They enjoyed that very much and also fishing.

Betty: Oh, that's right. Was there alot of water and streams around?

Rose: Yes, there were several streams.

Betty: Were they close by to where you lived?

Rose: No, they had to walk quite a ways to get there.

Betty: Did you own an automobile?

No, we didn't own ~~know~~ car. People didn't have cars in those days. There was just one car and that was the first car in Calumet. The superintendent of the mine was the one that had that. When he rode around he came up to Sved~~st~~own everyday and every one ~~in~~ in the town, when they would hear the car, they ran to the gate to look at it.

Betty: Do you ever remember the first car ride you had

Rose: No, I don't remember that, of course, I had several

Betty: I wonder, say how old were you when you went in an automobile?

Rose: Oh, I was about, well, I was in my teens when I had my first car ride. My brothers had a motorcycle.

Betty: Did you like to ride on that?

Rose: Well, I had three rides, but the third one I fell off so I didn't ride anymore. That was the end of my riding.

Betty: Did it go very fast?

Oh, yes they went fast.

Betty: Your mother didn't mind the boys having a motorcycle?

Well, she didn't like it to well, but they insisted on having it so they had it.

Betty: Of course, there wasn't all that traffic on the roads either?

No, there wasn't traffic on the roads then, like here is now.

Betty: Did they still travel by cart or horse, or anything in those days?

Rose: Well, yes they still had horse and buggy.

Betty: Horse and buggy?

Rose: Yes, because there weren't too many cars. As time wen on the cars increased.

Betty: How far was it when you had to go to a market

Rose: Well, it was about a mile that we had to walk

Betty: Did you have a cart or something you pulled?

Rose: No, we had to carry our things and we went most every day.

Betty: What sort of things did you buy in those days?

Rose: Groceries, same as you do now and our clothing.

Betty: Was the town like it is now, like the stores on Fifth Street?

Rose: Yes, they were. They weren't so up-to-date like they are now. They were more old fashioned.

Betty: Did they have taverns in those days?

Rose: Oh yes, they were plentiful ^{then} too

Betty: When you finished school then Rose, what did you do? Did you get a job right away?

Rose: After completing school I helped home for awhile. Then I started as an apprenticeship dress maker. I sewed for two or three years and after that I got a job in the garment factory.

Betty: What sort of garments did you make?

Rose: We made all different kinds of dresses, housedresses. They did make some better dresses too. But when the First World War started the manager of this shop went to war, so it closed after that. Then I sewed some more after that then.

Betty: What was your job in the dress maker shop?

Rose: Well, we made everything

Betty: Did you sew all the different parts of the dresses?

Rose: Oh yes, there were two of us together, facing each other, and then between the two of us we would make the whole garment between

Betty: Would you have a machine or what?

Rose: We had two machines. We each had our own machine.

Betty: What kinds of machines were they?

They were called Wheeler & Wilson, they were electric

Betty: Electric?

Rose: Yes.

Betty: Did you have a pedal on them or what?

Well, they did have a pedal that you pressed down. I think, that the electric machines now-a-days have the same kind.

Betty: Was it like these old type Singer things that we have now?

Rose: Yes, it was very much like that.

Betty: A big wheel on it and a pedal, hey?

Rose: Yes.

Betty: You mentioned about World War I. Did any of your family go into the war?

Rose: Yes, one of my brothers was in the War and if it had lasted any length of time the second brother would of had to go. He was suppose to be examined on Armistice Day.

Betty: So you remember Armistice Day?

Rose: Oh, yes.

Betty: What was the communication system like in those days? You know, like when your brother went off to war, were you able to correspond with him?

Rose: Oh yes, we corresponded. We would hear from him everyonce in a while. He was over in France. and they have certain post offices like they have now.

Betty: How did they carry their mail, do you know?

Rose: No, I don't know that

Betty: How long would it take to get a letter from France say to the United States, or to your home?

Rose: I don't know how long it took to get the mail across in those days. They didn't have the airplane service like they do now. They have airplane service, but it wasn't as complete as it is now.

Betty: Did your brother go over seas by boat then?

Rose: Yes, by boat.

Betty: How long was he in the service?

Rose: He was in the service one year

Betty: Did he ever tell you much about it?

Rose: Well, no, he never ever said too much about it. But one thing that he did say, he had a bowl of oatmeal for his Christmas dinner.

Betty: He sure would remember that, wouldn't he?

Rose: I should think so.

Betty: Do you remember any of the presidents that were in office as you were growing up?

Rose: When I went to school Theodore Roosevelt was the president.

Betty: Do you remember much about him? Did you ever hear him speak?

Rose: No, they didn't have radio in those days, so you wouldn't hear any of their conversations.

Betty: Oh, they didn't have radio?

Rose: Not in those days.

Betty: When did radio come in? Do you remember how old you were?

Rose: No, I don't. That came in later.

Betty: How old did you say you were when you first saw a radio?

I must of been about 35-36 years old when we first got the radio.
That was when they first came out.

Betty: That must of been an exciting day?

Yes, it was something new, something different

Betty: What sort of programs did they have for you to listen too? Did they have just news?

Rose: They had news and they had programs too.

Betty: Soap operas and things?

Rose: Yes, they had all kinds of programs. They had stories too.

Betty: Oh, did they?

Rose: Yes, they did.

Betty: Like these soap operas?

Rose: Yes.

Betty: Like Ma Perkins and stuff like that? I heard of that.

Rose: There were several different ones we use to listen too

Betty: Did they have record players?

Rose: Yes, they had record players.

Betty: Did the record players come in before the radio?

Rose: Oh, yes.

Betty: So you had a record player at

Rose: Yes, we had a record player at

Betty: You know before, we were talking about the presidents and I was just interested in how many presidents you knew when you were younger? Do you remember the first president that you voted for?

Rose: No, I don't remember that.

Betty: Who was running the first time you voted, both sides do you know?

Rose: No, I don't remember that anymore.

Betty: Well, I guess we sort of got off a little bit when you mentioned that the manager quit or went off to War, then the factory closed. How old were you then?

Rose: I was twenty-four years old then.

Betty: And what did you do then

Rose: After that I started to work for the Michigan Bell

Betty: You started to work for the Michigan Bell when you were twenty-four years old?

Rose: Yes, that is right.

Betty: Could you tell me anything about the job? What year was that first of all?

Rose: That was in 1918, and that was before the War was ended. I started out on a training program. In those days we trained for ten days without pay. I happened to be one of the good ones so I was put on steady from that day on.

Betty: Oh, and how many years did you work for Michigan Bell?

Rose: I worked 40 years and some months.

Be: My goodness, could you tell us a little bit about your job in those days? What was it like in 1918?

Each girl sat on a stool in front of a switchboard. There was a metal bar running across in front and each girl had to place both feet on it to prevent any shock. We wore headsets and used the drop system.

Betty: Could you explain the drop system?

Rose: Yes. The drops were up on top of the board and there were a little oh, I don't know what I would say, a little metal kind of a thick piece of metal about an inch by an inch square, and then over that was a thin metal with the number on it. When anyone took down their receiver this metal drop would drop in and it would push this little thin metal up with the number so you would know someone was calling and you knew what number it was. Then, we would plug in down below corresponding to the drops and these were called jacks. You answered in the jack and the multiple was in between the drops and the jack. The multiple multiplied throughout the board so that every girl could ring every number without reaching to far. There were two girls to a section, which had all the numbers in.

What type of phone did you have at that time?

Rose: Oh, we had the desk sets and also the wall phones.

Betty: What were the desk sets like? How were they connected?

They were connected by cord that you inserted into the board. Then they had a heavy metal band around the head which was very uncomfortable and then the transmitter hung around the neck. We had different headsets. The headset and the transmitter were connected together in one piece, and they had small bands on the head. These were much lighter than, and smaller and much easier to wear. There were ten positions on the board and each girl had 24 pairs of cords on her board and that meant you could answer 24 signals. You answered with the answering jack and you rang with the calling cord. There were line signals. Two signals connected to each pair of cords. When the subscriber answered, when they took down their receiver the light went out and then you knew they had answered.

Betty: Did you ever get tangled up in all those cords?

Rose: No

Betty: Did you ever get any shocks?

Rose: Oh yes, sometimes when the weather was bad there was electricity on the line and you would plug in a number and get a shock. Then again, I know one time the enable peeled off the transmitted ~~I was~~ wearing and I would get shocks in the neck. No one ever got injured only small shocks. Another time when I plugged in on a long-distance line I got a pretty hard shock. That time it almost jerked me arms out of me.

Betty: Well, for goodness sake there was alot of hazards to your job?

Rose: Yes, there was at times.

Betty: Could you ever here anybody you know, like you mentioned about these little keys. Did you ever hear anybody opening your key?

Rose: There were keys where you could hear, but you have to keep them closed because there would be too much confusion. You couldn't keep the keys open with everyone talking. They would all hear each other.

Betty: How did you test the line to see if i was busy?

Rose: We tapped on the rim of the answering jack and that would make a sound like a sort of static electricity and then you knew the line was busy.

Betty: Could you cut in on anybody if the line was busy?

Rose: Yes, the chief operator would cut in o a line, if there was a emergency.

Betty: How many subscribers did you have back in 1918.

Rose: Well, we didn't have too many at that time. There were, the numbers ran up into the eight hundreds. It increased gradually.

Betty: Oh, I imagine in those days, course it still ~~does~~ get cold, but many years ago you had severe storms and no plows?

Rose: And then another time one of the girls, it was a real storm a real big storm and she was on her way coming to work and she hailed a car. They stopped and picked her up and gave her a ride to work. After she got in the car she found it was a hearse and there was a dead man in there.

Betty: Did she get out and walk?

Rose: No, she didn't she stayed in, they took her to work. Another time many years ago when I first worked there when they still had sleighs in the winter time and they didn't keep the roads open then and one of the girls had a habit of hanging on sleighs and one day she happened to hang on one that they used for hauling animal hides and such stuff as that to send to the tanners and the soap factories, and when she came back to work she had to wear different clothing from the ~~order~~.

Betty: For goodness sakes, hey! Did you have a supervisor?

Rose: Oh yes, we had a supervisor, and she walked up and down behind us and watched us very closely and then she would plug in with us and listen, to hear what we were doing and saying and so on and so forth. She was behind us watching and butting in all over, sometimes they would plug in and listen to see how we were treating our customers.

Betty: Did you work an eight hour day

Rose: Yes, we worked eight hour shifts, but evenings and nights were 7- $\frac{1}{2}$ hours.

Betty: How much were you payed?

Rose: I started at \$20 a month with a 50% increase in six months. After a year on days I went on night shift and my pay was raised to \$28 a month. I worked night shift for about four years, then I went back on days and I was cut back to \$24 a month. After that I was raised \$1 a week until I earned \$12 a week. Later years I got more pay. When I retired in 1959 I was earning \$66 a week.

Betty: When you worked the night shift, how many girls did you have on night?

Rose: Well, the four years that I worked there~~se~~, there were two girls but when they took me off of night and put me back on day shift, then there was only one girl and that girl had to work alone. After that when any of us would relieve on nights we always worked alone.

Betty: Did you mind working alone at night? Did it bother you?

Rose: I was always nervous. I would rather have somebody with me, but those were the rules.

Betty: Could you leave the board and move around?

Rose: Oh yes, the traffic would die down later on during the night then you were able to leave the board.

Betty: What I mean is could you leave the board during the day?

Rose: Oh no, not during the day. If you wanted to leave the board during the day someone would have to relieve you, they would have to take your place while you were gone.

Betty: And how did they do that? Did they take your place?

Rose: Well, they plugged in before you disconnected your plug, and they stepped right in over you.

Betty: Michigan Bell ran an efficient operation?

Rose: Oh, you bet they were efficient.

Betty: Were there any changes in the board from the when you began working their?

Rose: Oh yes, there was. The board was the same from 1918 until 1937 and that was the Common Battery with the drop system. Then they built a new building and the new

board was much bigger and more subscribers. It was the light signal type that is, the manual type board. When a light went on you would plug in under the light and then the light would go out and then you answered in the same way as usual.

Betty: How many subscribers did you have on the new board?

Rose: Well, we started from well, at first it was 900 to 1000 multiple. It increased gradually up over 6000 after I retired. We had the same number of girls, they just had to work that much harder.

Betty: How many girls were at a board?

Rose: There was one girl to each position. All the numbers were in one section and two girls to a section. These sections were repeated throughout the board.

Betty: Did you have a union back in 1918?

Rose: The company had its own union in 1927. Then when President Roosevelt was in office he approved of the A.F.L. Union. After that they had a union.

Betty: Did you ever have a strike?

Rose: Yes, we had one strike which lasted seven weeks.

Betty: Was there any violence?

Rose: No, there was no violence in Calumet but there was in Detroit.

Betty: What happened in Detroit?

Rose: Oh, you can't print that!

Betty: Did you have picket lines?

Rose: Yes, we had to sit in the car two by two a certain number of hours, then we would change each one got their turn. Later we had strikes only on days when the weather was bad. They called that a hit-and-run strike.

Betty: Was that because you figured they would have such an overload of numbers or what?

Rose: That was the way they got them to come across the quickest, because the time when we were needed the most we weren't there and the officials had to do the work.

Betty: Did you feel the union helped you?

Rose: Things were much different. The pay was raised and improvements were made.

Betty: Did you ever carry a picket sign?

Rose: No, my heaven, we wouldn't do that!

Betty: Could you remember anything that might be humorous?

Rose: Oh, lots of things, but of course you can't print that.

Betty: Did you know anything about the line crew?

Rose: In the beginning there were five men. They used horses and the horses were so used to standing they never ran away. The men were on call and always busy.

Betty: I guess the operators in those days must of known what was going on all over?

Rose: Well, they were all from different locations and everyone new the news from their own location.

Betty: You must of had some interesting things that you might of over heard?

Rose: Well, of course you could never tell anything that you ever heard.

Betty: You never ever could listen in on a lone?

Rose: No, not unless that there was a reason. On long distance or that you would have to go in and out on the line to see that or hear the voices that they were talking yet, to see that they weren't cut off, or any other emergency if there was trouble on the line. That was the only time you could cut in on a conversation. That is you wouldn't be in on the conversation, but you would hear a little, but that was only while you were on.

Betty: Well, the long-distance calls then, how far did you place a call. Do you remember that?

Rose: All over. We had calls all over. The first call I ever did have was to Omaha Nebraska. It was to Omaha Nebraska. It was to the Lakota Hotel there. *I thought it was really going places then.*

Betty: You thought you were traveling to the hotel, hey?

Rose: Yes, and the first incoming call I had was from Minnesota. That was for the number 260.

Betty: Oh, for goodness sake, you remember that so clear?

Rose: I remember that, yes.

Betty: My goodness. Well, there must of been alot of things that you know you could, you know, well, operators got in on. A lot of people call in and say this is an emergency I need help or something like that?

Rose: Well, when they did that we rang the supervisor and she took care of them.

Betty: Oh, I see. Were you always a telephone operator?

Rose: No, I was a clerk

Betty: What did you do as a clerk?

Rose: I did all the clerical work. I did all the ordering for the office. I made out all of the reports that we had to have every month and I okayed all the orders. Took care of the board and took care of things concerning the order. Every day I had to give a report to the main office that Menominee on how many calls were made a day, and how many that were not made, and the long distance calls. Then I had to give a percentage of all this.

Betty: Was kind of a big job, hey?

Rose: Yes, it was. Some of the reports were pretty long. There was one report that took me days to do.

Betty: Oh, my gosh!

Rose: And that was on all the different kinds of lines. Then there were all kinds of other reports. One of them was employees hours that was given a count of each operator for all that she did for each hour.

Betty: Oh boy, they kept pretty close track hey?

Rose: Oh yes, they did. They never missed anything.

Betty: You were pretty well supervised, hey?

Rose: I'll say so!

Betty: Was there a way to keep track of every call?

Rose: Oh yes. Every month they took what they call peg count. Each position had a different register for different kind of a call; a local call, or an information call, long distance call, rural call, a paystation call. All the different kinds. Every time you answered a number you registered on that register.

Betty: You mean every time you said number please you had

Rose: You answered, you pegged the register.

Betty: Oh, did you have little sections where one said information, one said long distance, one said, or did you just have a main thing to tap or to register?

Rose: No, they were different registers. Different register for each kind of a call.

Betty: So you had to keep track of each kind of a call?

Rose: Each kind of call.

Betty: Then it was added up at the end?

Rose: It was added, subtracted for each hour, then all the subtractions were added up for the entire day and then it had to balance. You added them up and down and also crosswise for each hour. And then that all had to be balanced. It has to balance both ways.

Betty: Was that your job as a clerk?

Rose: That was my job as a clerk

Betty: How many years were you a clerk?

Rose: It seems to me I started in 1941 to be a clerk and I retired in 1959. So that was 17-18 years that I was a clerk.

Betty: Do you remember any of the averages, you know, of calls like for instance?

Rose: Sometimes the averages were 400 calls in a hour and sometimes they even went over when it was busy and there was only one operator.

Betty: Each operator took that many?

Rose: Yes, there were that many calls.

Betty: What about the dial system. Were you working when they had the dial system?

Rose: Well, they had dial to Lake Linden. Lake Linden had dial in 1941, but we didn't get dial in Calumet until March of 1956 and I had retired in December of 59'.
1966

Betty: So you weren't there when Calumet had Dial?

Rose: No, I wasn't there when Calumet went on dial.

Betty: What difference did it make in the dial, you know, like for instance; Lake Linden got dial in 1941 so you were there then?

Rose: Well, that was dialing the call to Lake Linden. We just dialed the Lake Linden calls. Each girl had a dial on their position and any Lake Linden calls she had she dialed. But that was the only dialing we had then.

Betty: Well, like for different numbers. Did they have, for instance, like if it was sort of a hospital or something or a doctors number, did they have different ways of telling this on the board?

Rose: No, there wasn't any different ways in telling that

Betty: Oh, so if a doctor lifted his phone up you didn't answer it immediately?

Rose: Yes, when they got the new switch board with the light signals, the lights were different colors.

Betty: Oh, I see?

Rose: All emergency lines, like the doctors lines and hospitals and ambulances. All had different colors

Betty: Were you expected to answer them?

Rose: You answered them first

Betty: And, well when you have these little party lines you know, like if somebody was a four party line that meant that four lines came out of one of those lights?

Rose: Yes, and the lines were marked so you would know how many parties were on the line. Now if there were four parties on the line it would be under scored by a green light, if it was an individual line there wasn't any markings. If it was a change, the change would be marked with a yellow quadrant and they had the different letters like J and R. and M and W. They were like imaginary corners on each multiple, and supposen it was a four party line and there was one party change, the J was changed, while on the imaginary J corner that would be marked with yellow. Say the M would be disconnected. The M imaginary would be marked with white. If it was disconnected that was not in the directory any more, that was marked by a red quadrant. And if there were a double change on a line that was marked in blue.

Betty: My gosh, there seemed to be an awful lot to learn, hey?

Rose: Well, there is but then once you learn it all, your okay.

Betty: I suppose it's just kind of automatic?

Rose: Yes, it comes natural and it's automatic.

Betty: Do you ever remember of knowing, like where different numbers were just automatic?

Rose: Well, do you mean on the board.

Betty: Yes.

Rose: Or where the people live and where the lines are

Betty: On the board, you know?

Rose: Well, I knew both. You use the boards you get so use to them that you can plug in and answer without almost knowing. You get so use to that, it's just like playing piano. You can play a piano without looking at the keys, well, you can do that too with these numbers.

Betty: You were constantly busy so you really didn't have time to you know, really think about anything else, hey?

Rose: No, thats true, you didn't have know time for anything else. Your mind was on your work all the while you were there.

Betty: Except you know, like if you were on the night shift it was slower?

Rose: That was slower, but then they had other work. Then they had to check all the long distance tickets, rate them, time them, and see that they had the right letter and so that the right numbers and all sorts of things.

Betty: Oh, they kept you busy?

Rose: Oh, they kept you busy at night too, they had other things to do.

Betty: So you didn't just have time to sit around, hey?

Rose: No, I'll say you didn't.

Betty: You had time to sit around, but you had to be busy doing it too?

Rose: You had to be doing something.

Betty: What about those colors you were talking about now did those change?

Rose: You mean the light signals

Betty: Yes, and all that. Did they always stay the same?

Rose: Yes, they stayed the same unless, supposen the line wouldn't be an emergency line anymore they change the light and put it back to an ordinary one.

Betty: Well, how many clerks did they have?

Rose: They only had only one clerk.

Betty: You were just the only clerk that did all that?

Rose:

Betty: Did you have to make out the hours too for the girls?

Rose: Yes, we made out the time sheets and all the hours

Betty: Did you get a lot of static from the girls if they didn't like what shift you gave them?

Rose: Yes, they grumbled, but then somebody had to work each shift. And each one got their turn, so.

Betty: Did they have sort of a system like well, one would have a weekend and another one would have to work?

Rose: Yes, they all had different days off, and each one got their turn to have a Saturday and Sunday off.

Betty: Did you have a lot of people asking for special requests?

Rose: Oh yes, some of them wanted a special request. There's always some that want something different.

Betty: Did you have any coffee breaks?

Rose: Yes, we had a coffee break. One in the morning and one in the afternoon. We had a recess, that's what they called it. We would be relieved for fifteen minutes on each tour, the morning and the afternoon.

Betty: Was that just after the union came in?

Rose: We always had a reliever, as long as I worked there but it was only a ten minute release. Then after it was fifteen minutes. I'd don't remember if the union was in then or not.

Betty: After the union got in maybe it was called a coffee break?

Rose: That's when we got the coffee break. Before that they didn't have any coffee breaks. When you were on your relieve and you wanted any lunch you had to bring it yourself.

Betty: But they provided the coffee?

Rose: No, I don't think they payed for that

Betty: You payed for your own coffee?

Rose: Yes.

Betty: In those days you had to be the "voice with the smile" Were you ever tempted to tell anybody off?

Rose: Oh, many times, but you couldn't do it. The only thing you could do was close the key and bring the supervisor and let her calm them down.

Betty: What would they mostly complain about?

Rose: Well, I don't know, anything. They had trouble on their line. Some people imagined they had trouble, such stuff as that. I know one woman use to complain all the time that we put the buzzer on her and we didn't have a buzzer on the board to put on anybody.

Betty: Did they ever complain about the service they got?

Rose: Oh yes, they complained about the service. They were never satisfied, it was never to good regardless how good it was. After they found out when they weren't answered so quick that they had better service. After when it got busier and there weren't so many operators, sometimes they would have to wait.

Betty: You weren't working when the dial system came in and all these people lost their jobs? I remember parts of it.

Rose: No, I wasn't working, then, but the older girls I guess were payed off and then the younger ones were transferred to different offices, unless they wanted to be payed off too.

Betty: Can you think of anything else that would be of interest?

Rose: Well, you know that old switchboard I sat in back in 1918 is in Detroit, being used at the Ford Greenfield Village.

Betty: My goodness, the one that was up here in Calumet in 1918?

Rose: Yes, its a relic the~~re~~ and they still use it. It is still good. There are alot of times when I still wish that I were working and that I could do all these reports again. I still feel like doing them.

Betty: You were really a career women?

Rose: Well, I guess so

Betty: Have you enjoyed your retirement though?

Rose: Well, I don't know, I still rather be working. I enjoyed that more. It was nice going out every day It was nice being with the girls, much better than being home alone.

Betty: Well, what have you done since you retired?

Rose: Well, I've done housework. And I did go to school and take up a few courses.

Betty: What kind of courses did you take?

Rose: A leather craft course and I also took a woodshop course.

Betty: Leather craft and woodshop did you say?

Rose: Yes, and textile painting and ceramics.

Betty: Well, I think you kept yourself pretty busy?

Rose: Yes, that's one thing.

Betty: But there's nothing like the good old grind of getting up everyday.

Rose: Yes, there's something to that. At the time it seems so hard to you and you wish for the day when you won't have to get up and go.