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

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SUBJECT:

SOURCE: William A. Gardner

COMMENTS:

I: Helgren
 Il: Harju
 R: Gardner

Interviewers: Harju and Helgren

- I: My partner will be Dorius Helgren and I'm Larry Harju and we're in Mr. Gardner's home here who is a known local historian of these parts and you can start off right when you came here, Mr. Gardner, if you will, and just ramble on.
- R: The family started here when my grandfather was shipped to Copper Harbor alone in 1853 at age nine from New York State to be raised by his uncle, Daniel B. Brockway. And on the other side of the family, my father's father was a foot-loose Frenchman from Three Rivers, Quebec and it got kind of crowded around their house with twenty-two kids so he was firing the boiler at the Cliff Mines in 1865. Somebody asked him...timekeeper asked him what his name was and he said, "?" And the timekeeper says, "What the hell is it in English, I can't spell that." "Well, I guess it means Gardner." So, that's what our name got changed to. My father got hung with the name, Octave Doville Gardner and lived in Eagle River in 1877 and '78; and got through school bits and pieces because he was supporting his mother, his father died when he was fourteen, and my mother...well it's kind of awkward, but her mother didn't approve of my father, so she married her daughter off to a man from Philadelphia and that was worse...so after he hatched one kid on her and abandoned her, she came back and finally the folks got together in 1902 instead of about 1893, when they wanted to and then I came along in 1907. In 1909, they came down to Grestview to a picnic on the old Keweenaw Central Railroad, walked down to Eagle River, came along and found this deserted house boarded up to keep the cows from breaking their legs falling into the basement and my father asked my mother if she would like that for a summer home...they lived in a company house... 1300 School Street, Calumet-Hughes, Engineer for C & H at the time. And so, they started looking for the owner. Well, they had a hell of a time finding him because the owners had left Eagle River in the night in 1898, and didn't leave any address. They left some bills, but they didn't leave any address. So, he finally found 'em and one was out in Arizona and the other was down in Iron Mountain; and they got the property which had obviously been built...the house had been built in 1853, because the place changed hands for seventy-five dollars that spring and twelve hundred dollars that fall. That's the only way I can figure out what happened. It was a twenty by twenty-five foot log store and that guy added on towards the lake fifteen feet, and then a saloon and dance hall on the northeast

side. The dance hall was notable because it had a spring floor.

I: Spring?

R: Yeah, it means joists for it tied down and you could get it going like a trampoline. So, unfortunately, they tore the saloon and dance hall wing off; but they restored it and enjoyed it for years and we left in 1920. I guess Pop got griped at C & H not even giving him four days off to take my mother somewhere for her health, and he quit...threw away thirty-two years service...good deal, glad he did. But, we had to leave town to get work. So, they kept the property and kept coming back; was the only thing my father ever cared about. Well, they both missed eighty-eight by only a few months. They quit paying their bills and taxes when they were eighty-four and I had to take over. That's how I got the legal description of it and I asked my father cautiously, if he ever considered disposing of the Eagle River property. It looked as though I'd hit him with a two-by-four. He says, "Gosh, I'd always hoped it'd stay in the family." And I said, "It would, I wanted it." He says, "You can have it." So he went in and told my wife he was really happy that I wanted it and Gardners came from up there and some of them were going back. He lived three more years and I started in in '55, wired it alone, plumbed it alone, painted it alone...twenty-one gallons of paint with a spray gun in a week...it was like a sponge.

How was the population around then...at this time? Was it much heavier than it is now?

R: Which time?

When you first were a child...when you first came here?

R: Oh, Eagle River in 1910 to '20, I would say thirty-five people and now it's down to twenty-eight. It went down two more...Bill Long and Pat Long's father died; but four more moved in, so it's really picking up. Why then it ~~isn't~~ everybody can come in and raise the population by ten percent just by bringing his wife and kid in. So, the peak was probably in the 60's. Mrs. Broakway's diaries which are from 1864 to '92...not every one, but a lot of them, mention gathering around and visiting in the wintertime with John Setter who had the big dock...did you know that Eagle River was a lake port of note?

I: Right!

R: Biggest one north of Detroit. I happen to have two charts of the Port of Eagle River drawn up in 1855 and approved in 1859 by Captain G. G. Meade of the U.S. Topographical Engineers...you know what he was doing four years later. And the dock was sixteen hundred feet long.

I: B oy, it was a big one, wasn't it

R: And my father said it was sanding up all the time...as a kid, they

could hardly keep it open; and the side up by the monument...which my father designed by the way, I was with him and Mr. Reader when they found the owner up at the turn in the road at the Cliff, and the sign is wrong there. There were only seventeen saloons in Eagle River.

I: Only seventeen saloons.

R: Yeah, but there were breweries, not two

Seventeen saloons and how many people? Thirty?

R: Oh no, no, in 1860's Eagle River was really going. There was an English traveler who wrote that coming up Main Street in Eagle River on Sunday, each saloon flew their own flag and of course the Irish wouldn't drink in the German's saloons and all that sort of thing.

Right...clannish.

R: Yeah...and the jail of which the door of one drunk tank is down below here, was built to lock up the drunks on Sunday so they'd be fit to work on Monday; and Joe Blouts of Delaware told me that the management of Delaware was irritated because the Delaware miners would trapse over the hills to Eagle River because of the whore house here, so the company built their own in Delaware so they'd keep them less tired when they were supposed to show up for work. And all the copper from the Cliff Mine went out of Eagle River so with the Cliff going into decline in 1872, that pretty well establishes the end of the prosperity of Eagle River.

Il: Right about 1872?

R: Yeah. Now, it's awfully hard to figure out the physical transportation of the copper from the Cliff, but I think I've got it. A ~~curve~~ of raised roads ~~Back~~ from Quantanos back here. This gap in the dunes down here I'm pretty sure is man made. That continues the road curve and I know that the Narrow Gauge Railroad that served the big dock was at the mouth of the river. It didn't go down this hill out here. Old Bill Long used to have to put a skid on his hay wagon to get down this hill, so you can't see them lugging copper down there.

I: No.

R: Well, time kind of stood still in Eagle River for...well it has yet and it's rather nice. Eagle Harbor has the water and the swimming and we've got peace and quiet most of the time. Incidentally, my decision to come up here was motivated by the desire to get away from hay fever. I had fifty-two years of misery down below and I don't have hay fever up here unless the wind blows from the southwest for about three days straight. So, I rebuilt the place keeping the atmosphere as it was and not trying to spoil it.

- I: Right, that's very evident and it looks nice.
- R: And while the furniture was throw-aways of the 1910's to the folks and some my wife picked up and some family stuff. This desk right here was a sewing cabinet my grandfather made for his bride in 1868 from a standup desk of C & H that was being throw out just as I salvaged stuff from Buick for my machine shop. When I could buy parts for a cent and a half a pound, why those were the happy days for me. It's a good thing salvage shut down ten years before I left Flint or I couldn't have moved. I have brought...a careful estimate ...two hundred thousand pounds of tools and equipment and building materials up here by my own efforts.
- I: From Flint?
- R: From Flint
- I: Do you recall any of your father's recollections of things that might have happened during this time like with the company and maybe their C & H police?
- R: Not C & H police very much...I knew Gus Welden personally and as a kid we were very much in fear of him. He wore a black hat and he drove a fast horse and buggy and he was called Black Gus and terror to evil doers even of small size; but the C & H police rode bicycles when I was...they got up to bicycles finally in the 30's, I think, and if you left your lights on they'd probably come up and tap on the door and tell you that you left the lights on in your car.
- Il: Was that a call? Did they have some type of a call if you needed them or wanted them being there was no phones or anything up here, how did you get hold of them?
- R: Oh, now just a minute. There were phones up here about as fast as anywhere in the country. The (?) had phones in their mines three years after Alexander Graham Bell invented it.
- Il: No, I mean just the general public all around.
- R: Well, maybe they didn't, but it was a very slim book but I remember from 1910, we had a telephone. And right along side the telephone because of my dad being a C & H engineer, was a list of the whistle signals to tell you where the fire was in case of fire. We lived on the corner of School and Rowland and the fire hall was up between Washington and the High School on Mine Street...and we didn't actually pray for fires or set them like this club down in Hancock that had to burn a building to get in membership lately, but when the fire engine went out and went down the street, maybe we'd get to see not only it going out and smoke pouring out and flames coming out of the stack but the second relay of horses would go up from the Calumet barn and go up and hook up for the second alarm if there was one. And certainly during the '10's, there was no lack of telephones in Calumet and they weren't hand crankers either.
- Il: Regular ringers?

R: Yes

Il: Seems things were fairly well coordinated, especially the fire department, I noticed. Everyone I've talked to has said they were really well coordinated when it came for fire...everything was businesslike, well coordinated, everything was together at the right time.

R: Now on local color on...oh the big strike, of course, I was six and I still remember the poor little mascot (?)...I watched and he climbed the transformer sub-station outside of the warehouse and got electrocuted; but it is said of Sheriff Epting of Keweenaw County that he came home with bullet holes in the back of his buggy and his wife said, "What are those?" And he says, "Well, they shot at me." She said, "Did you shoot back?" "No," he said, "they didn't hit me." And he was a slow man to anger but it's also reported that he was treed by three wolves once, well he might not have got the same ones, but he didn't rest until he got three wolves to make up for spending a night in the tree. But the violence in the strike, of course, was well...was on both sides; but I do know one thing...I have my grandfather's notes on part of what broke the strike.

Il: What were his feelings on it?

R: Well, you see, he was W. A Childs and he must have gotten his education with Branch Army because he had no formal education except a year after the Civil War and yet in a few years he was designing the rolling stocks for the C & H Railway and at one time...until his death in 1916...he put in fifty years straight with C & H. He had charge of everything that moved on surface and after the Italian Hall disaster, the merchants and ordinary people of Calumet and Laurium gathered \$25,000 by noon of Christmas Day for relief of those families that were bereaved. And the Union turned it down and the Citizens Alliance got so heated up that they broke the strike right then. And this man Moyer was in the hotel in Hancock...I don't have this, I have it only on hearsay...but the people called on him and told him he had to leave town that they'd had enough of it. And in the melee somebody inexpertly hit him over the head with a bottle and shot him in the butt and they wouldn't even let a doctor take the slug out. And they took him across the bridge and a preacher was reported to have said, "Well, why bother to put him on a train, let's throw him over here." But they put him on a train and sent him to Chicago which was a tactical mistake because he got a lot of publicity and that started the Congressional investigation which showed that C & H was equally at fault in hiring strike-breakers that shot up boarding houses and I think they killed at least two men at one time, but the public sentiment was against things. The Italian Hall thing, I don't know the answer...I don't know if there's anybody does; for certain there was no fire and lousy miserable song by Woody Guthrie about the Calumet massacre which I wish WGGL would not play anymore because it is so full of lies it makes me mad every time I hear it.

I: How so?

R: Well, the thugs out in the street cheering about the...the alledged

thugs out in the street cheering about the dead and trying to cause more trouble.

Il: I heard there was a song, but I'm not familiar with the lyrics.

R: Well, if you just ask WGGJ to play it for you, not on the air, I've heard it four times and I get mad every time I hear it because it's so utterly incorrect. It just makes anybody that was alive at that time and knew any of the things...well, I've got a half a shoe box full of strike pictures by the way, that my father took. I don't know where they are but sometime if I run across them, I'll get ahold of them for you.

I: And the big people of that time are the ones that kind of stood out were there Big Emma...I can't think of the names.

R: Yeah, the old anarchists.

I: Quite a few women involved in that.

R: Oh yes, oh Joe Plout has some beautiful things to say. I have a tape of that...I can't lay my hands on it at the moment, but as a little kid he was watching two cavalry men left to keep a mob from going across a certain street.

Il: When was this?

R: Oh, I don't know. He said, but I don't...was George Ahmeek, I believe. And one man went to get help with just one guy left and the women were shouting, "Tear him off his horse, stomp him." And little Joe was about thirteen at the time and he said all of a sudden he heard a whistle blowing and a terrific clatter and he saw the most thrilling sight he ever saw in his life...the rest of this whole squadron of cavalry came down with sabers brandishing in the air and the mob of about five hundred scattered. They didn't like men on horseback with blades.

I: No, men on horseback is enough, I can vouch for that.

R: But the women had their own method of attack. He also said that in Mohawk sometimes the women would see a cavalry patrol coming along, they'd hurry up and take an old broom and go out to the outhouse and dash it around like churning butter and go out and throw the broom at them as they went by.

I: I bet that'd go over real well

R: But the...I will never forget seeing men going to work in the dark at seven o'clock and coming home at six o'clock with their dinner buckets walking real slow.

I: Tired.

R: Just plain tired and when I was working as a student engineer at Ingersol Rand in eastern Pennsylvania, I felt the same way and I

have never been discourteous to anybody who was walking tired on the street 'cause I've been that tired. In fact when I was wiring this house alone up and down three flights, I remember one night I couldn't walk up those stairs, I had to crawl to get to bed or some nights I just slept on an old couch.

I: Boy, that was tired.

R: Well, what gets me is how people endured the wind blowing through these houses. This house has wallpaper on the logs and at 72 with a hundred and eighty-thousand BTU boiler on Easter weekend, my pipes to the bathroom froze because they went outside of this paneling and inside the log walls and they froze getting up to the bathroom. Now that wasn't cold weather...was only five above and that's why I've wrapped it up in aluminum foil, craft paper plus another layer of siding and I'm going to get more foam shot into the walls yet; but for fortitude, I don't understand how they could survive.

I Just a rugged class of people

R: Now, Douglas Sevelki said that old house next to the store down here, his father, Otto Sevelki, said they had a stove in every room and in the morning they had frost on the blankets from their breath.

I: I believe it.

R They didn't quite go to the Russian method of tilting the covers on his back and crawling in the cupboard and shutting the lid...that's what the Russians do. Of course the Koreans were smarter, they had the stove where the flue went under the bed.

I The heat come right off the flue. I heard tale of some man who used to ride around with a pet bear. Did you?

R: No...no, not really. I had not heard that one.

Can you recall any of the people who might have been really outstanding...you know, that really stood out in a certain way either from fame or...?

R: Well, yes! I'd say, John Senter, Jim Cooper...a friend of mine, he was his great-great grandfather. Once in awhile, the only way the mail got out of Houghton in the wintertime was John Senter would take it part way to Escanaba and hand it in a tree and somebody'd come from Escanaba once in awhile and pick it up. The railroad didn't get through to Houghton until 1865; and certainly D. D. Brockway was outstanding because in the history of the Upper Peninsula it mentions that Keweenaw was too tame for him in 1879 when he was sixty-five. He went to the gold rush in South Dakota, the Black Hills. And it mentions that he was one of seven that survived a stage being blown over in a blizzard in December and was forty-two below zero and he and seven others lasted fifteen hours until help came. But, in Mrs. Brockway's diary for 1879 is a simple little remark for December 23rd. It says, "Mr. Brockway left Deadwood on December 9th and got home today. Had a hard time."

That's all he said was that he had a hard time.

I: Had a hard time getting home

R: Yeah, just the stage blew over and damn near froze.

I: Do you want to give me the history on Mr. Brockway again...when he first came?

R: Oh yes! He was a blacksmith and there was a family of Brockways... there are a lot of Brockways around...and one brother got over towards Coldwater, Michigan...no, Dexter west of Ann Arbor eight miles; and he was a specialist. He and a preacher...they mixed their preaching and blacksmithing...one of them shod the front end of oxen and the other the hind end all winter and this Brockway was hired by the Federal government to teach the Indians blacksmithing in 1843, right after we got the Chippewa lands...about as stupid a piece of Federal work as you run into now. And after a few years he took his family, two young daughters and a couple Indians, and paddled around...up Keweenaw Bay...and around the point and settled in Copper Harbor and built the first house in the village.

I: Of Copper Harbor.

R: Of Copper Harbor and I don't know what he was in except hospitality house for sure because Aunt Annie Brockway who graduated from medicine in 1870 or so from Michigan, said nobody was turned away hungry and they'd served a thousand meals that year. And when there was the Indian scare, everybody crowded into one house and in the morning they sent the Chippewas out and there were no Souix around. Of course, in case you didn't know it, big history was that Fort Wilkins was not built to protect the settlers from the Indians, Fort Wilkins was built so that the road contractors could be given every other section of land on either side of the longest road to the furthestest place they could build it; just as the western railroads were and the Brockways, he ran a store in Cliff and he did lots of things. A remarkable and durable old man and he and his wife celebrated the first golden wedding ever given in the Copper Country in 1886. And her diary...you read it, my wife sat up nights reading it...and she did five turkeys and twenty chickens and five mince pies and stuff like that, and this went on for several days. They were just getting ready for their own personal party; but the village of Calumet gave them one and some of that stuff...bread upon the waters in the old days, came back. They were impoverished by that time and he says, the only time he was hurt was when a whole mining company shut down after the last boat sailed and he fed men, women and children from November to April and nobody said thank you. But anyway, at their wedding celebration the people were dressed up...and I have pictures of it...in fancy clothes and everything and those who didn't bring anyother gifts tossed gold coins into a bowl on the table and an item in the Calumet News which I have, says that at the end of the evening there was \$1,250 in the bowl. So that's what they thought of the Brockways.

I: Now that's the Brockway that the mountain is named after

R: Yes, and by the way the Foster and Whitney report to Congress

on the mineral lands of the Upper Peninsula, that is Brockway Mountain in 1850. It was already...in four years he'd made himself that well known; but they certainly were durable people.~ Yet you go up in the old Cliff cemetery as I did in 1953, and you see four little tombstones in a row of four children in the same family dead of diphtheria in one week. Now, those were the odds that you had to buck. That and just keeping warm

I: And a scarcity of doctors up here too, I imagine.

R: Well, and look how ignorant they were. They didn't have anything to work with. You were lucky if they didn't bleed you to death. Between cloisters and bleeding, why a guy had a slim chance of pulling through. No, I'm glad to be back. I think it's fine to have roots.

I: Right, definitely.

R: The homeless people that don't have any sense of belonging. Oh, we found things in this building, the carpenters found, every scrap of paper they saved. Imagine the kick I got when they got ledger pages where one Cliffour Gardner charged a pound of coffee here May 5th, 1869...sixty cents. Brazil was making money then. You see where Brazil is pushing again for a cartel. Then he had a half-gallon of whiskey sent around to the house for a dollar seventy-five; but that would be two days work.

I: That might be the Post calling.

R: In closing, I just want to say that some of this information I've picked up in strange ways. My father didn't bother to write a lot down, he didn't tell me a great deal. He said that his father ran a store over on Fourth Street in '77 and '78, and they didn't have any trouble with the Indians except the Indians would come around and try to trade deerskins for bake goods. They were already softened up, you see; and one of them did slap his mother across the chops with a bloody deerskin because she wouldn't give him some bread for it. But just a little corner of a 9 x 12 envelope had this note on it: Memo...Gardners left Eagle River 1877 - '78; Father ran a store on Fourth Street; used to drive around surrounding villages with one horse, wagon announcing arrival with second-hand army bugle. Now if that doesn't give you a picture of a fiddle-footed Frenchman. I don't know where he ever got the money to start a store, but a Civil War bugle and blow a blast on that to bring the people out of their houses, let 'em know he had the grub that they ordered the week before and take orders. But that's the sort of thing that you remember. And there was a wealth of it that died with my folks. I have one little short tape recording in 1955 at my father's eighty-fifth birthday in which the folks talked back and forth and I was not please myself and yet my mother was as smooth as though she'd been at it all her life and they got into an argument, as usual, and Pop said it was his ninetieth birthday and Mom said it was his eighty-seventh and they were both wrong. It was his eighty-fifth. Well, anything that I can add that you want

that I dig up, you'll be welcome to. Bob Paterson is coming down Friday from the Tech Library and we're going to dig into it. There's more Brockway papers which I hope to get.
