

Mel Johnson and Gene Peterson I

Interviewed by: Mark Jacobson 03/20/1996

Transcribed by: Jennie Hakes 09/05/2003

Cassette tape label: ***Mel Johnson / Gene Peterson***

Note

This is not so much an interview as it is a recording of Mark working with Mel and Gene on documenting Tamarack history for a book the Aitkin County Historical Society was putting together in 1996. This is the first of two tapes covering the one sitting. The tape did not identify which man was speaking, so I just called them 1 and 2. Number 2 has the deep voice. "M" is the Mark, the interviewer. It seems they are looking at plats to determine landmarks from the past. – Jennie Hakes

Side A

2: Well, there's a lot of accuracy in that book. That one in the office?

M: My folks got one at home there, so I can take a look at it. That's the Tamarack one.

2: See, Tamarack is the largest incorporated city in Aitkin County.

M: Oh? Yeah.

2: You know that.

M: Yup.

2: I have to keep reminding people of that.

M: (Laughs) Largest in size.

2: Largest in Aitkin. But there's a lot of history out here. You know, people have came and gone and a lot of 'em did some developing and you know. A lot of it goes back to the old Nelsons years ago when they came here. My dad, you know, he was an immigrant from Sweden.

M: Right directly from Sweden?

2: Right directly from Sweden. Yeah. He worked in Iowa, and I think he was up in British Columbia, and then he come back here, he and his brother, and they took and they were loggin' and stuff like that. And then he got drafted in 1918 World War I. And then of course, the fire came through and he was livin' in a shack right south of the house here on that little hump there, and then they... the 1918 fire come through and he was gonna build down here because the highway wasn't in.

But the Ditchbank Road was from here. You'd get on the Ditchbank Road here and you go down a mile and then you went out to the railroad tracks and cross the railroad tracks and then you went into town that way. Oh, that scared me when I was a kid. That was terrible! That old Model T traveling out there, and stuck in the mud. And you can see, this road wasn't through. This road here didn't tie in until 210 was made in '31 and through there.

Well, your dad was part of that team, wasn't he. They started to build this road so they could get out to the highway rather than go all the way back around the country out to Tamarack.

Tamarack Schools

M: Where were some of the old schools at?

2: The old school.

M: Why don't you guys take a look at that and I'll mark 'em down with this marker so I don't forget.

1: Well, about the only one I know is Nelson Lake, right on...

M: Well, there's one right down there?

1: ...at Nelson Lake there.

M: What did they call it? The Nelson?

1: School District 53, Nelson Lake. I think it was started in about 1906. And went until about 1928 or so. Maybe a little later.

M: Until late '20s, huh?

2: Well, your mother taught there.

1: Yeah. She was... taught there in 1923 or '22, I don't remember. See, most of the teachers started there, they only taught one year, they got about \$40 a month to start with. I think she got, I don't know, maybe got up to about \$60 after 2 (?) years. Seems like everyone stayed on one year.

2: Where'd she go after that?

1: Got married. Moved to Long Lake.

2: She didn't teach after that?

1: No. She taught before in Truline (not sure of the spelling, but that's what it sound like), or somewhere in that area.

M: Moved to... where'd she move to?

1: She came from Howard Lake, but she taught at Truman (now it sounds like Truman), maybe one year, then she came up here.

2: This right here was one of the first Tamarack schools.

M: Right down in...

2: Right... There's a corner of Ole's (unintelligible) there.

M: Ok. Section 16. That makes sense.

2: And according to your reference there, it was built in 1913. I think there must have been something else in there that we've missed. (Unintelligible) But this was built before 1918, the one in Tamarack, because it survived the fire. We got a team goin' here (laugh).

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1: (Unintelligible) Every time you get to the school. The Tamarack school (unintelligible – they are looking at photos). I got a kick out of those cars there, all lined up, ready to go. (Unintelligible)

2: Oh, Harriet taught there!

1: Yeah, my Aunt Harriet taught there, I don't know how long. The only person I recognize on the picture there is Paul Nielson. All the other kids are too old for me. He was born in 1927.

M: And that was at this school down here?

1: No.

2: No, that's the one in town.

M: The one there right now. Ok.

2: The building that's still there.

1: This is the only thing I got about Nelson Lake School. There's a picture of them taken 19... what? ...13 about. Clare Nelson was the teacher that year. That's the students there at that time. (Unintelligible) I don't think. I don't know.

M: Do you have these pictures?

1: I got a copy of that.

M: Because I know the Historical Society would like to get some of those just to make copies of.

1: (Unintelligible)

2: That's still standing there. By the liquor store.

M: Oh, yeah?

1: (unintelligible) good as cash.

2: It was like a dime store.

1: Yeah. Been there for quite a few years.

M: Where is that at?

2: In the city of Tamarack.

M: Right down here someplace.

2: It's right here by the... right there!

M: Still there?

2: Yeah, what's left of it.

M: That was what?

2: That was Arlene's...

1: Taylor's Cass Store it says on the sign, I think.

2: Kelley's Groceries.

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M: Grocery?

(long pause)

M: What year was that?

2: Here it says '31.

M: So it's probably goin' for how many years, roughly?

1: When it was started, you mean?

M: Yeah.

2: It's in that book, when she started it. It's gonna take me awhile to pull that out.

M: (laughs) It's not that...

1: Hey – here's that same picture. Just a little better shape.

2: That's the Nelson Lake School.

1: This isn't...

M: As long as you know roughly the era it was in.

1: Well.

2: It ended up as a coffee shop.

1: And a hotel.

2: But it had... yeah. (unintelligible) They're all gone. I don't know what he's got in it. It's just an eyesore. Wish it was tore down.

1: They've been trying to demolish it little by little. They just don't wanna do it all, I guess.

M: Where exactly was Marcus Nelson's sawmill?

1: Back in here.

M: Back in here someplace.

1: Now, wait a minute now. I don't know. This isn't Marcus' down here. This is (unintelligible).

2: That's the mill, I think.

1: It is? He was that big? Marcus'?

M: I know Herb had told – showed - me where it was from his house, but I'm not familiar with all the streets, and I wasn't sure. I think it had to be right in here somewhere.

2: Yeah, I think so.

1: Well, if it's this school over here, it's up the main street here, and over about 2 ½ blocks. It's just back of Herb's. Is that the way...?

M: Yeah, he said, he pointed to it. So it must have been about, right about in here.

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1: Oh, here's a view of the same thing. Smokestack and a sawdust pile here. (unintelligible) logs here. They had kind of a (unintelligible) then.

M: Say what year? It probably run right through the '20s and the '30s then, probably?

1: 1925 this was.

2: Right in the '30s.

M: Oh, just up until...

1: Yeah, I think it was done when we kids were in school, wasn't it?

2: I think so.

M: Mainly in the teens and '20s?

1: Hey – isn't that Herb getting water out of that well? Seems to me, by golly, when he pulled in there – well, it's quite a few years ago now – he found that old well and put a pump on it and it started pumpin'. Did Orvis make that well for his mill there? He had the mill later on. Did he make the well? He dug a pond for logs. 'Cause Dave worked there after he...

2: Who?

1: Dave. Our Dave. Workin' for Orvis. That's Orvis after he came back, you know.

2: Oh, oh. Workin' for Orvis. Yeah. Oh. That was different. That was...

1: Well, that was right where Herb is there.

2: Yeah. Right straight by Herb's there.

1: I think they filled in that pond that they dug.

2: And then that Tierney (?) he bought it.

1: Oh, yeah. Did he saw some in there? Oh.

2: Yeah. Tierney bought it and... Well, I got in trouble over that, too, because Tony Costello says "I got a whole bunch of restaurant stuff up at Dan King's (?) restaurant's closed out there by Lake Avenue and Superior Street in Duluth." He says, "We can get (unintelligible) booths (?) and everything."

"Oh, Ok." So I got a whole bunch of pickups and trailers and lined up, and we were up and carried everything outta there over the railroad tracks. And loaded that up, and brought it home into town, and "where do we put it?"

"Well," I says. "Let's take it over to Tierney's mill!" Because it was a good shelter. We had it only in there about two days and out come Tierney! He hadn't used the damn mill for, for months, you know! But he was running his mouth, and...

"Well," I says, "If you don't like it, we'll get 'em outta there!" (Laughs) That was it. It was just hilarious. So we hauled 'em over to the fire hall and stacked 'em in the corner there until we had time to put 'em up in the school house. Well, anyway, that's probably not what you're lookin' at!

M: Oh, yeah – we have to get it all!

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2: (Laughs)

M: When was the theater built?

2: (unintelligible) See – that was a hotel.

M: Oh, was it? Ok. It was a hotel first.

2: Yes, yes.

1: That was following World War II, wasn't it? Or was it right after?

2: It was after World War II.

M: That it was built?

2: No, no. That was built right back in... it's referenced (unintelligible). It was part of the... (someone's name, I can't make it out) had it.

1: Yeah, here's a... (unintelligible) as a hotel, and then they added on to the front. No, they didn't add on to the front, they added a quonset onto the back.

2: You worked there for 10 years, didn't you?

1: 18 ½.

2: What?!

1: 18 years I worked there.

2: He was projector manager.

M: Oh, Ok.

1: But when I started, I don't know.

2: Well, shoot. Let's get back to the (unintelligible) hotel. It was a hotel. It turned into a liquor store.

1: Johnson's had it for awhile.

2: Oh, George and Ailee (spelled the way it sounds), they had it after...

1: Tollerud was in there, too.

2: Tollerud was in it, and there was somebody else before that.

1: Will Johnson and his brother.

2: What?

1: Will Johnson and his brother operated it, too.

2: By golly, you're right. (unintelligible)

1: Well, maybe it was Tollerud before that. I think he moved out before World War II.

2: Orvis come back from World War II with some money. And he bought the thing, I think, and he put that quonset on there. And then he was runnin' a broom (?) shop there, too, see.

M: What was the name of that theater again? I can't... Marcus?

1: Marcus. Dr. Marcus Nelson.

M: I should know it. I went there a few times when I was a kid.

2: See, Marcus, you know, he was (unintelligible). Well, my dad worked for him, too, blacksmithing. He had a blacksmith shop in town there, dad did. I don't know how many dozens sets of sleighs... Dad was a good blacksmith, by golly.

M: Where was that at? Where was the blacksmith shop at?

2: It was there in town someplace. I don't know if it was over by the mill or where.

The light plant

1: It was... (sounds of pointing to the map) isn't this it over here? Or was that Kaho's? (pronounced it KAY - OH) Or was that a garage? We put the light plant, I think, in that one there.

2: Well, they had the light plant next to the – what was the motel theater.

1: Well, it was the Co-op Store had the first light plant, I think.

2: For themselves.

1: Well, I don't know if they had some for the town, too. But then when Kaho came in, I think it was after (unintelligible). Percy Kaho.

2: Oh, yeah. Percy Kaho, and who the heck else had that light plant? That's the reason that, see where they put the light plant in MacGregor. They wanted to put it in Tamarack, because it was harder soil, rather than shaky sand over at MacGregor.

1: Kind of like more solid, would you say?

2: Yeah. For the base. Them guys ran 'em out of town, see. Kaho and who the heck else was involved? Charley Gustaffson or somebody. See, they had a light plant there that furnished power just for the city of Tamarack.

M: Oh, I see. And they didn't want the competition.

2: And then G.M. Ewell (?) went to MacGregor and put up the thing there, and eventually... I don't know what in the world drove that light plant. Was it steam?

1: No, diesel. Where do you mean – Tamarack?

2: Yeah.

1: Oh, golly, I don't know.

2: I know we were so amazed in the school that I went... see, the school was wired up, you know, (unintelligible), then we could turn on the lights. If it got too dark, we'd turn on the lights about once a year, right? (Laughs)

M: Where was that light plant at?

2: Seems to me it was right on Main Street, but the thing I know about it, but the Gracy (?) road back there.

1: I can remember seein' the generator years ago, years back, you know. Just sittin' there, not bein' used anymore.

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2: Was it the old Kaho garage?

1: I thought it was in that other building across from the church there. Kind of on a point out there. But I don't know what that was. Golly! I'm not sure. It don't look in very good shape back in '34. It might have been, yeah, I think it'd been a garage.

2: I think it was right there on Main Street, right next to the hotel.

M: Right down south of it?

2: Yeah, south of it.

M: I'm trying to get these things in the right place. You're more familiar with Tamarack than I am. That was a light plant? (papers rustling) Who ran it?

1: Well, Percy Kaho, I think was one of 'em, wasn't he?

2: Yeah, here's some reference to it there, too. Percy Kaho and who the heck else was involved in that?

(long pause)

M: Was this strictly for everybody in town? For every business? Or what was it?

2: Anybody that wanted power, I guess, and could afford it. (long pause)

M: That was back in – what? – '30s?

2: '20s.

M: Oh, '20s. (long pause) Were there any logging camps over there in Clark?

2: Well, there was one right over here. I don't even know who owned it.

1: It was inactive already, in 1902.

2: Yeah.

M: 1902?

2: Yeah. It was right here.

1: Ok. Here is the Percy Kaho light plant. Ah, "Percy Kaho in partnership with Paul Heller and they supplied the whole village with electricity," it says here. Didn't say when. Well, he moved to Tamarack in '21, so it couldn't have been before that, I don't think. Bought (or "about"?) the only garage there (unintelligible) purchased it. Mrs. Kaho was a telephone operator at the switchboard there. You had to call for long distance there. Central System, or whatever you call it.

M: So the logging camp was right up in... somewhere in here, huh? (pointing)

2: My dad wrote in his history that he and his brothers and sister, maybe, drove the cows up back of where on Long Lake, up at the logging camp, for summer pasture. In the morning, drive 'em back. (unintelligible) After chores, I s'pose. They went there... did they take 'em between milkings that far, I wonder? Or they lived along (unintelligible). They had 'em up there. Kids would be herding 'em all day up there. At night they kept 'em closer to home.

M: And you don't know whose camp that was.

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2: No, I have no idea. But it was vacant at that time, because it was already grown up for grass, you know, from the horse manure and hay that they scattered around, so they had pretty good grass there.

M: It was prior to 1902, huh?

2: I would think so.

1: Yes. The only thing I know about it, is my dad talkin' about it. (unintelligible) Patrick come (unintelligible) you know them days they would lay the logs out and shove the dirt against it. And there was some (unintelligible) some kind of a structure there, and then there was a well there, see. And I remember my dad bought the place from old Matt (can't make out the last name) moved over there, in 1940, I think. He had cattle over there, and they didn't have water, so he put a gas engine on it, and by golly, he pumped water out of that well. Oh, I could show you within 50 feet where that facility was. Of course, now it's been plowed and tilled for many years, and dad talked about an ice road out from there. Go up to town. It's (looking at the map)... It kinda shows up on here, I think. OK. I'll turn this in the right direction. See, it was right in here.

M: Yeah, in Section 12.

1: Yeah, and they... the ice road went through here. And there's some evidence of it here, or it's over here. But this might be it here (sound of finger tapping the map). This one, this identification here is where Duncan logged off some of this island here years ago. This, you know, there's so much that we don't know. Here's another old logging road coming off from up here, and that's startin' to grow up, finally. And I think some of this stuff was, well, it had to be done before the ditch system was in.

M: Yeah.

2: It was kind of a strange place for a sawmill there, wouldn't it be?

1: They didn't saw!

2: It was a lumber camp. OK. How did they get rid of the logs, then? On the railroad?

1: I s'pose. I s'pose they took 'em to town.

M: When did the railroad come in there?

2: '72 (1872) or '3 or somewhere around there.

M: Oh, way that far back?

1: Oh, yeah.

2: They could railroad the logs out of there. They wouldn't go no waterways.

1: (unintelligible) There was no waterway.

2: Well, they wouldn't have the logs right by the mill, necessarily. Or the lumber camp, either. (unintelligible) housing. They could go clear up there to the Tamarack River, too. They had logging dams there, too. Two dams on the Tamarack River. One at Wright (that's what it sounds like, or Right) and south of there. They could have floated them down the Tamarack River. Then they would have gone up to Sandy Lake.

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1: Yeah, that's the way the water goes. You don't float logs upstream unless you got a barge.

2: Yeah. But they did have... there was two dams on the Tamarack River.

1: Earthen dams?

2: Yeah. Earth. (unintelligible) driving logs. There was one right by that bridge at Wright, railroad bridge. And there's one along towards Eagle Lake. That's where the Tamarack River starts. I got that location somewhere.

M: You guys are talking about Long Lake.

1: At Douglas.

M: I figured that was it, but I wanted to clear it up.

1: See that, old Douglas (unintelligible) another, for some reason it got the name Douglas Lake and Nelson Lake got named after Nelson. Stuff like that.

2: (unintelligible) that big barn.

1: What?

2: Douglas built that big barn. The old Roadwin (spelled the way it sounds) barn?

1: Oh.

2: I got some pictures of that, a bunch of guys doing it. Fred Olson identified it. It had the two dormers on the east side of the barn.

1: Going into the hillside?

2: No, no. The dormer... Yeah, the barn was built into the hillside, but it had two dormers on the east side, and he said that's so in the barn (unintelligible) it would have dormers like that, there were lights that should have, you know, when you... but that was Douglas that had that done. And he cleared a lot of the land around there, too. Right around. It was after World War II, or before it, or about that time.

1: Around World War I, you mean.

2: Yeah, World War I. He cleared, well, south of Spruce Lake in there, and north of Long Lake. That was cleared out, and it's logged off, and everything's cut there. When Douglas had it, or had it done.

1: But then, I don't know, didn't he go out of Tamarack there? He built another house, I think, in Tamarack, didn't he? Where... kind of like Paul Heller's and Douglas (unintelligible). The Kelley one. He sold that. Douglas sold it to Kelley's in 1918. Said somewhere for five thousand dollars. That was in that county book there.

M: Sold it for \$5000?

1: They bought it for \$5000.

M: That's a lot of money then.

1: I think he either had another house, or built one on that, down by Paul (unintelligible)'s there. I think there was a Douglas house there, too. I don't know, maybe he had two buildings. He sold one to Kelley in 1918.

(end of Side A)

Side B

2: There's a big logging road, right, right about where the road goes up here. You come in from Kenny's there, and went through here... went all the way through what is our property now, and there was a bridge... he put a bridge over the drainage ditch. He put that right next to the Ed Kahn (?) house.

M: You're gonna have to guide me on that one. (laughs)

2: OK. Is that pen or pencil?

M: It's a pen.

(long pause)

2: I know Dad used to talk about the Finns comin' through from over here. That was basically in the winter, of course.

M: Um hm.

2: See, they cut through from... it was right over here, next to Mud Lake. And they went through about like this, and they went through about like this, and over to here. Haulin' the cordwood to town.

M: Oh, that's where the bridge was, then.

2: That's where the bridge was.

M: OK. Right in about, between 14 and 15.

2: Yes, it was pretty close. Well, it was at the edge of that firepit there. But you're pretty close right on the line, there. But then there was...

M: There was a bridge for hauling timber to Tamarack.

2: Yup.

(long pause)

M: That was across the ditch. Ditch number 14? Is that right?

2: Yeah. Where your dad used to run the horses on the mail route...

1: I think when he went through the woods there's another bridge south of there, just, well, at the corner of Gene Boise's field on the ditchbank? That one that's across the ditch there?

2: Yeah.

1: There was a bridge across there.

2: Yeah. Yes.

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M: On the Sandy River or what?

1: On the north side of the ditch.

2: Actually, it was just about like our snowmobile trail. Comin' down here, it goes like this, then it went across this bridge here. Of course, other people used that, too, right?

1: Yeah, well that was on that old road I was talkin' about. You know. That runs from, well, north of our barn, and against the woods where we had that old sawmill? That old logging road ran west and came out, I think, at that bridge. Probably the bridge was made after, you know, the dredge ditch was dug, because that trail was there in 1873 already. Surveyed it. That old logging road – or “old trail,” they called it – on the surveyor’s notes. And that’s where it crossed. Right there where that bridge was, as far as I can tell. So they must have made the bridge – well, I suppose it was for... would that have been Douglas owned that land there? Or was that Kings? Douglas was probably first, then Kings owned that land in there, too.

2: Up in the bog here. Closer to town, you mean?

1: No. He owned it between Spruce and Long Lake.

2: Ok.

1: Well, I don’t if it was Ed King or his dad, but they came from Canada, and they bought a lot of land there. They didn’t use it, but... might have used it for pasture. They did fence it, I think, with smooth wire.

M: That bridge was right about there (probably pointing at the map).

2: Yeah.

1: Then the trail, it ran, it ran... where are we? (looking at the map)

2: Right here’s the trail.

1: Well, kinda back here. And it’s about here across the road. See, it went through a little slough there. They kinda maybe even filled it in there. That little wet spot, there was beaver dams in there. They crossed that road over there by Ozzie’s, went up here somewhere. Maybe they went up by Mud Lake north of there, and I don’t know where they ended up. If it was a logging road, they might have been heading for Tamarack River over there. And then the other end of it was down, well, where is (unintelligible) Minnesota, where are we?

2: Well, did it splice here? Did it...

1: No, it stayed, I think it stayed on the highway.

2: I’m talkin’ about your dad, where he’d (unintelligible) his cutter (?)

1: Oh, yeah. He’d go across this big swamp here, as far as I can tell, he was able. Otherwise he’d go up the Ditchbank.

2: Yeah. This thing went over here, too, then.

1: Yeah. North of Dave’s there.

2: Inside (unintelligible).

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1: Well, it was Sandy River over there.

2: Because this is Sandy River.

1: Ok. Somewhere over here, it met the Sandy River, I think. The trail did, according to what...

2: Did they float logs on that?

1: On the Sandy?

2: Yeah.

1: I don't know if there was enough water. Because right here the headwaters, there was no dams there.

2: (unintelligible) Salo?

M: Yeah. Whatever.

1: Well, talk to John Jackman. He'll remember what his dad... he was logging down there.

2: Harold or John?

1: John would know. I think Harold would, too. Jack Jackman, I think, logged down there. I think maybe he was in the aftermath in there, logging tamarack and cedar. He wasn't into pine, because they (unintelligible). In Hill City they bottled pop up there, in Hill City.

M: That was in Salo?¹ I could write that, just mark it down.

1: Either John or Harold Jackman would know. Jack Jackman's logging. That was along, through Grayling.

M: You don't know exactly where it was at?

1: Well, I think it was just south of Grayling where they were logging, and south of there, too, I guess. I don't know.

M: I can maybe get that from them.

2: I'd talk to Walt (unintelligible). That's...

1: Yeah, he would... if he remembers.

2: I don't know how his mind is, do you know?

1: I haven't talked to him for a long time.

2: He drives and stuff, though.

1: Maybe he's OK.

2: Sometimes that don't mean anything! (Laughs)

M: And this was the bridge for a mail route, was it?

¹ Salo Township

1: No, actually it was a shortcut for getting into town, if the road was plugged, because this road here was so bad usually.

2: Did you bring those pictures? (Laughs) Oh, man, he's got some artifacts here, I'll tell you! (sounds of rustling papers)I'd buy a storage box at the bank to put them in!

Looking through photographs

1: Here are some mail route pictures.

M: All right.

1: Snowmobile and stuff like that. You can go through 'em if you want to just...

2: Yeah, just take a fast trip through them. That's pretty good. You guys want a can of pop?

1: That'd be OK, I guess.

M: Sure.

2: I got Pepsi... Coke...

M: Doesn't matter to me. Pepsi's fine for me.

1: I'll have a Coke.

2: Coke?

1: Yeah, I'd rather have that. Oh, you got diet caffeine-free.

2: Is that what it was?

1: Yeah.

M: Pepsi's fine with me. (Back to looking at the photographs) Sure had a lot of snow. And your dad ran the mail route then?

1: Yeah. About 1922 till about close to '57 maybe, or somewhere in there. Maybe '56.

M: You got these in any order?

1: No, no. I just picked out the ones that showed him on the mail route. Vehicles. I was really trying to get snowmobile pictures because I've still got that old snowmobile picture (unintelligible). Let's try that. Figure out what it was like, you know.

M: Here's one where he's got a... oh, that's what you're talking about?

1: Yeah.

M: That's quite the rig!

2: Doggone old horse. You know, that thing would really go.

1: Yeah, that was a little bronco we bought from some... Blake. He used to trade horses.

2: Old Fred Blake?

1: Fred, was it? Yeah. He used to go over to Dakota and get some wild broncos.

2: He probably stole 'em up there! (Laughing)

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1: Anyhow. We had one that was really a good single for the mail route.

2: He would go like a son of a gun!

1: Oh, yeah. He could really trot along!

2: Is this Lorraine?

1: Probably not.

2: The (sounds like “Sh-minch-kins”) they didn’t show up this year on our route, but it was pretty cold that far, it was about 20 below.

M: Where is this road then?

1: I think it might be Section 4 over there down south of Tamarack. Probably. Through that swamp. It’s kinda (unintelligible) thing.

2: (unintelligible)

M: I guess.

2: Yeah, sure. This is right south of Steve’s.

1: Yeah, it looks like it.

2: Sure it is.

1: Kind of a dismal stretch through there. Quite a long stretch.

2: Yep, they sure put up with a lot there.

M: Hm. Struggle just to get the mail out.

2: The mail must go through!

M: Yep.

2: Now if it snows 8 inches, we don’t get any mail! (Laughs)

1: They changed the requirements, I guess.

M: I get a kick out of that. Looking at these old horse and carriage and this old thing, but mailboxes haven’t changed.

1: No, not much. There was that older design. It’s kind like half a stovepipe. Got a flat lid on it. I think I had one of those old mailboxes somewhere. Real old ones.

M: This is the post office in Tamarack, I take it? Same place?

2: Well, it was a couple places.

1: But basically next to the bank there where it is now. Well, that was the first one. First one was on the other side of the street. By the (unintelligible) store. Sam’s.

2: Before they had that open, they had to get it from Grayling or Cromwell.

M: Oh, they didn’t even have a post office? If they wouldn’t have one in Tamarack...

2: (unintelligible) I’m not disputin’ it.

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1: Well, the first folks there (unintelligible). Yeah, this family, they come from Wright, at first, before they had one in Tamarack. They said something about it in here, but I don't know if that's quite accurate when they started.

M: What year was that first post office in Tamarack? Any idea?

2: I'd have to go by that book.

1: Probably about 1913 or something like that, or '12. That's just a guess, but it's pretty close. There was a – I think it was in '13, yeah – there was a little article in the Aitkin paper one of those years. It was in '13, '14, I think. The government was askin' people to send in for, what do you call it? Apply for post offices in different towns. If they met the requirement, whatever that was, they could get a post office and get a postmaster, I think. But that was around '15, '14, I think.

M: Did they have different churches around the, say, Clark Township?

1: Well, I was talkin' to a guy this Monday, had a little booklet (unintelligible) and it was kind of a bulletin or directory for a group of churches from (sounds like Phil-uh-son – maybe Finlayson?), Lawler, Cromwell, Wright, Tamarack, and this whole area there. That was in 19... when was that? Can't remember now. It might have been 1930, I don't know. Anyhow, there's a minister, (sounds like Leck-a-skow), came out from Duluth, and he was a traveling minister. He was Finnish, er, Swedish Lutheran. Every other Sunday, or whenever he could get around, he would stop at the different places and... or stop at one place on a Sunday, maybe. Anyhow, it worked out so each place wouldn't have church every Sunday, but occasionally, you know. When they could get him out there. He was there for many years, (Leck-a-skow?).

2: There is some mention, too, of some of that stuff in there, too. Well, I can't pull it together. Things moved around. You know, a lot of things were temporary, you know, until finally they got something going.

1: I think it was in homes, first, they had the church there.

2: Yeah.

1: And then, over the county line over there, Dan and Margaret, there's a little log cabin. They had a church there.

M: It was...

1: It's right on the county line. Webster's.

M: Yeah, I know Webster's. South of the lake? Close there?

1: Well, it's in Aitkin County, the church is.

2: Yeah.

1: They used it for a church, I can say. But it's still standing there.

2: Yeah, right where that black dot is.

M: I'll see Dan tonight. I can ask him maybe.

2: Yeah. He's got...

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M: What year was that, roughly?

2: I don't know.

1: I'd say maybe before the '30s, probably.

2: Oh, yeah.

1: There used to be a Pastor Niemi that came around, too, before Lechester. He was at least probably 15 years earlier. Maybe longer than that.

2: How many of these rigs did your dad have?

1: Three that he had said in his story. I can only identify two of 'em. But some of them were made out of parts from others made into one. Some of the tracks were better, some of the skis were better. There's one snowmobile, I got the cast iron step for, you know, for stepping in from the driver's side. It says "snowmobile" on it. They were made a little bit different. They had 3 set of wheels on the back.

2: Oh, they did? Two drivin', or one?

1: Mmmm. They had one. They eventually... one company made 'em with a 4-wheel drive. Both sets of back wheels had drive. It was kind of on a (unintelligible) type thing that swung on the regular axle. There was a sprocket on there, and it drove the chains to either front or back. Of the two. Otherwise, there's a tendency, these wheels in the track, to spin in there.

2: Oh, I know.

1: But they had special tires that were molded to fit the track. (unintelligible) They're a little but expensive. You see, once in awhile, that old snowmobile that still has those old rubber specially made...

2: Hard rubber?

1: No, they were special tires that had a kind of a bar...

2: They were pneumatic, though.

1: Oh yeah. Oh yeah. But the snowmobiles had a hard rubber tire, some of them did, based on (unintelligible). They made many thousands of those things from New Hampshire to... oh, there's a couple places in Wisconsin (unintelligible). They made 'em (unintelligible). They didn't plow the roads in the winter.

M: So they just had to go over the top.

1: A lot of doctors had 'em, too, for makin' house calls.

M: Yeah, that makes sense.

1: There's a church south of Tamarack there, that Lutheran church, by Goodwill there.

2: But, see, that was a school.

1: Ok. Ok, that was a school. So that wouldn't have been a church.

2: It was a school, but now it's a church.

1: Wonder what the name of that thing was?

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2: The district?

1: Well, did they have a name for it?

2: There's something in there about it, too. It...

1: They had some strange names for some of those schools.

M: Where was this at, now?

2: Ok.

1: It was a school, all right.

(sounds of turning pages)

2: It was right here. And then they took and built the Red Brick School right here.

M: The first one was... I guess they're both in 29, aren't they?

2: Yeah.

M: One was... they called Red Brick School?

2: The Red Brick was the one down in the corner here, and that was, I got a district number here...

1: That was a more permanent type.

2: Yeah. Brick. Tile.

1: Yeah, did that have indoor plumbing I wonder even then?

2: I doubt it. That'd been School District Number 69.

M: Both of those?

2: Yeah, I think so.

M: What years was that?

1: Hm. What year did they close that down? Was that the same time Tamarack closed?

2: See Billy Hovde - he never went to Red Brick, neither.

1: Well, Onas Ditner (?) – he tore it down, didn't he?

2: Ditner tore it down, yeah.

1: The Lawler school didn't get closed down same time as Tamarack, 'cause the kids went from Tamarack to Lawler.

2: Yeah, they re-opened the door for a few years, too. They got a room built.

M: Yeah, I remember when Lawler still was goin'. I went to Bellhorn at the same time. We used to have a little competition between Lawler and Bellhorn, you know. The kids would play kickball or something like that.

The Red Brick was after... this one just to the south here?

2: Yeah. You know they made things good and bad back them days. First thing you come to building, you either had to go down, or you had to go up. You know? Just like

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going to Lawler. If you wanted to go... soon as you hit the thing, you had two choices. You went down to the basement, or you went up the (unintelligible).

1: Well, the same way with Bellhorn. Same thing in Tamarack.

M: Yup. They wouldn't pass code now. (chuckles) You figure that Red Brick School was probably in the '20s, '30s?

2: When it closed?

M: When it was kind of in operation.

2: Oh, yeah. It was in operation through the '30s, because we used to go down there and play ball against them, 'member? It's in there someplace.

1: It's a real job trying to get all that information coordinated, or indexed on the maps.

M: Yeah, it sure is. It's amazing how many people have stuff, though.

1: Oh, yeah, I bet. Yeah. A piece here and a piece there. It kinda all fits together eventually. Sometimes you have to through it all about 5 times to...

2: ...grade schools and they call it Barrett (?) School, Kale (?) School, the Bee House, and the New School. I take it that was, this is North Star. The old log school. I think some of this, if you can sit down with Ruth (sounds like "Oh-haul-ski") on that area up there. Now I am totally away from the Red Brick thing. She can pull out some of this. "Elsie (unintelligible) taught up in the new school house." Myrtle Nelson (unintelligible). Bobby Harder, he's done some work on some of that stuff, too, you know.

1: Well, you have access to that, is it Wally Newstrom's collection of schools? He's got pictures of 'em all, doesn't he?

M: Yeah. See, we're not with his... we're separate from him, but we're gonna give him the stuff that we get.

1: I mean, they had (unintelligible) a lot of the schools.

M: Yeah.

1: Pictures of 'em.

M: Well, they didn't have all of 'em, because Ruth Larson had one they didn't have.

2: (Big laugh) There's quite a story in here on Mabel Patrick and the Patrick family. Just seen this the other day here.

1: I think it was 1905 they were supposed to have school at my dad's folks' place. Before they made the Nelson Lake School. But then they got diphtheria, and they were quarantined for – I don't know how long – but anyhow, they decided not to have school that year. So they didn't have school. They started it the next year. I don't know if they'd built the Nelson Lake School already by then, or... Well, no, they hadn't. Maybe they built it then the next year. I think they had school at their house. Maybe they did. Because they mentioned the builders coming around, the superintendent, coming around, with horse and teams staying there overnight. Maybe they did have school the first year there.

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M: Which end of Douglas Lake?

1: Well, that's the east end. The Johnson, Peterson place. They might have started there the first year before they built the school. But the very first year, they were supposed to be... have it at home there, they didn't. They found that diphtheria.

M: Right on the east end of the lake there, there's a little 2-acre square there. I wonder if that's...

1: That's where Schara (?) lives there, that's him, too. Yeah, there's a 5-acre square there. East end.

2: I forget – who's buried on the hill, there?

1: Well, in here, in there it says Toyvo, but it isn't (unintelligible).

2: Peterson or Johnson?

1: Peterson. My dad's next younger brother. In there it says Toyvo. But it wasn't. That was Toyvo (unintelligible).

M: Was there a name to that? I suppose there's just somebody's house.

1: Well, it's just the Johnson house. What do you mean, where that school was?

M: Yeah.

1: Yeah, it was Fiskus Johnson's house.

M: Fiskus?

1: And Gildersleeve was the county superintendent, or whatever they called it, and he came out to check on the school sometime, he'd probably been the first one that came around. But he did stay overnight there. I mean, he traveled. There weren't too many places to stay that were commercial. I don't know where he stayed, the house was pretty full, but...

M: Yeah, Fred (unintelligible) from McGrath, he showed us where they had a halfway house. It was halfway between McGrath and Finlayson, and when they'd take the team of horses, it was too long a trip, so they'd stay overnight there a lot.

2: Livery stable.

M: Yeah. I s'pose.

2: Full of lice and bedbugs.

M: (chuckles)

1: Hotel in Tamarack. Somebody said there they had... when you got off the Tamarack, at Tamarack at the railroad station, they stayed at the hotel there. Full of bedbugs.

M: Oh, yeah? Was that the hotel where the theater was there?

2: No. There was 5 of 'em in there, hotels.

1: Yeah, it was pretty... hotel minded there.

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2: You see this is on the (unintelligible – he is reading something aloud) “It was the site of the E. L. Douglas logging camp and housed many men and horses. The Sandy River Lumber Company.”

M: Where was that at?

1: (unintelligible) now.

2: (unintelligible) by Siler’s.

1: That’s where the old bridge used to be there.

(The tape runs out here. This was the first of two tapes.)

(end of Side B)

(End of tape)