

INTERVIEW WITH JOE DROBNY  
SUBJECT: MUNISING WOODENWARE COMPANY  
AUGUST 31<sup>st</sup>, 2010

**KORDICH, DIANE (DK):** This is an oral interview with Joe Drobny. This is Diane Kordich speaking. We are going to discuss the Munising Woodenware Company and Munising bowls that were made in the Upper Peninsula. Joe, can you tell me anything about the factories?

**DROBNY, JOE (JD):** Well, I could tell you how this all started. This was a brand new department. They brought some people here Mr. and Mrs. Dilley and a girl known as Carrie; she had worked for them out in New York where they decorated woodenware. They wanted to establish a department in Munising. So, this was all brand new and they advertised for... I don't know how I heard about it...

**DK:** Did they advertise in the newspaper?

**JD:** I don't remember but it was word of mouth or if they advertised in the newspaper, but there was a tryout you had to go to. I don't remember exactly where it was; it seemed to be at the Historical Society or the Library or someplace, where you had to sit down and show your brush--expertise with a brush. There were quite a few from Northern that were just graduating; you know art majors, who were going to be teachers. Then some local people from Munising and a gal from Escanaba came up. You all had to try out and show that you could handle a brush. Then they'd, if you're okay, they'd hire you. This was out in Munising and then we had to get a place to live down there. Some would stay there the whole week; others would come home for the weekend.

**DK:** And how old were you?

**JD:** I was 24 then.

**DK:** 24. And had you gone to Northern?

**JD:** I had gone to the University of Iowa for a while and then I went to the Institute of Design in Chicago-- that may be of interest to you.

**DK:** Yeah!

**JD:** Celini went there, I believe. I was doing commercial artwork in Chicago but once you grow up in Marquette, it's a beautiful place, that's all I could think of was coming back home; even if you got to take a loss. So, I didn't know what this would amount too (working at the Woodenware Company); no one really did. I took a chance and came back home. Once you get back home you aren't going to leave again. There were several kids from Northern. There was Kathy Hunt whose one of them; Hunt Hall was named after Lucian Hunt, her father.

**DK:** Yes, Lucian Hunt.

**JD:** There was Verna Etelamaki, Wanda Balai, and Bob Wester. We all got to be really good friends, but Bob especially. He was a real good buddy of mine; we roomed together down in Munising.

**DK:** And where did you stay in Munising? At someone's house?

**JD:** Yeah, we stayed at Mrs. Le Veque's house to start out with. The girls had one big room and Bob and I had another room, but Mrs. Le Veque didn't think that was a very good idea after a while, having the girls and the guys in the same...

**DK:** Same place.

**JD:** So, Bob and I got kicked out.

**DK:** Oh dear, you had to find a new home.

**JD:** We found a much better place. First, we went to a cabin. We were going to live in this cabin, tourist cabin. Tourist cabins back then 1949, they weren't that great. We were in that for about a week and that didn't work out. The heater didn't work right; it was too cold or too hot in cold weather. So, we went to live at Mrs. Menze. We had a real nice place there and that worked out fine. They were both on Onota Street. In fact, everything was within a stone's throw. Le Veque was on one corner, Menze was down the street a little ways, and they're only about two blocks from the plant. So, it worked out well. Bob and I, for breakfast, we would go to this little cafe. I think it was Auntie's Café. We'd always go in there for breakfast. The gang would sometimes get together for supper or a picnic. We'd do a lot of swimming down at Grand Island. So, it was a nice summer, until the summer ended and the girls left. They had teaching jobs coming up, but Bob stayed. He'd graduated but he wasn't sure what direction he was going to go and we stayed there until they went on strike. Wages weren't very good and it was a new department, so we got the short end of the stick anyway. For the other people at the established departments, they had to make a living wage. They went on strike. They weren't making much to begin with and they went on strike; they weren't making anything. But, they were off for two whole months; in 49' the economy wasn't that great. This (article) was in yesterday's paper, that's why I have this paper here. It was 60 years ago. "Munising Woodenware goes back to work and hoped to be on full schedule" (this article is included in the file).

**DK:** I'll look at it.

**JD:** And that was 60 years ago yesterday.

**DK:** That's amazing. I called you up and here we are talking today.

**JD:** Yeah, so it went back but I never went back. I did some work for the local printing companies; some of my work is around yet. The garbage bags out there, the seal of... the Marquette Seal that's mine.

**DK:** Good. So, what was a day like in the Woodenware Factory? So, you ate your breakfast at Auntie's and then what did you... you walked the two blocks to the Woodenware Factory. What time did you have to be there?

JD: I don't remember, probably 8:00am. You can see in the picture (photo) how it was set up. We had these round tables; they were on a pivot. Depending on what it was like, what size bowl you were working on, is how many they'd put on the table. Like a Lazy Susan, maybe you'd only get five on there but little bowls they'd stack them up and you would have dozens of them on the table. Maybe you only had to put a couple of flowers on the small bowls. It depended on the size of the bowl and design; you know how many you had. You'd come in there; you'd get set up for the day. Your palette would be a piece of wax paper wrapped around a board. Your thinner would be turpentine in an oil can. Your paint would be in little cans. You'd have to open those up with a palette knife, scoop a little paint out and put it on your wax paper. Put a little turpentine in, to get your right consistency and you'd have different colors on different parts of the palette. There was one fella there, John Drury; he was colorblind. Well, sometimes he'd get mixed up what color was which. He'd have brown grapes or something. You'd mix up your paints. I got some brushes here. These are still brushes from Munising. I want to tell you they were good quality. But something else, you had to buy your own brushes. Now, we only made about...

**DK:** These look like small sable brushes?

**JD:** Yes, sable, you betcha.

**DK:** Some are square, it looks to be a one-inch, a half-inch, a quarter inch, and two are more pointed.

**JD:** This isn't from Munising; this is a later one. But, this was a real important one; it was a small quill brush. They called it a quill brush, it was an actual quill and it was kind of like a Chinese lettering brush or something.

**DK:** A Chinese lettering brush.

**JD:** We used these a lot, especially for stems and leaves.

**DK:** So, the quill brush was used for stems and leaves and these other brushes were used for...

**JD:** This wide one here, this was for apples and things, that little baby costs like four bucks.

**DK:** At the time?

**JD:** You had to buy it. They wouldn't supply it for you; you only made about 83 cents an hour. So, by the time they took out your withholding tax and union dues, you almost had to work a whole day to get one of these brushes. It wasn't very good. **Note:** The workers were timed with a stopwatch. The pay was by piecework. Some workers were paid more than others. Workers were paid differently—pay inequality. Thus, they went on strike.

**DK:** And that's why they went on strike.

**JD:** Yeah, like I say we got the short end of the stick in the art department. But all the departments were hurting, that's why they went on strike for two months.

**DK:** So, originally the owners from New York and...

**JD:** The owners were from Piqua, Piqua, Ohio. When I came to Marquette here, they called it The Piqua Handle Company.

**DK:** And that's the one that was in Marquette?

**JD:** In Marquette, right where the high school is now. It was a big plant and it was a big employer.

**DK:** How many people do you think worked there?

**JD:** How many people worked there? I couldn't say but there were a lot of them. A lot of my friends worked there. It was a dangerous place to work; a lot of them have missing fingers, that's for sure.

**DK:** Would you say there were 50, 100, 200?

**JD:** A couple hundred, 300 maybe? It was one of the major employers in the area. Then, there was the Munising plant and that had quite a few. That was one of the major employers in Munising. There was a Veneer Mill, a Woodenware, and the Paper Mill. We're getting off on a tangent here.

**DK:** We were kind of talking about a day at the... well we were talking about two things. One was, how your day went and then I asked about the owners from Piqua. So, they came closer to where the wood was? Was that the idea?

**JD:** That's right; all the wood was up here. So, they had a hot pond, a sawmill and a power plant. They used up everything; all the scraps were burned. They had the dynamo there, which provided their own electricity. It was a good operation that didn't pay very much. I wasn't associated with this one (Marquette/ Piqua Handle Company) but I'll come to that later. Well, they eventually moved the art department from Munising to Marquette. It wasn't in operation

too long. I shouldn't jump ahead like this but I will as long as I'm on it. That's where a fire started once, with all the paints in there and...

**DK:** In the Munising one?

**JD:** In the Marquette in one, in the art department. It was a conflagration, a big fire and that was the end of the Piqua in Marquette here.

**DK:** So, it actually burned down?

**JD:** Well, it was burned to such a point that it was marginal by then and that's where the high school is now. But it was the art department that was their demise. Talking about the fire danger. We used to clean our brushes. Bob Wester and I, we were the ones that would have to go outside and get a can of the lacquer thinner, so everybody could clean their brushes. So, we were griping about, that we were doing this on our own time. So, they'd give us an hour extra for a week of doing this because we'd have to go out in the snow. They wouldn't want that lacquer thinner in the plant. The plant was a timber box; the building was all bare studs. So, we'd go out and we'd bring that lacquer thinner in and everybody would swash their brushes in it --go from table to table. Then, we'd have to take it back out again to dispose of it in another barrel, so it didn't stay in the plant. So, it couldn't stay because it was so flammable, something went amiss here in Marquette, that's why they had that fire.

Well, getting back to painting now, this wide brush that was for apples, big things-- like hearts, big hearts—well, I really wouldn't use this for the hearts, I'd use a smaller brush. But with two strokes, you could make a heart; you could just twist it. Boy, you got adept at it. This quill brush, this was a beautiful tool; you could get real fine stems with it. You could get two dimensions because you'd mix up your paint; you have your light green mixed with white and load up your

brush, and then you'd just dipped the edge in the dark green. Then, you just make one stroke, two strokes and you got a leaf with three dimensions.

**DK:** Had some shading.

**JD:** Yeah, shading. The same with your stems; that was two colors on one brush.

**DK:** Did they teach you how to do this or did you...

**JD:** Ehh, they just gave me the patterns and you went on your own. I'll get into the patterns then too. How I did this, I skate on my fingernail, zip, zip, zip, zip (movement of his hand as he painted; he used his baby finger to steady the brush as he painted) then move onto the next bowl. By the time the bowls came around that was pretty dry, so you started in there with other colors. You do all the greens and light greens. Then, when you get around, you can do your strawberries. Then, like the green here, that would be dry enough that you could paint your flower on top of it.

**DK:** So, this sort of lazy Suzan had a row of bowls or a lot of bowls and you would do all the leaves on all the bowls. Then, you would do all the strawberries on all bowls and by the time it came around it was dry. Was it an oil paint?

**JD:** It was an oil paint; it had some kind of a dryer in it. So, by the time it went around (it didn't take very long to go around) you had to work fast. They had a piecework program but a lot of these elderly women from Munising they never tried. They were just there to visit. It was a nice day away from home. They were painting and doing something they enjoyed. They weren't worried about making a livelihood out of it. But the rest of us, we tried to scramble, if we could get beyond a certain number of bowls, we might get another dime an hour. But it was such a struggle, that's why it ended up in a strike. It was so hard you could never make a living at it. I



just wanted to mention these women because somewhere in there... they wanted it as a job and these others were just passing time. They were making a few bucks but...

**DK:** Well, they were just adding to the income of their husband and so consequently they weren't trying as hard.

**JD:** Absolutely, they weren't trying at all. They'd be very meticulous and you needed to whip it out. Strawberries, were done with two strokes too, different sized brush and they're shaded too with a lighter red and a darker red. They'd go one stroke and another stroke and you got your strawberry, shaded/molded. The little dots there, they weren't put in with a brush, they made up some little funnels, narrow little funnels, with a tiny whole in it. You put your yellow paint in there, kind of thinned out, and you just dot, dot, dot. Otherwise with a brush it would take you forever, with that you'd dot, dot, dot, dot, dot and that went pretty good.

**DK:** And your specialty was strawberries right?

**JD:** Yeah, I did a lot of them. Some people had trouble with them, but I liked them. The stroking through the stems and the leaves, so it went quite nicely; I enjoyed it. A lot of them didn't want to monkey with strawberries; it was too difficult. They wanted those big, big things like the hibiscus (flower).

**DK:** So, let's talk about the patterns a little bit, there was a strawberry pattern, there was a heart pattern with tulips, on the Lazy Susan.

**JD:** That's uh Pennsylvania Dutch there (heart and tulips).

**DK:** Yes Pennsylvania Dutch

**JD:** And hibiscus

**DK:** And the hibiscus, were there any others...

**JD:** And there's apple, plum, pear/strawberries/ hibiscus, uh the Pennsylvania Dutch. After, I left they introduced some others, a rooster or something came in.

**DK:** Seems to me, I thought there was some sort of ivy or maple leaf.

**JD:** Yeah, ivy came in after, too. Yeah, after I left.

**DK:** Ivy came in later, okay. Did you draw the pattern on it, or you just eye balled it and copied from a pattern?

**JD:** How they did it, they had little patterns like dress patterns, with all these little holes in it. They'd lay that, crush that paper and lay it inside the bowl. Take a little bag of chalk or charcoal or whatever it was.

**DK:** Charcoal and pounced it, through the holes

**JD:** Pounced it yeah, through the holes. So we had a general idea, you really couldn't see the real design, but you know where the main objects or main parts were and then you did the rest from memory. As long as you knew...

**DK:** So, would you just use one pattern for one bowl or you could use the pattern over and over and over again? *Note:* At one end of the elongated room that housed the Art Department was an area where the bowls were sprayed. They first received a sealer before the designs were painted on, the pattern was pounced on, the bowls were painted and then final gloss coats of lacquer were applied.

**JD:** Oh, they used that pattern over and over again. There was a gal that would do that pouncing and she'd supply the bowls to the tables. Certain bowls they wanted, you know the salesmen would go out and get orders. Whatever was going out big, they'd push those bowls and like this was a very popular size. A twelve inch bowl and...

**DK:** So, they had what six-inch bowls, eleven inch bowls, thirteen and fifteen inch bowls. How big did they get?

**JD:** That's about as big as they had. There were larger ones but we never saw them, I mean they didn't bring them in for decoration, not that I saw.

**DK:** So, they were making just plain wood ones?

**JD:** It all depended on the logs that came in. These weren't turned individually, they were cut out of a block of wood and that was quite an operation in itself. They had these little booths that are lined with steel sheets and their all full of dents and they put a block of wood on that spindle and...

**DK:** On the lathe?

**JD:** Well, kind of but not really a lathe. It had a model A- Ford transmission on it, so that they could shift down so it had more power. They had that block of wood on that screwed down, then they had it spinning and a knife would come in (on the other side), a cutter, and it'd cut out one size you know.

**DK:** So, it wasn't somebody chiseling at it, it was a machine.

**JD:** Yeah, (sound effect of "zzzz") and this (bowl) would pop out. Then they'd go again and then this (bowl) would pop out and then you moved to the next bigger size. So, you get all these different sizes out of that (one block of wood).

**DK:** So, they were kind of nested into each other?

**JD:** Nested into each other, yeah. Of course, the blade, you know they were quite coarse. Then they went into the sanding room. They had belt sanders; they'd go like this and disc sanders. I

don't know how good the ventilation was in there. We were away from that; we were in another department.

**DK:** Well, you can paint and sand at the same time there.

**JD:** No, they were different departments. But, I mean they were separated because these guys were there with the sanding all day long. People in Munising used to say, that you could tell if someone worked at the Woodenware because their pallor looked something like wood. I can almost believe that. We were away from the dust, they had ventilation, but OSHA would have a ball, the way conditions were back then. Then, they sand them and then they go into a dry kiln. A dry kiln was just a room with iron radiators and they stacked up all these bowls, they'd dry, and some would crack in the drying process. For every bowl they cut out I don't know how many got through the whole process, because some would dry in the... And you notice now this isn't exactly round, it was round when they started, but after it dries and shrinks in different directions, it's kind of oval.

**DK:** Yeah I noticed that some of them, a lot of them are oval.

**JD:** Yeah, they're oval, that's from shrinking process. Like I said, there were so many patterns and the Pennsylvania Dutch that was kind of nice one, that was the one where you use the quill brush a lot. Dipping all those tear drops on there and that was kind of popular. There is a...

**DK:** Can you tell me the kinds of objects they made, just bowls, they made Lazy Susans, they made salad forks and spoons, and did they make anything else besides those?

**JD:** The plant as a whole? Oh yeah, they made thousands, maybe millions, of clothespins.

**DK:** Really?

**JD:** Oh, clothes pins, that was a big thing, and they were kind of waxed and there were a lot of seconds and they'd grade them. People would take them home for firewood, for kindling; oh, they loved those old clothespins because they had wax on them.

**DK:** Were they a knob on top or were they more square?

**JD:** Yeah, they had a knob top. I think then they made the ones with the spring in them too.

They sawed out these on the band saw. Just a fella on the band saw, he'd saw out those spoons and forks. They made clothespins and that was one of the biggest things. Other than that, right there at Munising, it was bowls, clothespins, salad forks, and there might have been something else, but it was important, you didn't see much of. But Marquette, they housed the Piqua Handle Company, years ago. They made handles for everything that was a big thing; at the time everything had a wooden handle on it. They called it the Piqua Handle Company. Later, they started calling the new plant Woodenware; so I don't know which came first, that one or this one. But the Piqua, they came from Piqua, Ohio, that's why they called them the Piqua Woodenware.

**DK:** So, did you ever have a break during your day, or did you work straight 'til lunch or

**JD:** Straight to lunch, no breaks. *Note:* For lunch, I would often heat up a small can of pork and beans on the radiator in the dry kiln.

**DK:** And your lunch was half hour, hour?

**JD:** Half hour.

**DK:** And you went right back to work?

**JD:** Yes.

**DK:** And you left there at 5:00 pm?

**JD:** Yeah, I'd put in 8 hours.

**DK:** 8 Hours a day.

**JD:** After a day there, you know, you try to make time; you're exhausted. There was something I was going to say; oh it slipped my mind here.

**DK:** So you were with Bob...

**JD:** Oh Bob Wester, yeah.

**DK:** Up until...

**JD:** Until the strike?

**DK:** Until the strike, and the strike was in the fall? The winter?

**JD:** It was, we went back August, yesterday, and the strike was all summer.

**DK:** Oh it was an all summer strike.

**JD:** Two months. Bob and I, well he graduated from Northern but like some people he wasn't sure what he was going to do. What we did was right there in 60 years ago.

**DK:** Oh, yes I see. The newspaper says, "**60 years ago:** Munising Wooden Products Company officials today said, that they believe full production at the their plant would be resumed in about two weeks following a wage strike lasting more than two months (Mining Journal, 8/30/2010). So, this means that it was August and July--60 years ago that they went on strike (summer of 1950)."

**JD:** Yeah, talking about Bob Wester, he was a really good buddy of mine; we roomed together. Like I said, he was kind of at loose ends; he stayed around to pick up some more credits at Northern.

**DK:** So you stayed until the strike began, so that meant you left in June (1950) or...

**JD:** Yes.

**DK:** And he stuck it out all that time?

**JD:** Well, he never went back either after the strike. He didn't go back but...

**DK:** So, wait, so you worked from what period to what period? In 1949? You worked from January to...

**JD:** In '49? Uh, we started in the summer, beginning of the summer in '49. It was almost a year that we worked there until the two-month strike was.

**DK:** Oh I see, so you really went there in '48

**JD:** No '49, it was '49; they say June in '49...

**DK:** A whole year.

**JD:** Into 1950, until the strike...

**DK:** And then the strike came.

**JD:** Strike went in June again.

**DK:** Oh yeah, that would be right.

**JD:** We went back to work uh...

**DK:** So did you come home with pockets full of money?

**JD:** No, it was very, very meager existence. That's why I didn't go back. I went back (to Marquette) to try to do a little artwork around here. I worked for the printing companies. I got, some other work, which turned up every now and then. I did the seal for the city but it wasn't... Then I did sign painting for Cook's Sign Painting. Then, I wanted a steady job, no strikes, and no layoffs. I went to work for the Board of Light and Power. It wasn't that great of a job when I

started out but it ended up, we had wonderful benefits. It was a job that everybody wanted, Light and Power. So, I was there 31 years; it worked out well.

**DK:** Okay, and as a painter you were able to sneak your initials into the bowl?

**JD:** Oh yeah, everybody did that. That wasn't a matter of speaking, everybody...

**DK:** So, that was acceptable... **END OF SIDE A**

**JD:** Yeah, everybody had an initial on there. In fact, Lillian Revord, she was one of the older ladies down there, a wonderful person from Munising. She just died about a year or two (see obit 1907-2008); I had her obituary around here, nice long obituary. In that obituary, there was a special mention of her decorating bowls at the Woodenware. She says, she's the one that started that, about putting the initial/s on. She said, she didn't want anyone else credited with her work; she wanted her identification on her work. I think, she kind of started it, Lillian Revord from Munising.

**DK:** And the bowl with the hibiscus and the V?

**JD:** V, that's Virginia, Virginia Anderson. She was a young gal from Escanaba; she came all the way up from Escanaba to work. Why I have all these spoons and forks here because you had patterns to go after. You're supposed to do it this way and you're supposed to do it that way. But people didn't do it always that way. You can see how the leaves are on this one and the leaves aren't on the other one.

**DK:** Oh yes, there is a difference there.

**JD:** But people had to show their individuality.

**DK:** Well, that's all right. That's good! I can see. And are there any funny stories that happened while you were in the plant?



**JD:** I don't know, but I could tell you a little about Bob and I. We kind of bonded there at that job; you know, we lived together over at that job, at the plant together. We had a lot of interests in common and we didn't always spend time together in the Art Department but afterwards we'd always go swimming down to Grand Island Landing or spent a lot of time in Leach's Bar.

**DK:** Where was Leach's Bar?

**JD:** Right where the Falling Rock Café (on M-28) is in Munising that used to be Leach's Bar. They'd have a jukebox for dancing and we might go in there and have a beer or something. That was our hang out for all of us there. There's Kathy Hunt, Verna Etelamaki, Wanda Balai, Bob and Carrie.

I went to work for the Light and Power. But in 1953, I wanted to take a trip around the country. I wanted to get in an old truck and I wanted to kind of vagabond it all the way around the country. I presented that to Bob. He was going to do it with me but we had to get so much money. We had to have two hundred bucks apiece and I bought this old truck. So, Bob and I, we took off and went all around the country. We went over 10,000 miles, maybe it was 15,000; the speedometer didn't work on this old truck. I mean it was an old beater. But anyway, we went for two months; it was wonderful. We saw everything, Yellowstone, Grand Canyon, everything, just the two of us. I tell people about that; they said, "How did you get along with one person, you know, for two months?" Well, I never thought about it, but it had some real significance. We were on the same wavelength. Bob was a brilliant guy and we could talk. We could go all day and we would not talk about the same thing twice. I think that was a secret because we got along well. Even to take a trip with your wife for two months that'd be impossibility. But, Bob

and I, we slept in the back of that old truck, we cooked on a gas grill that we poured white gas into and we ate a lots of macaroni and cheese because it was cheap. Like I said, we each had two hundred dollars and out of that came all the gas, all the food and we didn't have any lodging. We always slept in that truck or out on the prairies. We thought, "Oh, this is neat, out there on the prairies under the stars like the pioneers." We'd take our mattresses out there. Until somebody the next day, where we'd stop for gas...we'd tell them where we'd slept, "Well, you shouldn't of-- there's snakes there."

**DK:** So, that was in 1953?

**JD:** 1953, Bob and I did that. That was wonderful. I told Bob we ought to write a book about that. Bob ended up as an English Professor at Northern, maybe you remember Bob?

**DK:** Not in my time, but I've heard his name.

**JD:** Jan Wester, he was married to. He was a professor for years.

**DK:** So, Jan had also worked at the Munising Bowl Factory?

**JD:** Jan? No, she was a doctor. She was a neurologist. Where they met, I don't know. They got married, nice couple; she's a wonderful person. So, Bob and I, we did that.

This is a spinoff of our bowl painting days. There's a Charlotte Wapienik, she moved to Marquette; she used to be one of the decorators. Her husband, John "Josh" Wapienik, he plays golf. I run into her every once in awhile, she's in Marquette. So, is Johnny Bullock, he used to paint down there for a while. But a lot of them are gone now; they disappeared but they were good friends.

**DK:** Well all right, if you don't have any more stories about the bowl factory. When did the Woodenware Company, Munising Woodenware, close down?

**JD:** I'm not sure exact dates.

**DK:** We can look that up (1955).

**JD:** I'm not sure when it finally folded up.

**DK:** And all of these bowls were sold to tourists or did the salesperson went out and drummed up business?

**JD:** Yes, there you go. That's exactly what they did; they come in there and want someone to take extra pains on their display. What they'd take around to these department stores; they didn't want something that was hurried but they wanted something that was really nice. So they'd bring these around; they were samples, salesman samples. Anyway, there was a department store in Munising, Denman's and they sold these in there, kind of a set. A bowl, I think there was...

**DK:** Wasn't there a salad bowl and then the individual bowls? Fork and spoon?

**JD:** And a couple of those I think. A set I think was about 12 bucks. At that time, that was almost twice what we made in one day. We could never afford these; we never had any of these bowls. They finally agreed to give us a bowl at cost, if we decorated our bowl; that was a chintzy outfit. So, we got one bowl; we could select a bowl. I got this curly maple; I like curly maple. It's beautiful when the light hits it; it has a nice glow to it. But, some got Bird's-Eye, which is nice if you get a nice, close grain Bird's-Eye, but you could decorate one for yourself. So, that was the only bowl, the whole year I worked there, the only one I came home with. The

only one I had, because you couldn't afford it, like I say. You couldn't afford to buy one. The only large one was given to me by a friend.

**DK:** The hibiscus bowl?

**JD:** Yes, the hibiscus bowl. These other one's, I think I picked up at yard sales or rummage sales. The Lazy Susan, I picked up at a yard sale, I believe. The forks I picked up at St. Vinnie's (St. Vincent De Paul Store). But, now you can't find these; they've been all picked up. You used to find them at antique shows, flea markets and antique stores. They disappeared; people that got them just treasure them.

**DK:** That's a plain little bowl.

**JD:** Now, this is a plain bowl, but it's Bird's-Eye, see all the little holes in there?

**DK:** Yeah.

**JD:** Bird's-Eye, unless you have real sharp knives to cut and sand the devil out of them to get below those pits, you don't get a good surface.

**DK:** I think that I have a maple bowl plain like that, it doesn't have any finish on it, but it's that size. I think it's made out of maple, not Bird's-Eye maple.

**JD:** Well, they made these bowls out of mostly maple, some beech, some birch, but mostly maple. I have seen big bowls, they were made out of oak, but I think I've only seen one or two of those. While I was working at the plant, I never saw any oak; but there are some large bowls that have been made out of oak. Bird's-Eye is a beautiful wood; it takes extra work, extra work. I can give you a spin off on this Bird's-Eye.

They used to make station wagon bodies for Ford up in Kingsford. The Bird's-Eye would come through and it was so hard to work with, they'd set it aside. They had all this Bird's-Eye set

aside, so they finally decided to make two Bird's-Eye bodies (car bodies). Like I say, it takes extra work, you know, sanding. So they made two Bird's-Eye bodies and I saw one of those at a car show. Oh, that was beautiful. Anyway that's not regarding the bowls. I thought I'd add that in.

**DK:** Well, that's an interesting fact about the wood industry in the Upper Peninsula. There was a lot of wood doing a lot of things. If it wasn't for construction in building homes and things, then it was for charcoal kilns to do the pig iron. Then you have the car company...

**JD:** Oh Ford, all of his wood came from...

**DK:** Well yeah, Upper Peninsula that's why he built plant over in Iron Mountain. Then you have the pulpwood that goes to the paper mills. So, was the paper mill going at the same time that the Woodenware Factory was?

**JD:** Yeah, that was going and the Veneer plant was going too in Munising, those three industries. Then the Woodenware left. I don't know if it went before. But they were phasing it back; they moved the art department to Marquette. How long after--I don't know the dates--I was out of town. I went to Chicago and different things. Speaking of the wood industry as a whole, Henry Ford, I don't know how many board feet went each Model-T, all the framing, all the floorboards, running boards, and all the spokes for the wheels. He used oak for the wheels and the spokes. That's another thing I could talk for all day on old cars.

**DK:** Well that's because you have an old car.

**JD:** Oh I've got nine vintage cars.

**DK:** And you know all about that.

**JD:** Oh a lifetime. I've been painting; these are all my old paintings around here. The one behind your head. Those two over there, those are photo prints of the Freedom Art Exhibit at the high school (Marquette High School); they're large oils-- those two, the first locomotive in Marquette and the first automobile in Marquette. Then, I've got paintings all around, portraits of my grandkids I did, some are watercolor, and some are colored pencil. I've been busy.

**DK:** Yes you have. Well if there's nothing else on the wooden works...

**JD:** Let's see, unless you want to, I could tell you about employees. If I look at that picture and tell you how many were there. Where is that picture I want to take a look at it a minute?

**DK:** Oh where did you put the Green book?

**JD:** Oh here it is.

**DK:** The Green book is the "Alger County Sentential History from 1885- 1985." (Joe has a picture that we are looking at. There is a poor copy in the file folder labeled).

**JD:** Now here, this me up against the wall. This fellow standing there, that's Mr. Dilley, he's the fella that came from New York to establish an art department, he and his wife. His wife was the artist; he was just kind of a helper, moving cans of paint around, kind of a gopher. See the small bowls there; you could pile lots of small bowls if there were just a few little things that you were going to put on them. But, then you get some of these tables and you only see, oh, only three, I've got a couple of them piled up there; those are strawberry bowls probably. Some of them (tables) don't have that many. This gal, she was a war bride from World War II, Irene Honshu. She was Greek; she had an uncle or somebody in Munising. She got divorced and I guess she came up here; you know we were kind of looking after. She was a nice person. She got married again; she had a nice little boy. Anyway, she was in France during the occupation,

and she told us stories of the atrocities. She said that if they (the French) killed one German soldier, they (the Germans) killed ten Frenchmen. She was there she lived through that. She was an interesting person. Mrs. Rivord she's back there (in the photo). This is an awful lot of people here. But to make it look like more, they took a gal that was a janitor and sat her at a table, just so it looked like more people in the department.

**DK:** Than, worked there.

**JD:** That actually worked there, yeah.

**DK:** All right...

**JD:** Well I want to tell you about those brushes.

**DK:** Oh okay.

**JD:** Those things are 60 years old, and I still use these occasionally. Like, I said we have to clean these with the lacquer thinner, Bob and I would go out and we'd take turns getting that lacquer thinner. Everyone sloshed their brushes in them. You had to take good care of them because they were expensive.

**DK:** And you paid for them.

**JD:** Yeah, we had to buy them on our own, ourselves. Then you'd put Vaseline on them.

**DK:** Oh, to keep them pliable.

**JD:** Yeah, keep them soft; we'd do that everyday. Lacquer thinner and Vaseline. We worked with these things day in and day out. You'd get a good quality sable and they last practically forever.

**DK:** Yes, they do.

**JD:** I've been using, I have all kinds of modern brushes, but I still use these once in a while because they're nice; they're flexible. This one is a great one for lettering; I use that for lettering, but that's from Munising.

**DK:** Well that's great.

**JD:** And like, I say I don't have one of the old quills. Just kind of wore them out, you'd use them so much; you beat them to death. But this is what we used for quill brushes and they were great for small leaves and stems. You could really go. Like I say I'd skate along on my fingernail. I'd wear the fingernail right out.

**DK:** He's talking about his baby fingernail as support to do the brush, to paint. All right I thank you for your time and your effort... **End of side B**

**1/9/2011**