

INTERVIEW WITH BYRNHILD MITCHELL

MARQUETTE, MICHIGAN

JULY 7, 2009

SUBJECT: MUNISING HISTORY

RO: Okay, but you haven't held any other jobs?

RUSSELL OLDS (RO): To start off can you tell us your birth date please?

BM: But let me say this, we were all safe in those days.

BYRNHILD MITCHELL (BM): November the 24<sup>th</sup> 1903.

RO: Mhm, Yeah. Back when you could do that it wouldn't be a problem, yeah.

RO: Okay, can you tell me where you grew up?

BM: No, I didn't think so excepting to hike and hitch rides.

BM: I was born in Ishpeming.

RO: Okay, now umm, can you, do you remember the great depression?

RO: Oh, you were? So was I. (laughter)

BM: Oh yes, oh yes. I do remember it.

BM: I was, and when I was a baby in arms my father and mother and we four oldest children moved to Lansing where he was employed in the state capital. And we lived there and we came back to Munising when I was about six. To the Tannery, the East Munising Tannery and it was the biggest Tannery in the world at that time.

RO: Can you explain what a Tannery is?

BM: Oh, Tanning hides that they got in a lot of fresh balled up hides. And there was a certain part of the tannery where they had two...handles...and knives and they went like that on the hides and got the hair off the hides.

RO: Oh, okay. So you can here to Munising when you were six years old and you've been here ever since?

BM: Yes in the 20's and 30's for 18 months, then I got married. I had a daughter Betherly

BM: Yes. Mitchell. So that was mostly my big life.

RO: Okay, and what jobs have you held? (the depression, just here in Munising?)

BM: Well...

RO: Have you had in Munising?

BM: Telephone Operator for six months and then I went west.

RO: You went west? (You can...)

BM: Yes. I was going to say we had the Spanish influenza around 1918. And that was terrible, people died right and left and when they went down to the stores they would put on masks, to

RO: Like west Munising? that for awhile, and one of my neighbors was expecting a baby and she and the baby both died. And we went to a funeral after I got recovered, and we saw a lady

BM: To Montana, to Yellowstone National Park. Three of us girls got together and we hitchhiked, you don't want to know all that. baby on her breast.

RO: Okay, but you haven't held any other jobs?

BM: But let me say this, we were all safe in those days. use back in the hill for people that couldn't be taken care of at homes. Well that was the Spanish influenza.

RO: Mhm, Yeah. Back when you could do that it wouldn't be a problem, yeah.

RO: Okay and that was in 1916?

BM: No, I didn't think so excepting to hike and hitch rides.

BM: Yes, World War One.

RO: Okay, now umm; can you, do you remember the great depression?

RO: Did World War One affect Munising?

BM: Oh yes, oh yes. I do remember it.

BM: Oh of course it did! We have an American Legion post called Roderick Prego and he was

RO: Now did you come back to Munising from Montana, were you in Munising at that time?

BM: Yes we came home, and I became; now wait a minute. The Munising Highschool, sorry I'm trying to think of the name. Munising Township School Librarian, so I was Librarian for 18 months. it was kind of a lull. I suppose soldiers came back and found jobs and married. Things like that. So, 1920. And of course you know what happened in 1929?

RO: At the High school?

RO: That was the depression.

BM: Yes.

BM: Well, no. The stock, the collapse of stocks and bonds. There were people who lost a lot of

RO: That was during the depression? ted suicide. And I don't remember anyone around here but it was in the cities.

BM: Yes in the 20's and 30's for 18 months, then I got married. I had a daughter Betherly Eleanor Mitchell. So that was mostly my big life. Munising at all? Did people lose jobs?

RO: Can you explain what life was like in the depression, just here in Munising?

BM: Yes.

RO: how? and in the Depression families bundled up together. We had a mattress in the attic where three of my father and mother's grandchildren slept every night and ate with us all the

BM: You don't want a before that? ort another family at the same time, that's why I worked.

RO: Oh, yeah sure. You can... a librarian at this time?

BM: Well, I was going to say we had the Spanish influenza around 1916. And that was terrible, people died right and left and when they went down to the stores they would put on masks, to

protect themselves. I had that for awhile, and one of my neighbors was expecting a baby and she and the baby both died. And we went to a funeral after I got recovered, and we saw a lady laid out with influenza; I mean she was dead in the living room and we all walked through the house. Well anyhow she had a baby, a dead baby on her breast.

RO: Oh for 18 years, I thought you said 13 months I apologize.

RO: Oh no.

BM: No, 18 years.

BM: Yes, so it was a terrible time. And we had a pest house back in the hill for people that couldn't be taken care of at homes. Well that was the Spanish influenza.

RO: Okay and that was in 1916? the family.

BM: Yes, World War One. at that time?

RO: Did World War One affect Munising?

BM: Oh of course it did! We have an American Legion post called Roderick Prego and he was the first one who died over in Europe.

BM: Yes, I married Edmund James Mitchell.

RO: Okay, after post World War One what was the 1920's like?

RO: Okay, alrighty.

BM: Oh, it was kind of a lull. I suppose soldiers came back and found jobs and married. Things like that. So, 1920. And of course you know what happened in 1929?

RO: That was the depression. the Beach inn.

BM: Well, no. The shock, the collapse of stocks and bonds. There were people who lost a lot of money at that time and some committed suicide. And I don't remember anyone around here but it was in the cities.

RO: Oh, okay. Do you remember what types of foods and drink were served there?

RO: Okay, how did the stock market crash affect Munising at all? Did people lose jobs?

BM: Oh no, I never served anything. But I'm sure the food was good, but I remember the ...no I

BM: Well it brought on the Depression. That's what it did. called him Mein Hual. I was trying to think of the name of the original one. All I can remember is Heckathorn, he and his wife took

RO: Okay. most of the place. But the original one was very important, must be somewhere at the historical society. See I gave my leg to them too.

BM: Yes, and in the Depression families bundled up together. We had a mattress in the attic where three of my father and mother's grandchildren slept every night and ate with us all the time. And we were helping to support another family at the same time, that's why I worked.

BM: Oh yes, they have it all down.

RO: Okay and you worked as a librarian at this time?

RO: Okay, I do have one question do you know of. ... there was a bowl company; they

BM: Yes, Yes. making wooden bowls.

RO: And you said you only worked as a librarian for less than two years?

BM: 18 years!

RO: Oh for 18 years, I thought you said 18 months I apologize.

BM: No, 18 years.

RO: 18 years you were a librarian, okay I'm sorry.

BM: I was part of the support of the family.

RO: And you were married at that time?

BM: No...I didn't get married until 1941.

RO: So you were 38 when you got married?

BM: Yes. I married Edmund James Mitchell.

RO: Okay, alrighty.

BM: Then I had Betherly Eleanor Mitchell.

RO: Really those were all the questions I had for you, but you don't remember much about the  
RO: Okay, do you remember the Beach Inn.

BM: Oh yes, I used to go down there sometimes for parties. But the whole town had parties down there. It was an important, it was the best hotel in the whole...the whole area.

RO: The food and drink at the Beach Inn.

RO: Oh, okay. Do you remember what types of foods and drink were served there?

BM: No, but I'm sure they had the regular hotel things. I'm sure of that, and they must've had

BM: Oh no. I never served anything. But I'm sure the food was good. But I remember the...no I don't either. Mein Huaf was the manager of the Inn, they called him Mein Huaf. I was trying to think of the name of the original one. All I can remember is Heckethorn, he and his wife took care of the mot of the place. But the original one was very important, must be somewhere at the historical society. See I gave my leg to them too.

RO: The Historical Society? who worked there?

BM: Oh yes, they have it all down.

RO: Okay, I do have one question do you know of.... there was a bowl company; they specialized in making wooden bowls.

BM: Well I knew a woman, but she's dead. Well that's a long time ago you know.

BM: Oh yes, the Wooden Ware.

RO: Wooden Ware.

BM: The Wooden Ware. In fact people collected them, and also spoons and forks. Wooden, all wooden. They'd even put out a little thing to pick butter...butter to put on your plate. That came down and made an impression. Oh yes, they did get a lot of things. And then they hired an artisan from Chigaco to come up and teach and some of the wooden people how to paint those rolls, and those are very special today.

RO: Uh-hu. Okay.

BM: There painted flowers and things on them.

RO: Can you recollect the years that was in operation?

BM: Well, It'd be in the 20's.

RO: 20's? Okay.

BM: because my brother was in the service in World War One and he came back and he worked in the Wooden Ware, he and his wife. So that would've been in the 20's.

RO: Really those were all the questions I had for you, but you don't remember much about the food or drink at the Beach Inn?

BM: The what?

RO: The food and drink at the Beach Inn.

BM: NO, but I'm sure they had their regular hotel things. I'm sure of that, and they must've had good food. They were very good, the men especially...well I can't say just men or women; but they were all good cooks. And it was well known, in fact whenever business men came to see the business try and get their things stuff bought in the stores they used to stay there. And a lot of the teachers used to stay there, they had rooms upstairs for that. It was a big building, and very well known and well liked.

RO: DO you know anybody who worked there?

BM: What?

RO: Do you know anybody who worked at the Beach House Inn?

BM: Well I knew a woman, but she's dead. Well that's a long time ago you know.

RO: Okay, umm. Okay, by the looks of it... *And especially like I said, the potato bin that was shipped out to the army.*

BM: I do remember that my father was a volunteer weatherman and they had a big tower outside the Beach Inn and he used to have put up flags and turn on lights all shipping season. And the boats used to come in with coal. And even at the tannery dock in Munising for the tannery, a big ship used to come in with coal and with even hides. There's one thing about the hides, most of them were from South America and from the United States; but one year they got some from China. And that's the only year that there was a death, from Anthrax. Anthrax is deadly, deadly disease and...

RO: *The Anaconda, I believe it's made with Whiskey.*

RO: What year was this?

BM: *Never heard of it...Anaxanda?*

BM: What?

RO: *Mhm, I'm told it was a popular favorite.*

RO: What year was this?

BM: *Of Whiskey?*

BM: What year were we about?

RO: *Mhm, I believe whiskey went into it; a smooth whiskey.*

RO: I think we were in the 20's.

BM: *A drink? Never heard of it. Of course I was young.*

BM: No, we were in the teens before World War One, because I was only a child. And they really brushed and brushed the hides and sent them out by engine and box cars and brought them in that way besides even a boat.

RO: *I wasn't at any time, so there.*

RO: Okay, alright. Okay, yeah we just wanted to capture a little bit of early history here in Munising, can you explain what every...what just what...

BM: Well honey...

RO: well a little bit about how World War Two brought America out of the great depression can you explain what the end of the Depression was and the era like of the 40's with World War Two.

BM: Yeah.

RO: Can you explain how World War Two affected Munising and the end of the Great Depression in Munising?

BM: Well I do remember, oh yes. Potatoes were gathered. There was a great big farm up south of Lentmore. That now is the airfield. That was put out all by a commune was potatoes. So down by the railroad track, Su line, there was a great big stone...stone...bin! Bin! It was the length of the track, so large. And they put potatoes in there for the World War One. And we all had gardens, for the World War One. We all had gardens and the school had a garden. And

everybody saved and used their own gardens. And especially like I said, the potato bin that was shipped out to the army.

RO: Okay, well that looks like all the questions he had for you. Well, I should ask you one more; just to be safe. Do you remember there was a drink there was a special drink that came out of Munising called the Anaconda?

BM: That what?

RO: The Anaconda, I believe it's made with Whiskey.

BM: Never heard of it...Anaconda?

RO: Mhm, I'm told it was a popular favorite.

BM: Of Whiskey?

RO: Mhm, I believe whiskey went into it; a smooth whiskey.

BM: A drink? Never heard of it. Of course I was young.

RO: Right, so you probably wouldn't have been drinking at that time.

BM: I wasn't at any time, so there.

RO: Oh, okay.