

Interview with Pete Minneau  
Gladstone, Michigan  
No Date Given

Pete Minneau (PM): I was born in 1914, I grew up in Gladstone, and I spent all of my life here. My father was a railroader. He came in here and transferred. Originally he was from Oconomowoc, Wisconsin he transferred, he was on the Northern Western Railroad and he transferred to the Soo Line here at that time. The Soo Line Railroad was the mainstay between here, between the Soo and Minneapolis. All the car repairs were done in Gladstone, we did all the repairs on the cars. All the engines were repaired, they had a machine shop \_\_\_\_\_ the machine shop over here. And all the repairs on the engine, they were all steam engines. That was long before the oil and stuff came in here. Of course there was a lot of ring running around. You had the North Western Railroad then you had what we called the EL&S Railroad, we used to call it the easy way, as kids ya know. But the EL&S did a lot of railroading, what they've done they built a lot of spurs into the logging sections of the UP. And they would log out the logs and bring them to different places to be cut up. Now here in Gladstone we had what was known as the North Western Cooperage and Lumber Company. The North Western Cooperage and Lumber Company was owned by the Bushongs, they came here in the early 1900s when they started, and that was a big operation. They had a steel mill, lap mill, shingle mill, veneer mill, saw mill, and flooring mill, where they made hardwood floors. Now the logs were brought in, you seen they brought everything up on the White Fish over here north of Rapid River and eastern Rapid River, they brought it all in from steam coach all over. At that time they were cutting up mostly pine, cut of the pine and they took all the hardwood for veneer. Now they weren't too interested in hemlock, they cut some hemlock yes, but they left an awful lot of hemlock. Now of course the cutting them days are a lot different than it is today you know you get your lumberjack up there. At that time they were working for a dollar a day and board. That's what a lumberjack got, and you worked from daylight to dark. Now if you weren't in the lumber camp and you were riding the team, well you'd get up at 4 o'clock in the morning to ride the team. You get them unstuck, you'd get them ready for the day. Then you would go into the cook shack and you would eat and you would be out by splitting by day break. So you had to come in, when you came in at night, before you were even done as a lumberjack you went in and fed your horses, you would crate them down, fed 'em, watered 'em and got 'em ready for night. Then you could go and you went to eat, and you didn't stick around long because you would hit the sack right away because you were tired out. You know it was always a men camp, we had a big long tent, I can remember those days. As a kid I was up there thinking, well when I was 14 years old that would be 1928, my brother worked in the woods for, at that time it was the Stevenson Company that was a Northern Michigan, they called it the Michi Ridge (?) and they were cutting off there and I went up to work with him in the camps. And you would get into those camps is that they would stink at night because they had their socks hanging on wires and everything was heated by the stove. There was no oil or gas or anything like that. And when you worked in those camps, depending by the place you didn't make a lot of money. According to the times though, the cost of living was down. You made it, that's all. What I mean is you worked hard, but you got very little money. Them lumberjacks used to work all winter and come down in the spring and raise a ruckus. They'd go out and hang one on, and in about a week or two they were broke flat and then they'd go back to camp and they'd stay there till the next spring. They worked like beavers and they had nothing left. There was lots of that being done. Like I was saying to get back to the

railroads, all the railroads had spurs into all these camps. When they would go in, and the logs were removed at that time, and we would haul them out to a different mills. Now like the Buckeye, well we had those going out and I think it was an Nieman Northern railroad that pulled them out and they connected with the Soo Line and then the Soo Line picked them up and brought them to Gladstone where they were the North Western Cooperage Company got them on the road, make them in veneer, made them into flooring. But at that time, even as I grew up as I got older and I graduated from school, I went to to work, there was no place to work! You worked at the mills in those days. And that was the Depression time, we went to work, you went to work for 10 cents an hour, 10 hours a day. If you didn't like it or you looked crossed eyed at the boss you were gone, he fired you. There was no unions when I went to work during the Depression, there were no unions at all. So all we did, we went there and done your best. Now the big company store was run by Bob Riley, but it was connected with the Bushong Mill. So you either bought everything at that store, or you didn't have a job. So one day I got smart, I went downtown and there was this clothing store by the name of Hamptons and I bought a suit of clothes. I went to work Monday morning and my card was pulled out of the rack, I was done. My father had lots of pull because, on the railroad like he was, he handled all the movement of the cars that went into the North Western Cooperage Company and he talked to Bob Riley and I got my job back. They never bothered me anymore, because I was a lucky one. But those days, I've known people at that time that had worked for probably 20, 25, 30 years and has never drawn a payday. Never had a check. On payday they got a pink slip on how much they still owed. You could not buy anything, I mean if it was a washing machine or anything like that the company would get it for you. If they didn't have it on hand they would get it for you, you bought it from them. So that's the way people would get paid in those says you know what I mean things were easy. But then I come along, in the years that I come along and start working at that plant down here, Bushong, the Buckeye, we called it the Buckeye. When I worked there, I can remember hamburger was 3 pounds for a quarter in those days. Milk was 5 cents a quart, bread was 5 cents a loaf. I had bought that suit of clothes uptown I think I paid 18 dollars for it and it was a top grade blue suit in them days that's what they sold. Today you'd pay a couple hundred dollars for that same kind of suit. And I know as kids, as we grew up and we'd wanna buy a rifle like the 30-30 Carbine model 94 that they got today that you buy for 200 dollars, 180 something 200, we used to buy them for 18 dollars at the time. Of course in those days you didn't have all the cars you do, I can remember back when the first World War was going on and we would \_\_\_\_ into town. But when the war was over they'd drag the dummy of Kaiser Wilhelm around town behind a car. But there wasn't many, most of them were tourists. My father bought one in 1923, a Chevrolet, I think he paid 400 and some odd dollars for it, but that was brand new. That's what they sold them for, but they were touring cars. You had to put side curtains up on them, you know what I mean, and that's how you kept the rain out or the weather. You didn't have them modernized windshield washer, there was an arm up there that you kept on twisting to make it clean. But the lumber business, as I say, you had the Bushongs came into this neck of the woods. Other places, you had the Nieman Northern working up there and you had the, what was the, from Escanaba, they built that big school building...

Interviewer (I): The Bonifas'?

PM: The Bonifas' came in. And as my grandparents told me and my father, as they explained to us. Them people came in, they didn't have nothing. They bought a 40 of land and a long axe and

they just started cutting, the only true cutting in the Upper Peninsula. And that's the way that thing went you know what I mean they got rich, or because they weren't paying any wages as far as wages were concerned. And you remember, like here in town even the Bushongs were either on the commission, had some of their people on the commission, you know what I mean. Anytime anyone wanted to come into this little county with a business, they kept them out because they didn't want their competing leads to change. As long as they had us down, they kept us down. That's what kept the industry from filling up here. Because at one time, when I was a boy, across from Gladstone over here in Kipling, there was steel mill over there. They were making ingots and everything, they were working and all, trying to build. But eventually they couldn't keep up, they had to get out of here. But if they could have, that closer to the ore it would have been a handier. But it just didn't work out, they wouldn't let them in and prosper. We'd seen lots of that in my time. There wasn't cars, in like Gladstone were you didn't have a lot of cars. People didn't have a lot of cars, just the rich had them. If you wanted to go to Escanaba there was a streetcar, run straight from one end of Gladstone right through all the way to Escanaba. And we used to get on that streetcar, it used to cost us 10 cents, and we would go to Escanaba, and that's the way that you would come back on that streetcar. And when I was real young, why then there was across from Gladstone over there at the Greenwood, they had a beautiful set up there. Oh for dancing and all that stuff. And they had pageantry. There was a lot of blueberries over in that neck of the woods and there was a boat, a sailboat, and we used to go around the Mayflower over there. And there was one more sailboat that used to go to Escanaba and a lot of stuff that we ate, all the stuff in here, came in that way instead of by rails. By boat, that's as far as them two boats run. The Lotus and the Mayflower, that was the names, the Lotus was one and the Mayflower was the other. I can remember, we used to go as a family. We would get together, we'd get on the dock on 10<sup>th</sup> street here and we'd have our big picnic basket and we'd go across the bay on the Mayflower and then we'd pick berries, blueberries. Oh we'd pick a lot of them blueberries, then we'd come back on that Mayflower. Of course Pa worked all his life on the Soo Line. Then my oldest brother, Arthur, he started on the Soo Line here but he left and he went to Iron Mountain, or up to Marquette. And he got in with the Blue South Shore (?), and he was the record holder on the \_\_\_\_\_, he had that record for a long time. But eventually the Soo Line did absorb the Blue South Shore \_\_\_\_\_ and he worked for that. And that went on for, oh Arthur worked up there for a year. Well eventually the Soo Line started to move out slow but sure. They moved out some of the round house, they didn't have as many people on the round house. Well that started late late late in the Depression, before the \_\_\_\_\_ moving some out to repair it to a warehouse in Wisconsin \_\_\_\_\_. So that went. Pretty soon the rip track went. Then it kept coming down to, it was just the line running from, getting stuff out of Canada that was the Soo Line Railroad. And the Canadian Pacific would ship out there \_\_\_\_\_ this line through Gladstone on up. Well Manistique drives by the Soo Line and that helped because there was many men in those early days working on the Soo Line at Manistique. And the red yard went too. Because you had all the different outfits hauling from the different camps, they were hauling logs you know what I mean. I remember back in my times, and the docks down here, well the first one was big coal dock. All the coal used to get here by boat through that big coal dock. Next was the merchant dock. In that merchant dock, all the cars that were sold up in spring in the woods, they all come through the merchant dock. They'd come in by boat through the merchant dock. The next one was part of the merchant dock, that's were a lot of food would come in by a boat. A lot of the clothing stuff that you wore and all stuff that you used came in there. Next was the flour line, and boy a lot of flour

was shipped in here and out of here. Right behind it was a big grain elevator. Oh and it was a momentum thing. And the grain was shipped by rail out of the Dakotas now up in there where they made all the grain, and shipped down into here. Like Minnesota and all them that had grain, all the Dakotas that had grain, and all different grain up here by rail. After it came here it was stored in that big elevator. Then the boats were come in and would load that big elevator into the boats and would be shipped out of here. So at that time, Gladstone was pretty prosperous, we had 6000 people, boy we were big then! Well since then we've depleted way down. We're down to about 3800 now. The town is going down constantly because everyone has moved on. The only thing left up here now is... The lumber mills are all gone. They cut the pine, they cut all the hardwood and that. They pulled out, they're gone. What else do we have for Gladstone? We used to have Ronald Arms. That was an old time outfit. They made gun ram rods and game gators and all that kind of stuff. That was made here for lots of years. Then we had Model Cars and made electric generators and motors. They sold to Eaton later on, Eaton is running that now. So that's still here, but they don't hire like they used it. It's gone, \_\_\_\_\_ it's gone. So Gladstone's a \_\_\_\_\_, most of town is the paper mill, the Escanaba paper mill hires a lot of people out of Gladstone. So that's uses up a lot of... If you go back through those years, oh I can remember back when, boy I'll tell you when the Depression hit there wasn't one thing set up to take care of the people. There wasn't one thing set up, no programs at all. That's what Roosevelt was in office, 1932 he came in and, they set that up. Boy I'll tell you she would nip and tuck people who, someday I'll tell ya we took to the woods and made a lot of fences and took to the lake and made a lot of fish. We were fortunate as a family, because my father had a good job at the Soo Line, all was good. But I'd seen families, and boy I'll tell ya, and at that time all of them were on a fixed income. They came through with economy relief to help the people out and they gave them canned meat and they gave them oranges and grapefruit and all that stuff you know started shipping in here to give to the people all under Roosevelt's time. Then people started getting along, then they started the WPA and they worked on the WPA while the cities were putting in sewers and all this stuff for city improvements and the wages were paid by the WPA. The city would get some stuff and do the work, like at that time sewers and stuff. Gladstone built that golf course and the City Hall under the WPA. Of course you weren't getting rich on the WPA, it was only \$44 a day once a month, you got \$44 a month and that's what you had to live off. But people seemed to try, they seemed to make it you know what I mean. You do this, you do that. A lot of hunting, a lot of fishing. Of course for \$44 dollars a month and then you would get these commodities, they call them commodities like flour and stuff like that. I remember a time when they first start they would give you a whole slab of bacon, a whole slab of bacon. And hams and stuff that they had. The canned meat was all beef and pork, we used to call it canned tires. And during the winter we'd try to ahold of canned meat and I kind of like the taste of it ya know what I mean. When I started working, that's what you had. Of course I had to work at the mill, but heck I'd get along better if I worked the WPA than I could at the mill for 10 cents an hour. I was \_\_\_\_\_ for \$44 a month on WPA and getting them commodities than I was working at the mill and being forced to buy from their stores. But as times went on, well then you got the late, I left here in '39, I went to Detroit and went to work for \_\_\_\_\_ down there. Then eventually ended up moving to Ford. But then again I went, I had left the mill because boy it was hard to hold a job. I was married then and feeding my family. \_\_\_\_\_ But I couldn't stand the WPA so I finally went to Detroit and I worked there. Then the war was coming on and things were happening, the war was going to Germany, then you factories were going hammering tongs, you know everything started. Ever your veneer mills were doing very well because they needed that veneer

bad. So your veneer mills were going hammer and tong. I came back here, after my wife got sick and passed away I came back here. And I had 5 children at the time, so it was pretty hard to even raise them because there was no way I could do it alone. So I was going back to my life with the family and I left. I went into the service. But when I came back then I bought this house and we finished our roof. I remarried and started \_\_\_\_\_ in the veneer. But we look back on those days years and years ago, it was 30 Thin, 30 Thin Eaton. It wasn't like during the depression, we had well taken care of, because dad had a good job. But when you went on your own and started raising your own family, the jobs weren't there. They just weren't there. And Roosevelt had at that time had done everything he could to start thing rolling, to get things off by gosh. We had the WPA, then he had the CCC Camps that were started all over this UP. And guys would go to the CCCs, it was like army training but then you were like cutting trees, climbing trees, building roads and stuff like that. It helped the Upper Peninsula a lot. It opened the Upper Peninsula up and helped a lot. That helped.

I: Do you think it was harder in the UP during the depression than the rest of the country? Or about the same thing?

PM: No I think you're more we were more able to take care of ourselves. Cause your families, families helped families in those times. I don't remember when I had my house down there on Dakota Avenue, I was, I bought that little house. It wasn't much but I bought it. At that time I bought that house for \$500, but she needed a lot of work. She needed a roof, she needed everything. But the minute I started putting a new roof on there, all the guys came. Everybody came and helped me. All the neighbors were out and we put the roof on, we had a regular get together. The women cooked, baked, and we had done everything and then we'd eat there all the men and all them we'd all eat together. The women over there serving us. All these guys brought their ladders and hammers and everything and we put it up. Same with the inside of the house when I fixed it. So they all came to help, and we'd make evenings out of it. People got together, families got together. They'd cook stuff, my wife would cook stuff, and they'd all bring it and then when it was time to eat we'd all sit down and eat together as family. Everybody helped everybody in those days, today they don't do that. So then, we didn't all have cars. We couldn't all do this, do that. So we were more oriented, as families, to stick together in a group and work together. But today the cars are so important, people just take off and go! They just don't sit around and take in a next door neighbor anymore. Nobody ever hurt in those days. If your neighbor was hurting, you're hurting so you went and helped your neighbor. I would go, with you, sure I'd go to \_\_\_\_\_ with you. We were homeowners. Five families here, that none of us had work. Whenever we'd get a deer something we'd divide it among the five families. There was no refrigerators or freezers to keep meat in those days. So all you had was the ice box, the ice man would come around every third day and you'd buy a 25 or 50 cent chunk of ice and put it in your ice box. You couldn't keep meat like that. So you either canned it or you divided it among your neighbors. So everybody helped everybody. I was a lot nicer in those days than I am today. Today your neighbor doesn't care whether you live or die, you know what I mean. You can \_\_\_\_\_ they don't bother to say hello. Of course in a small town, everybody knows everybody. But those days, boy everybody helped everybody. So when you look back on, it wasn't really as bad as it sounded. You baked your own bread, you done everything in those. You'd done everything. By gosh when I tell you, I went to school, I went to Hayward \_\_\_\_\_ School here on the other end of town, and we lived on this side of town at that time. There was

no bussing. Kids walked in from Kipling to go to school here, kids from way out here in south Gladstone walked to go to school, and you carried your little brown bag. In the wintertime there was a guy by the name of Pete Lionelle [spelled phonetically] years back he used to pitch up his team. He had a big sleigh full of straw and then he had bricks that he would heat out on that big wood stove that he had on the barn and in the morning he'd put them in there and stretch a canvas over it and he had a lot of blankets he'd come right down the \_\_\_\_\_ railroad tracks. And us kids would all meet him standing out there, he'd stop and we'd all crawl in. Nice and warm! And at night he'd come and pick us deliver us all back home. But there was no busses or anything like that in those days that was all. You played, we played, in school I play football, basketball, track and all that. But you didn't travel down to Lower Michigan, you didn't travel into Wisconsin. We played right here in the UP. There was no busses, you got your car, your family too family cars and they would drive us to these games that we played. It's a lot different from today.

I: Where was your furthest game?

PM: The furthest game I think that I ever went to was Houghton.

I: Wow.

PM: That's as far as we went. Other than that, we played Manistique, Escanaba, and Crystal Falls, all around. Houghton would be the farthest one. The Soo would come up sometimes and play with us, or we' go to the Soo. Had track in Newberry, but like I said it was all in family cars it wasn't done with busses. Any more about the past that you need to?

I: What was the industry for the UP during World War 2, was it mostly the timber still? The railroad?

PM: Timber was pretty well gone, some of the mills were running. I'd say your paper mill, and the ore is always a big thing, it kept your railroads running. Ore has always been up here and Escanaba pushed out a lot of ore. They pushed out more than anybody right now in the UP right now because they have that belt system running out there \_\_\_\_\_. And boy they weighed it by the millions and millions and millions of tons. They even worked all through this winter. There was some reason they needed to pull all the ore out and they were still having it all hauled out from the mines and store for come the day that something would happened that they couldn't get the ore, they got it stored so they could ship it. So they worked straight through the winter storing ore down there and then repairing their dock, and \_\_\_\_\_ the belt. Just a big belt, the ore runs on that dock right off. The ore comes in on those cars, two cars go into this building and the machinery hooks on to two cars, turns them over and dumps the both of them, puts them back on the tracks like that, they're pulled out, then two are shoved in. And that's how the way is moved on this belt, through the machinery and onto the boats.

I: When was the first paper mill around here? '78 the first one?

PM: That's the only one.

I: When did that start?

PM: Oh that started way back in the early 19... before me. They built those dams, I can't really remember...but they've been there a long time. There were four dams on that.... Or three dams? One in Escanaba, one in \_\_\_\_ Falls, and so on. I think there's 3, there's either 3 or 4 dams on the Escanaba. At that time a lot of our electricity came from, most of it, came right from the paper mill. Today they're buying from everybody else because they're so big. They couldn't help, produce any more electricity for the rest of the town. We built our own plant way back when, of course we're out of it now, and because it wasn't producing...you know what I mean. They didn't pay us to have it to have it so we sold it to another company, and now they got a big generator down here. So if the electricity kicks off around here we have a big generator right here in Gladstone, she kicks on within 15 minutes. But I can remember when the power... Of course I remember back in the day, in the early days there was a lot of people that never had no electricity at their house, they had lanterns. Oil lamps, lots of them. Then the water plant, was here. We built it way too big for the size of this town, which was foolish I don't think we ever should have ever done that. Our other plant, I think if we had added another machine to it it would have carried this town. Because we're shrinking all the time, the population, so we didn't need that.

I: That's about all I really need.

PM: I hope I helped you.

END OF INTERVIEW