

Interview with Charles Sprague Taylor

October 12, 1966

CST: The following is a recording made by Sprague Taylor in his home at 401 West Avenue B. Newberry, Michigan on the 12 of October 1966 for the American Dialect Society and their project for the production of a dictionary of American Regional English.

CST: Back when I was ____ I learned something about new Tahquamenon Pass, especially about the activities of some of the older men who had worked in the woods during that period, I couldn't help being impressed by what seemed to be kind of an inventive flare, colored language and slang, and the fact also that a lot of it stayed on long after the heyday of the time was old. Apparently men had had titles fitting their jobs and I heard quite a few of them. The camp foreman in the area according to whatever status he happened to have, was either the straw boss or the bull of the woods, or the [TAPE CUTS OUT THEN CUTS BACK IN]. But over him generally there was a superintendent, over two or more camps and he was called the walking boss or a walk. When he got into the cook camp part of a large camp organization, it seemed to be kind of inevitable that the cook would be a gut robber in the office where the nickname the meat slinger, and the carpenter became a wood butcher. Out in the woods, the workman, many of whom I know who have done more or less menial tasks in the woods who worked on the sleigh roads were called road monkeys, and his cousin, who worked in the deep swamps generally __ or cutting shingle timber was generally called Cedar __. On the other hand a sawmill hand who, preferred to live out in town was known as a sawdust eater. Now a rather plain food or chuck that was put on camp tables was inevitably, they were given a bunch of salmon as I recall so forth was sow belly and some fellas called pee swamp water and a mixture of scorched grease and flour and water and they called a hardwood gravy. Sausages were latecomers to camp tables and you would have to call them 45 90's after a rather sizable rifle cartages. There were prunes, looks like dried apples constituted as fruit, became logging berries, and according to these same __ dried apples a lumberjack might ask if somebody would hand him the red man's ears. When they were out in the woods working I can hook the most useful tool that they employed with heavy timber, became the foot for the crooked steel a horse was a hay burner, a cross cut saw was sometimes called a brier, and the scaling rule that the scaler used to measure up the camp's output just as often as not was called a swindle stick. If you were out there felling timber and caused a tree to split when you knocked it down caused it to split in the weak part of the trunk attached to the stump, it was said that you had barber chaired that tree and if when you were felling timber you looked up and you see a big limb hanging on top of the tree, you knew that you were standing under a widow maker. I have for example known probably three men in this later time who were killed by such hanging portions of trees. The snuff was snuess, and the sleeping quarters for the men's camp, as it was generally called the bunks, were often called muzzle loaders, because you went into them __ and almost universally even up to the present day, and inefficient company or a logger has been called just plain haywire up. If you left your job, walked off voluntarily, you bunched it. And in a case like this you would be apt to go to the camp clerk and say simply, make her out. Meaning give me a time check or a pay order. That seemed to be kind of an adaptation of the modest of the French teamster was supposed to give in one's time, I mean, went barely into the camp office and announced I come from I quit. As you were headed out to the woods for Newberry or Ackerman or Trout Lake with your turkey on your back, a turkey was a sack for all of your personal possessions, and if you were thirsty, which you were apt to be and loaded for bare, everybody conceded that you were stake bound, and once you got out there and bellied up to the bar, a tight spinder among you

immediately got the name of Dick Smith who was supposed to be a character with short arms and deep pockets.

I rather early learned when I was trying to find out more about my home diggings, at that, certainly one of the most colorful loggers who had ever operated on the local scene was Cornelius Culhane and gradually as I visited with the older woodsmen, through the 1940's and the early 1950's I accumulated a few impressions about this man who came up from the Port Austin region in Michigan, and who badly made a great impression on those who worked for him and those with whom he was associated in the harvesting of part of the local fine forest. He was apparently commonly, referred to as Con or Bull Con, his crew apparently had quite affection for him, and also for his devoted wife Ellen, who came to be known to her small army of lumberjacks as Mauve Culhane. He introduced railroad logging to this part of the country and many of men has described to me how Con used to stand on the edge of one of his railroad landings and watch his smaller engine, the Ellen C. come into the landing with a load of logs and marvel at it, and say, you know she is neither sleigh nor wagon, she is Mauve's machine. I had run into, in the course of trying to follow his trail and elderly fellow by the name of Burt Macklehargy [SPELLED PHONETICALLY] who lived in Sault St. Marie, and who at the time I visited with him was tending bar at the old Brunswick Hotel on Portage Avenue and one evening in the winter of either 1946 or '47 I paid Macklehargy [SPELLED PHONETICALLY] a visit, and he told me about following the Culhane's up from lower Michigan and about some of the experiences he had with them. One little anecdote that's always remained with me and one has to imagine Macklehargy [SPELLED PHONETICALLY] wiping off the bar with a rag and very animatedly and visiting at the same time and as I recall his story about Con and his wife Ellen in the buggy when something like this, the way Macklehargy [SPELLED PHONETICALLY] spoke. Well you see Taylor, Con and his wife were going down from the white house to the railroad in the buggy, to go catch the train and he met this big jack going into camp. ___ asked for Culhane's camp and Con gave him the directions and not telling him you see, who he was. But right away he looks down at him and he says, can you fight? Well he looked up at him and said yes he can hold his own. We'll see says Con so down out of the buggy he goes, he hands the lines to Mauve down out of the buggy he goes, but pretty soon he looks as if he has taken in a little bit too much territory, and there is Mauve sitting in the buggy hollering to the Stanger give it to him, give it to him he asked for it!

I found it a bit frustrating years ago when I was unable to find out a great deal in the standard writings about the Upper Peninsula about the beginnings of Newberry it wasn't long before I had determined that by checking such offices as it were ___ and some of the court records, one could reconstruct something about its beginnings, unlike most towns in the Upper Peninsula, it owed more probably to the penetration of the Railroad more than it did to waterway transportation, and as a result its organization and founding came a bit later than those towns situated on the water edge of the peninsula. Probably for that reason that eventually became the largest most important interior town in the eastern half of the peninsula. It's not clear to me whether the location and the size of the place have anything of a hazard, but certainly after the, what became the ___ South Shore and the Atlantic railway came through here in 1881, a cite for the location and the charcoal iron furnace was several of them, and the village rather quickly grew up around it so that by 1886, some five years after the railroad came through, some four years after the furnace was built, the little town of, mostly the population, 1,000 to 1,500 and had most of those typical businesses that one would associate with being necessary to carrying on community life at that time. The name of the company which operated the furnace, was the

Vulcan furnace company, we also had a store and a hotel and built for its employees, company housing so that a great many people during the course of the life of the furnace, knew what it was to buy from a company store, and live on company row. This company underwent a large number of reorganizations and it eventually became known before it quit operations in 1945, as the Newberry Lumber and Chemical Company. Along about 1910 it expanded, the scope of its work in the large forest, hardwood forest that it controlled thereof put in a sawmill and so made a wider use of the wood addicts disposal, it headed to, as I understand it, the hardwood was in prime ___ for the production of charcoal which is necessary in the making of charcoal iron. They also began furnishing a number of chemicals to rot wood, acidic gases I believe.

The local area was fortunate in having a variety of forest covered so that at the same time the furnace was in operation, a good many other smaller forest harvesting operations went on, these lent a certain stability to the lively village as much as it was a trading and a headquartering center for a large wooded area, but along about 1895 an event occurred which lent even more lasting stability and security to the whole local region. That took the form of the building of the Upper Peninsula hospital for the sane, as it was called then. Construction was begun about 1893 after the proposals were taken from a number of Upper Peninsula settlements and Newberry was chosen. So that during the ensuing 30 or 40 years while lumbering constituted a very definite mainstay in the economic life of the community the fact that there was a steady monthly payroll at this large state hospital which now numbers I believe among, employs some 700 people ensures the stability of the village to a degree that was probably a number of Upper Peninsula towns which had to depend upon extracted resources, minerals, or timber for their existence. The making of capital goods, the production timber, as a mainstay for the unity economic life probably was lessening through the 20's and 30's and again probably in its importance of the chief mainstay in the mid 1940's when the charcoal furnace plant went out of operation. Quite definitely since that time Newberry has become a service community providing services to people for beside the, in addition to the state hospital it is also a regional headquarter for such state offices, there's the conservation department, the state highway department and of course the state police.

The story of Arthur the rat. Once upon a time there was a young lad who couldn't make up his mind, whenever the other rats asked ___ would like to go out hunting with them, he would answer in a hoarse voice, I don't know, and then they said would you rather stay inside? And he wouldn't say yes or no either. He would always shift making choice. One fine day his aunt Josephine said to him, now dear no one will ever take care of you if you carry on like this. You have no mind of your own than a greasy old blade of grass. Young rat caught in blinds as usually said nothing, ___ said his aunt, stamping her foot, and she couldn't bear to see the young rat so cold blooded. I don't know was all he ever answered, and then he'd go off to think for an hour or more, ___ stay in his home _____. One night the rats heard loud noise in the loft it was a very dreary old place. The roof let in the rain come washing down, the beams and rafters were all rotted through so the whole thing is quite unsafe, at last one of the joists gave way and the beams fell with one edge on the floor. The walls shook and the people on the loft and all the rats stood on end with fear and horror. This won't do said their leader, we can't stay up here any longer, so they sent out scouts to search for a new home. A little later on that evening the scouts came back and said they found an old fashioned horse barn where there would be room and board for all of them. The leader gave the order at once, company, we are all in. And the rats crawled out of their holes right away and stood on the floor in a long line, just then the old rat called, sight of young Arthur, that was the name of the sugar, he wasn't in the line and he wasn't exactly outside it. He just stood by it.

C'mon get in line, growled the old rat, of course you are coming too, I don't know said Arthur. Why the idea of it you don't think it's safe here anymore do you? Well I'm not certain said Arthur, it may not fall down yet. Well said the old rat, we can't wait for you to join us, then he turned to the others and shouted, right about face, march! And the long line marched out of the barn while the young rat watched them. Then he thought a little more, he said to himself, but then again perhaps I won't, it's nice and snug here, I guess I will go back to my hole under the log for a while just to make up my mind. But during the night, there was this big crash. Down came the ceiling, rafters, joists, the whole business, the next morning, it was a foggy day, the men came to look over the damage, it seemed odd to them, it's really not a complicated rat, but at last one of them happened to move a board and he caught sight of the young rat right there. Half in and half out of his hole. ___ got him food, and there was no mourning for him.

[END OF TAPE]