

Ann Harwood

Jim Robertson

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Tape was very noisy and was hard to pick up all of the words said

Start of interview

(A) I just wanted to start just talk a little bit about South Street. You were telling me on the phone those stories about the Algonquin club and the boxing matches and so forth

(J) Yes the Algonquin club, when McKinley school was built I think it was around 1901 they abandoned the school build and it became the Algonquin club.

(A) And that was on South Street?

(J) No it was between the South Street and the tannery, part way up the hill about where sat where I made the painting. The Methodist church was built first there was a railroad car and the Episcopalians had this railroad car and I remember my dad commenting our dear lord was the minister and he preached the sermon about the price and the fisher man and you could look out the window and see the boat go by! But when they built the Methodist church they abandoned that car stood there on the siding for some time for a year or so after they abandoned its use.

(A) And they used it for a church and they used the railroad car as a church

(J) That was the first church up in Algonquo

(J) But the Algonquin club was very useful place they used have a, what they call Literary once a month and they sometime they would have exhibition boxing votes or someday Jerry Murphy, Tommy Murphy. No Jerry Robinson was awful good at swings clubs he the --- stood about that high made like a milk bottle.

(A) Kinda like bowling pin?

(J) Yeah and he do all sort of whistling he would use his hands and he could whistle and anybody could have any talent what's so ever was used in one of these monthly meetings. They were very entertaining. We kids always looked forward to going over, my dad was usually the chairman, he had a whole list of stories that he could tell, even after I was grown up by the speaks some days I would go and see him. And he'd tell me now don't be around sharing this he because I haven't told this story for 40 years! I'd go out and tell the whole state of Michigan telling you when district governor of Tawas for the state of Michigan but I didn't the background or the humor that my dad had and...

(A) Was your dad from the Sault?

(J) He was born in Scotland but he came here on account of the tannery he had learned two trades when he was young. Shoemaking, first I got liberal education because they had a man up on a stool reading to us while these boys were learning shoemaking and I think they spent about

six or eight years learning so he was a very adept and a well-trained shoemaker. But then he... because the --- got off fighting Saturday nights he gave up shoemaking and learned leather making! And so when he came to the United States he could get a job anywhere where there was a tannery or any place people wore shoes.

(I) [Laughs]

(A) His friends that were leather making got off Saturday night. Is it because his friends were off Saturday nights?

(J) Yes, that's why he learned the two trades why he gave up show making, because his chumps were all off Saturday night and he couldn't get off.

(I) Oh because he the shoemakers weren't but the leather makers didn't.

(J) No, the interesting thing about it is he cobbled shoes at night but when he was working at the tannery now they worked six, ten hour days that's 60 hours. And that was normal for anybody working but at night when he came home, he'd ask if anyone bring shoes in and more often than not somebody would have shoes there. Or they would come and wait while their shoes were repaired. So he had two pays coming in. 1905 he took us all to old family fee, my two sisters at that time to Scotland for three months! We stopped in New York City for a week on the way over and we stopped in Montréal for a day or so on the way back. My folks continued to move out towards the Canadian northwest because some other friends of theirs had done that. But when got home they had a big Hason cab a team of horse of course were at the depo for us and took us up the river boat to Algonquo and they had the Algonquo band out and they had a dinner all fixed up and my folks didn't have the heart to move away when they got such a royal reception back. That was in house on 1600 South Street right kitty corner from where they built the new school.

(A) The school when they built in 1901?

(J) 1901 and then just a very few years later it burned down. I can remember looking out the window and seeing the school ablaze and just stone throw away from our house. When they first built it, it had a flat roof and that wasn't good for this country because it piled up with snow and so the next roof they built was a peaked roof. But we went around to...

(A) Did they build it at the same place?

(J) Yes it was about a year into the rebuilding...

(A) What did the children do?

(J) We scattered around to little improvised schools, places that had been a school at one time and I remember sitting in desk two boys to one desk and it was way over beyond 4th avenue but it the whole year before some of the youngsters were at the Methodist church it was used as a school weekdays.

(A) When did your parents first come to the States? Were they married before they came here?

(J) Oh yes they, my dad came here over here at the World's fairs I think in 1893 then he went back to Scotland worked for a couple of years then he proposed to my mother by letter, she couldn't remember very well she asked her brothers about him and she wrote a letter and said to come over and ill decide when you get here and he wrote over to all sorts of girls over here and im not going to spend all that money to go Scotland and back unless I get an affirmative answer. So she consulted here brothers again and they knew my dad and they said it be a good thing so my dad went over and they came to the United States on their honeymoon and they settled in a little place call Cattaraugus its about 30 miles south of Buffalo, right east of Chautauquaa and there was a tannery there of course that's why they were there but there was strike of food at the tannery and the owner of the tannery sent to Germany and got bumping machines. Put the bumpers out of work. The bumpers were the highest payed man at the tannery. The first shipment of pipes that they sent back to Europe had been rejected and the company went busted. In the meantime the men all moved away from Cattaraugus had to get jobs someplace else and that's when they resolved to not let a union get into the tannery at the time my dad worked there. There was no union there. But shortly after the union committed the tannery went out. That was... I don't know when that was 1935 or 36 or was it later?

(A) The tannery went out in 50s I remember that.

(J) But did you see they, all the years my dad worked there those men made sure there wouldn't be any union.

(A) But how did the union connect with bumpers did the union got into the machine bumpers that wouldn't be right at Cattaraugus.

(J) Oh the owner of the tannery bought bumping machines.

(A) Is that how the union went out?

(J) No that...

(A) Oh it was after the strike.

(J) That to they wouldn't have to rehire them back.

(A) Oh I see.

(J) They substituted these machines...

(A) The men strike first then they put in the machines then they weren't up to the job.

(J) At that time, some years after my dad and I visited Cattaraugus, I wanted to see what it was like there world be gone place there wasn't much of anything there. Cute little buildings on the main street it wasn't a big town to begin with.

(A) Was it the same company that opened the tannery in Sault St. Marie?

(J) Oh no no connection.

(A) Oh and your dad went from Cattaraugus to the Sault? How did hear about the Sault?

(J) I don't know I think this tannery had just started.

(A) Probably more advertising. What did your dad do for the tannery? What job did he have in the tannery?

(J) He was bumper, he could do anything.

(A) Oh he was bumper.

(J) He could any job there was at the tannery. He spent quite a few years learning leather making after learning shoemaking. Leather making so he could do any job there was.

(A) What did the bumpers do, they were the ones who finished off the...

(J) They took off the first top of the leather, see cattle have wire or pricks their hides are sorta rough and so they take that first top layer and its very very thin tissue paper thick, these bumpers would take that off and it would give you a nice clean piece of leather.

(A) Where was that World's Fair in 1893?

(J) Chicago.

(A) Chicago so he was working in Chicago when he first wrote to your mother or was he in...

(J) No he went to the World's Fair with some other men from Cattaraugus and he bought something at the World's Fairs and they wanted Louie one of the older man who were buying it for them. But it was a gift to sent to my mother.

(A) So were you born here in the Sault then?

(J) No we, my two sisters were born in Cattaraugus and so we really five years old when we came to the Sault. I remember driving across the bridge and looking down and seeing the water part canals entirely empty they were just building it!

(A) Oh! That was when now must have been 1900?

(J) It would have been around 1900.

(A) The other story that I was I amazed by Algonquin club was you had the only phone in...

(J) Oh yes we needed to load a coal I need to climb up on the chair to I think it was Kip Metius coal company and I remember one time I was a man up in Algonquin felt they were being cheated and my dad ordered a ton of coal and he had to dump in our backyard and he borrowed some scales from a butcher shop nearby and they put this coal in these bushel baskets and weighted it and my dad took a day off from the tannery and went down to see the prosecutor of attorney and showed them a ton of coal and how much short it was. The prosecuting attorney I don't remember who it was. Well he is such a good friend of my I couldn't tell him that.

(A) [Laughs]

(J) Kip brothers were running the coal company at that time. But my dad was always picked out to do jobs like that. He was supernatant of the Sunday school or good with the church they were Baptist because that was the only church up there, now the Methodist church we went to the Methodist all the time. Of course Gwen's father was a Episcopalian minister I didn't...

(A) Whose father

(J) Gwen's.

(A) Oh Gwen's father.

(J) I had never joined any church I went the Baptist when we moved to town and I used to usher and do all kinds of things around the church but I never joined! I never joined any church until I married Gwen then we went to the Episcopalian church the --- the Episcopalian ministry had been a classmate of Gwen's father at the theological seminary. We had a houseboat down by the country club it was a great big house, built on a dredging scout had eight rooms --- the whole high school factuality but Palson used it to down pour my rowboat and go down, he put a branch in front and paddled very slowly down the river he'd bring back half a dozen ducks and that be before get up in the morning. He was the best hunter I ever saw in my life. I took him hunting one time down by Augsburg's place, Duck Island and we got I think 76 ducks. Just down one day and came back the next 76 ducks.

(A) No limits then?

(J) What?

(A) Were there no limits then?

(J) No there weren't any limits. But I've asked him, when I invited him to go he said let me decide when we go, he would say not yet not yet and finally he said now is the time to go and he wouldn't stand it he wouldn't get in the blind he he'd stand right out he'd stand stalk still and he knew how to lead so you don't shoot at the ducks you shoot out in front of them and the ducks would come down bounce up 20 feet they'd be flying over.

(A) Did he use decoys or...

(J) No! Just stood stalk still and I had one little spar I would tie the ducks the together through their noses and doom feathers and the --- and I had ---- seat in my car and I would put these ducks in there I stopped at Maryvale's cigars store and I promised him some ducks he wanted to entertain the officers of the board. I went into see him could and I said pick out your ducks. What you mean pick out my ducks. I said, come out and see so he went came out and looked and though many have promised me ducks but you are the first one who made delivery. He picked out his ducks and then we took the rest of them over to the Hotel Ojibwa and we feed the whole true honest club.

(A) [Laughs] Did live on that houseboat year round?

(J) We leased it for six months. We lived on it from Mary Donna at Kenya College, Louie Bailey, who graduated from high school to be the principle he was at Kenya College.

(A) Louie Bailey?

(J) Louie Bailey. So Gwen and I went down there and he married us. And then they came back up here and they stayed with us on the houseboat for a little while. Gwen's mother came stayed with us, but we laundry picnic down there must have had about 35 people at bad and then a little later on I think it was Halloween we entertained the whole high school factuality.

(A) And this was down here...

(J) Right right... you know where the Moose Lodge is?

(A) Yeah.

(J) Just within a hundred feet down the river from that. I sank post into the ground big storm came up one Sunday afternoon. Big black cloud came over and it just lasted a few minutes but it took barns down and trees down it blew the houseboat away. The first one there were inch and half lines that sunk the post down into the ground and tied it, had two big anchors about 6 feet long to hold it out the other way so that it didn't swing. It was dragged it was right across the way. And our rowboat was tied up to the dock so we had no way getting off the houseboat. And finally Arthur lowered the, Episcopal ministry had a cottage on Steers Island.

(A) Which island?

(J) Arthur lor.

(A) What was the name of the island?

(J) Steers Island

(A) Oh Steers Island

(J) He rode out to see if we needed any help so we had him bring out rowboat out so we could get off. We went show...

(A) Where did the houseboat end up?

(J) Well it ended up right across, there was a... on sandbar. And we had a tug the next day to bring it back.

(A) Did you just live on it that six month period?

(J) Yes.

(A) When did you open the laundry mat?

(J) My dad had the invested in the laundry. He bought that big block 906 Sasheman Street and he had taken in a man who would had been employed at the Chris foundry who said he could make all kinds of money in the family washing business, well this fella didn't have a cent to his name and my dad gave him an apartment and took him in at half interest. And yet my dad was the only one to put any money in. I get back from New York City and I pointed that out to my dad that if the thing was a success that he would have a half interest in everything and if it failed my dad

would be the only one.... The loser. Well anyway my saw a lawyer and had the partnership resolved. And I took a job with my dad running the laundry, I had been working down at New York City and the first job I got was citizen military training camp, came here in the summer time. And it only lasted a month but I took the job and worked out a plan for Hamblkit. The first week didn't amount to very much and the second week and the third week were heavy, the fourth week also did amount to very much so I made quite a lot of money on that job. I... it took me a long time to build it up cause I finally bought my dad out and made it my life's work. But the war came along and we had a lot entirely war time laundry and what I was interested in was getting the boats. You had to have men on the mocks and it was very difficult the right kind of men, they had to be honest, and work long hours because there were 12 hours days and another crew working 12 hours at night to get the most hours out of boats and I had a girl, more like a man almost she had grown up strong and she could handle herself better than most man can. And I used to send her down to inventory to warehouse, well one other fellas working on the locks the other men were cheating. They weren't turning in all their money so I got around that by sending this girl down to inventory to warehouse because we had to have warehouse right close to Courtiage Aveune it was in that build at the end of Farris street right, across from the upper gates of the rocks. That was were the first ---- there is three different kinds of laundry that you get from boats. Get them from the men themselves then you get ships laundry...

(A) That would be like the sheets and table cloths.

(J) Yes but the sheets, pillow cases, bath towels, and cooks things. Cooks caps and white jackets and white pants paid for by the steamship company but the men could have laundry and they could also had dry cleaning, their own personal laundry, dry cleaning. Sometimes the boats would go through the Canadian mags and they would bring their laundry down and leave it at the ferry dock, sometimes it would lie out in the rain all night long before anyone would notify us. It was a complicated business, because sometimes these men would have white flannel pants they would wear them on the boat but when they went on shore it was a different matter. After a pair of pants would lie out in the rain all night. By the time we would send them back they would nothing like what they should have been. Well anyway I finally got to work for U.S. Steel and I had that contract for over 25 years but that was they had their office right here in the Sault and they also handled the work for the Pickands Mather

(A) The what?

(J) The Pickands Mather the U.S. Steels were the biggest fleet on the lakes they had over hundred boats, the boats back then weren't as big then as they are now but a few toll barges.

(A) What was Pickands Mather?

(J) Pickands Mather was the second biggest company that was...

(A) Just like it sounds? Pickens mathei is that right?

(J) Pickands Mather.

(A) What happened when that girl took the inventory?

(J) Oh well that made it so these men couldn't cheat they had to collect every ---checking every what was in in she knew had been we would hand them a bill for the laundry see the boats would not drop the laundry off on the way out and they would pick it up on the way back so they didn't all come back with the same order they went out. Sometimes the boats were slower or the boat went to Marquette and would be back 24 hours but if it went to Duluth it was usually three days, eventually they got faster boats and we had to have a list of the ones who couldn't return in less than three days. Ordinarily you were at sea for three days, 72 hours but you had to know where they went.

(A) What ever happened to the fellow from Chris laundry then after your dad resolved the partnership?

(J) Oh I don't know whatever became of him.

(A) Did he leave the business then?

(J) Yes, but that's how we got started.

(A) How did you come up with the dancing dolls I remember those. When did you put those in?

(J) Oh they had a home and sports show down at the up at the armory I think it was. I had taken two spaces I then began to worry what can I put in there I don't have any merchandise display.

(A) Dirty laundry [Laughs]

(J) So I invited that dancing dolls sign, and it attracted so much attention that I changed it and improved it that made variation that finally had the signs up all up and down all of the windows.

(A) As I recall there were the dolls would go by in a kina of... they were story book dolls weren't they isn't that?

(J) Yeah I used to buy the dolls at the JC Penny Company and I had the little beer cans and took the dolls in the skirt skin out and around it. Well I made these well it was a belt that went around but I had little wooden disks and I mounted the dolls eccentrically on the disks so when the disks evolved the dolls would not only turn around but they would move. They would also, I had disks underneath that sometimes they would be engaged on one side sometimes on the other side so that the doll would go around this you see, then that would make them evolve and eccentrically. And when that was all done with these little disks.

(A) Where did the costumes come from? Were those from the store too?

(J) Yeah I got them the JC Penny Company who sold those dolls, remember being out in San Francisco one time and wanting to change the window display and I sent a telegram to my man put on display I tried to advise the other fellows interests instead of my interests.

(A) How do you mean?

(J) Well people would normally about 95% more interested in what is theirs then what they ever can be what's yours. So if you adverting the other fellows interests.

(A) Like what?

(J) Well like something going on at the high school.

(A) Oh I see.

(J) I think when I sent that telegram to my man I had him to put *Go Sault High Go* or something like that. I remember Bob Fisher one time wrote a letter to me from Marquette and he drew a picture of one of these signs and he drew one of the Sault Loix that was all that was on the outside of the envelope was this picture of the Sault Loix and this pen drawing of the Sault Loix and a pen drawing of my sign.

(A) [Laughs]

(J) He wrote a letter to me and he told me what he had done and he said oh somebody from the post office somebody from the evening news that there is a letter down here and we think it belongs to you, and if it does we want to publish an account of it. And sure enough it was --- they published the account on the evening news, a picture of this...

(A) When was it?

(J) Oh about 1950 about. I had that around me some place...

(A) When you had the show where you originally came up with the dancing dolls you had the belt down there that sign did you have the dolls too?

(J) That was the first thing I had ever done because later on had these two long belts that 40 feet long each one and I had to cut the speed of the motor down so I had to, see you can get the motor to run sorta slow you had to take whatever speed it runs at and reduce it.

[Jim and Ann look at scrapbooks]

(J) The picture doesn't show very well.

(A) And that was your tenth anniversary?

(J) Yeah---- these are the downs.

(A) Oh I remember some.

(J) Wherever you go to Roberts ---- but I got someplace around here I got much better pictures than that. I don't know where to get my hands on them.

(A) It's interesting about the magazine publishing. I used to stop and watch those all the time through cars window...right up there.

[Jim and Ann go back to looking at scrapbooks]

(A) When were you there?!

(J) 1952 to 1957.

(A) I had forgotten all about that. I remember... how long did you dad work at the tannery did he work there until it closed down or did he retire?

(J) No he in 1910 he came downtown and started the shoe shop. He bought...he watched that Ashton Street for almost 10 years anticipating from starting but making the funds see we kids were growing up and it was getting more and more expensive all the time. We needed various school books we started to go downtown to go to high school but he waited until 1910 and he wanted to get it on Ashton Street he didn't want to be around the corner and he wanted to have a cheap rent and a good location. So he got the place right across from the Temple Theater, 213 Ashton Street. And the building had been condemned and was supposed to be torn down because it wasn't a very good building but they finally let him have it and he stayed in that oh I don't know how many years, two years and then he moved right next door a place that had been a bowling alley. We lived up above this bowling alley and we ---

(A) And that was when then ?

(J) He ran the shop for the year before we moved on so it must have been in 1911 and he bought a house on 324 Dolson Street. I guess my mother took Ida over to Scotland that summer and we kids persuaded my dad to buy that house and my mother didn't like that house when she came home she wanted out. She always wanted a house big enough so she could have two or three rooms so she could have pin money. That house had a big tower on it and it had a nice hedge around it and it had a great big Elm tree about seven or eight of them, this hedge around the park came from that hedge. My mother never liked that house.

(A) Never got here rumors then. She never got her borders?

(J) Well it wasn't very long after that that they bought that other house the Porch Street, 618 Porch Street and that was a big house and she always had two or three rooms but they own the house in Algonquin and they still own the house on Dolson Street and they have that house on North Street. So the three houses for quite a long time.

(A) When your dad opened the laundry did he go out of the shoe business or did he keep that?

(J) Oh kept that all his life.

(A) The shoe business?

(J) Yup. We were partners for quite a long time and when I tried to buy him out he would agree to everything but he would never sign his name to anything. Now I had a terrible time I would take him down to my brother ----Detroit and he'd go down there agree to everything but he wouldn't sign anything.

(A) This was for the laundry or the...

(J) For the laundry. Finally our boiler blew up and see my dad couldn't help me after long he couldn't come in if I needed help I was running two shifts while boiler was out. The day shift and the night shift and I was going through that for six months. He had no comprehension of what I was enduring and when the boiler blew I had gotten a man who owned his own laundry

down in Alpena and I didn't like him but I thought well why judge him why don't I turn it over to him and see what happens. He was horrendous in driving the girl on the night shift home. That he wasn't seeing the boiler was properly shut down and it wartime conditions and it was awful difficult to hire anybody. I set up temporary boilers, the boilers that I set up weren't big enough to support to run the plant I could either heat water or run the plant I couldn't do both. So I for one week I was running on one boiler with that staggered shift just doing the boat work, and finally I got another boiler setting pin one would heat the water and the other one run the plant. But my dad had no comprehension of the difficulty that I was having. But he finally I was able to buy him out for half...

End of tape