

THE NEW DEAL??

Carl A. Koski, I., my grandpa and one of a family of 12 children, was born and has lived his entire life in the West Ishpeming location. He was born on March 30, 1918.

Although President Hoover is often used by many people and even historians as a scapegoat for the Depression, Mr. Koski stated strongly that, in his opinion, Hoover had nothing to do with the start of the Depression.

Although the Koskis had 12 children in the family, they had 2 gardens as well as cows during the Depression to give them food. They also got all of their own firewood. Flour and sugar had to be bought but that was about all. Mr. Koski's father also worked right through the Depression, first at the Cliffs Shaft Mine and later at the Greenwood Mine. Because some members of the family were employed, the Koskis managed during the Depression years. Mr. Koski stated it quite simply, "we were not rich by all means." The same could not be said for all families in the area. At one time the mines, a main source of employment in the area, were only working one day a week and many people were out of jobs. There was not even any unemployment in that time, although the county had a program in which they helped the poor and those in tough "straits".

Obviously there were problems in the Upper Peninsula in the thirties. Many Americans were without work for the first time in their lives. In 1929, 3.2% of the labor force was unemployed. By 1933, 24.9% of the labor force was unemployed. Fears grew that the bad times might destroy the country. Then the New Deal came along, supposedly to save the nation. My grandpa was not impressed by the New Deal and he explained, "It was a sorry mistake. It started a gigantic welfare that's still going on today." He also said that he wasn't very confident that Roosevelt could end the Depression. This all makes me wonder if the history books are correct in proclaiming President Roosevelt and the New Deal as the savior of our country.

My grandpa described the times while the New Deal was in action and one would think that nothing was being done to end the Depression. He thought that 1938 was probably the worst year of the Depression. Some of the mines partially closed down and jobs were hard to find. My grandpa said a man could usually get a job cutting pulp, but in 1938 you couldn't even find work in the woods.

One thing that Mr. Koski felt hurt the area was the fact that the Gardner-Mackinac Mine in Gwinn closed down. A lot of the men that worked there transferred to this area and became employed at the Cliffs Shaft and at the Negaunee mines. As a result, workers from this locality were kept from these jobs, and this hurt the area further.

Evidently some of the people who were out of work were using their time for home enterprises during the times of prohibition. To my surprise, I learned that some local people were arrested and my grandpa mentioned that several neighbors were "hauled down to Marquette (prison) for their little chemical works."

Help was needed. This help came in the form of such New Deal organizations as the Civilian Conservation Corps (CCC). It put young men to work in the field of conservation. He mentioned that there was a C.C. Camp at Sagola and there was also one south of Gwinn that was called Camp 1620. Camps were also located at Big Bay and Au Train so there were a number of camps within about a 50 mile radius.

One other organization that Mr. Koski mentioned was the N.Y.A. which dealt with the nation's youth. This organization gave the bigger high school kids jobs working on the playgrounds and doing various other work of that nature.

Mr. Koski is a proud man who doesn't complain about the Depression and he doesn't ask for sympathy. However, you can still sum up many families situations in one quote by Mrs. Koski: "We didn't have any money to lose!"

Carl Koski