

Interview with Paul T.
Moffatt - Flooring Mill

Kevin Nelson

Q. When did you start working?

A. I started working in 1947, September.

Q. How long were you working there?

A. I worked there approximately, been around there for 34 years and I was off seven years between

Q. What position are you now at the Mill?

A. At present Q. Yeah A. At present I'm consulting engineer

Q. What do you do at that at consulting engineer

A. I advise em on how to run the plant or any other problems that ^{they} might encounter.

Q. What positions have you had, did you start out like low?

A. I started out as a pipe fitter, I then went to an assistant engineer, which consisted of electrical, steam, (pause) mechanics, from ^{there} I went to chief engineer which is in charge of all maintenance and construction, and from that to general manager of the plant, itself, and then a semi-retirement of which I'm now a consultant to the company.

Q. Was the lighting good at the Mill?

A. Was the lighting good, the lighting was terrible, I also was an electrician in doing the electrical work that's my trade by the way.

Q. Was the ventilation good?

A. Ventilation, no I can't say its good because of the dust situation, and the fans and the machines that were operated, created a lot of dust and we didn't have to good of an exhaust system.

Q. Has the Mill try to improve then?

A. O yes over the years they've improved it, they put in new ventilating fans and so forth

Q. Were there like major disasters at the Mill, I know there was a fire just this year

A. We had we've had two major disasters one was in 1978 when the ^{aah} warehouse which houses about \$3 million dollars ^{worth} of ^{aah} flooring with six feet of snow on it March, 5 of 78 six feet of wet snow caved the entire ^{aah} building down ²⁰⁰ by ^{aah} 100 foot in area

Q. How long were they, how long like were they out of work?

A. The people were out at that time, approximately a week and then we improvised ^{aah} warehousing facilities within the mill itself.

Q. Oh Did they like help the people during ^{like} that disaster

A. No ^{Did they} ^{there was} we didn't have to help anybody everybody was on what we call unemployment that week they were off no one got hurt ^{aah} no one got killed so there really wasn't nothing to do

Q. Was there another disaster besides that

A. The most recent was this year with ^{when our} wood house ^{caught on fire} do to a ^{piece} machinery that caused the fire which was costly, which I can't tell you the cost, ^{how much it cost} but it was very large amount

Q. were there many layoffs?

A. Oh you ^{aah} that you mean ^{do} to the disaster
Q. or like any like ^{just} when they ^{just} ran out of money
A. Well many ^{some} layoffs ^{of} ^{ins.} ^{aah} its been up and down do to the problems we've had, disasters, fires or cave-

3. we've had to laid people off and with ^{aah then} the economy in which it stands, right no we've laid a few people off, yes

Q. Who is where there any benefits for the people when they got hurt, would they give them pay or would they

A. Oh you, sure they we have they all have an insurance or covered by compensation, workmen's compensation and aah there benefits aren't as good as if there working, but they are well taking care of

Q. Were there benefits for if there like spouse died or like for the person that is still alive

A. If they ^{if they work} died

Q. Yeah

A. O yeah the benefits to the spouses, aah they have in insurance for them, it is typical ~~of~~ any industry

Q. Was there a union at the Mill

A. Yes there was a union, there was a union for 20 years and when the mill closed up back in 77 by the Cook Industry, people who owned ^{they} ~~it~~ closed it up because of one thing or another, which, well anyway, this union then we were down for five months, this union was then disbanded, and then when we started up again, we never got the union back, we had a vote and the vote went in the favor of no union

Q. Was the union successful over the 20 years did they

A. Evidently not because if aah when I became manager ^{we} called a vote, will you have union or will you ^{and} not have union, the vote was 66 to 6 in favor of not having a union, so that must answer

4. your question that it wasn't favorable before

Q. Yeah, Has there been strikes at the mill, by like the union workers

A. Has there been strikes, when the union was there, Yeah there was several strikes over the past years aah which one mounted into a 3 month strike when they aah finally decided to go back to work, they were worse off then they were before the strike

Q. Did the people get paid good?

A. Not according to, not according to the industry, the iron & steel industry and ore industry in this area the Mill wages are approxiamently 1/2 of what the mining industry pays the people but they are getting better

Q. Wna, like the boards ^{like} what kind of boards did you make?

A. ^{no} were they all floor boards of the kind of wood that is used is maple, oak, birch alot or some soft woods aah and they are all in eight and sixteen foot lengths approxiam-
ently 8 inches wide, 1 inch thick all sawed from the Mill.

Q. What was the best kind of wood or were they all like equal

A. I didn't get that

Q. The best kind wood

A. used, well the best kind of wood used in our industry is maple and oak which we make aah hard wood maple floors which ~~we~~ ^{you} walk on every day, thats the best as far as we are concerned

Q. Wna, Did they like put out like millions of square feet on

A. we approxiamently, when were running, In the years lets take a week for instense, in a week would process approxiamently 100,000 board feet of lumber

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through the mill every week, when you talk about square feet the square feet as a aah a piece of flooring comes out about half amount of board feet in other words you put in 100,000 board feet out, you get approximately 50,000 square feet of flooring do to the waste factor.

Q. Om Did they ^{put} Did they every week put out 100,000 board feet

A. Appro aah Yeah approximately that you could say over 35 years of operation you could say we run 100,000 board feet per week.

Q. Do you remember the year were you put out the most amount of wood and was there a great demand in a certain year

A. There was some good years, there were some damn good years we we put out as high as ^{some} a weeks 150 to 200,000 thousand but them were the good selling years when the economy was good, Aah no if we could run ^{maybe} 100,000 at the present were doing damn good.

Q. Di who did you sell the floor boards to, anyone

A. we don't sell to the mines, we sell all over the world, we aah export alot of our flooring the biggest buyer as strange as it might seem is Japan, they will buy up every piece of flooring we can make, we export to Germany, England and aah every college ^{well} about 75% of the colleges, universities in the United States have Robbins Floors in their gyms because there hardwood maple were the largest manufacturer of hardwood maple floors

Q. So like that what some of the wood boards are used for basketball floors.

A. Basketball courts is what we we really number 1 is basketball courts and we call them port a

b. courts we make them into 4 by 8 port court we can pick this flooring court up and in ^{about} 2 hours and they can be playing hockey, they could flood it underneath and ~~pull~~ pull the floor and in 2 hours and we can aah there is alot of uses.

Q. Did you sell ^{like} some wood aah to any famous people

A. To famous people, The one I remember ~~the most~~ was to Jackie Gleason, back in 1950 we sold em about 10 thousand feet of African Mahogany it was a black brown, we we made it a special floor only 1 inch thick and 1 inch wide and aah put this floor in his home in New York at that time and then 3 months later it burned down.

Q. was like the Mill was it or is it ^{like} the biggest industry in Marquette County or the U.P.

A. No no the biggest industry, Naturally the minning is the biggest industry, but I would say were are the largest other independent industry ^{and} in the town of Ishpeming were are the only industry because all the mings are out the Gozzard Factory is out, we are the only industry that is paying taxes in the city right no

Q. Like what type of heating did you use did you use for your furnaces, did you use coal or steam

A. Machinery no we got steam machinery which in turn is generated by steam and the steam aah comes from ^{the} big boilers we got, this steam engine go what we call an alternator, some people call them generators we manufacturer our own current and aah we have ~~a~~ lot of other machinery inside the mill, naturally ~~aah~~ the machines we got makes our flooring cuts our lumber, cleans our boards, all kinds of machinery

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Q. Did they like ~~the~~ the people ever have to cut the boards by hand, or

A. No its always been aah its been much more automative at the present then it was ^{noah} even 15 years ago when I say automative I mean people used to cart the lumber by wagon a wagon type of thing from one area to another and in the last 15 years we automative through conveyer and motorive systems aah no one has to lift more than at any given time 25 ~~years~~ pounds well as years ago they have to ~~be~~ unload those boards which weighed 75 to 100 pounds, no more that