

This is Dan Kohn interviewing
James Meni at his house in
Nauvoo on January 2 1988
on Mining.

me - When and where were you born

Mr. M. - When! What year I was born

me - ya.

Mr. M. - 1912

me - o.k. where

Mr. M. - Parter

me - Where were you born

Mr. M. - On a princeton Michigan that about 25 miles from here from
Aauganee

me - What was your early childhood like

Mr. M. - (Studers) My What

me - What was your early childhood like

Mr. M. - My my early childhood well I used to (Studers) Well when I was a
Youngster about oh say 5 or 6 years old I use to help my mother
in the morning before I went to school and I ab scrubbed the floors
and maid bread every morning before I went to school and then
when we used to scrub our floors they used to have sand wood floors
and the kap, and to make the floor nice + white we used to use
ashes in our water to make the floors white in the morning + that
was my job in the morning

me - What would the ashes do to make the floor ~~and~~ white

Mr. M - (studies) ash is like a lie. The same purpose as a lie, now
on stead of using lie, lie is laid on your hands, we used to use
ashes, had wood ashes, and that (studies) and that ~~is~~ ^{ashes, the} some
purpose as a lie,

me - I see

me - did you have any pets when you were younger

Mr. M - Pets.

me - yea

Mr. M - oh I had dogs, and I used to go out into the woods early in the
morning, I get up early real early in the morning and I used to have
like a trap line you know for trapping when I was a youngster have like
trapping weasels and muskrats and stuff and rabbits and stuff like
that there when we were youngsters. When I was there was a lot of that
(studies) that was our food that how we used to get a lot of our
food there days. Of course there was ~~all~~ other stuff you can
~~get~~ buy but of course we were youngsters we used to go out & get
rabbits down around there

me - How many people were in your family

Mr. M - 6, 6 boys

me - did you all have jobs to do like that

Mr. M - (studies) yea the boys all had those jobs some had to carry wood in
some had to do other ~~work~~ chores when they were small some had
to wash dishes we all had to do that

me - what did your father do for a living

Mr. M. - Miner. he worked in the mines.

Me - where did he work.

Mr. M. - He worked at the Stephenson Mine. Well he worked at the number two mine (staders) Stephenson mine, & at the same mine, they were all mines down around Swin. one ~~the~~ time Swin was nothing but mines that were (staders) the first mine was started here in Nanguanel was an open pit then they started underground mines now talking about underground mines

Me - what were schools like when you were a kid

Mr. M. - ~~the~~ schools were schools we used to have to ~~go~~ walk to school we had one in Princeton that went to the 4th or 5th grade and then we had one in our location and then the high school was at Swin. that was about 3 miles & we had to walk there every day, we had to walk to school

Me - did you ever have any favorite teacher or anything.

Mr. M. - No I never had any favorite teacher (laughs) because I didn't like school & I had to go to work I cared about work I didn't care much about school, then day if you were big enough you were old enough to work. school didn't mean much at all

Me - what happened if you were bad in school.

Mr. M. - If you were bad in school then the teacher used to get the pointer out or if you were bad enough they would take you in the back room & use the bell rope on you they used to have bells in them days. they used to use the bell rope. they didn't get anybody else, they used to use bell ropes 3

Mr-M When they first started out they would slap you on the fingers then if all depends on what you had done if you done real naughty then they used to take you in the back room + use the bell rope on you.

me - What were some of your child hood diseases.

Mr.M - diseases measles; chicken pox, and then came pneumonia. that was the real bad pneumonia people would die and they would bury them a night, because they would monkey with their because they would die so fast.

me - did you ever go to college

Mr.M - No I never went to college

me - did ~~you~~ have a job when you were in school like working for some body

Mr.M - Yes, yes then days I was working for a man named period. he used to have a horse + field of hay and stuff + I used to go around when I was a little younger + bury stones - make a hole + bury the stones. in fact I got berries under one stone and I had three ribs + a collar bone broken.

me - did you ever have any thubs when you were younger

Mr.M - No Never had any clubs no

me - did you ever win medal or awards

Mr.M - I won a golden glove. I used to do boxing + then I just one a golden glove. then I quit and had to go to work.

me - At what age did you start working in the mines.

Mr.M - What year I started working in the mines

me - Yes

Mr.M. When I was 12 years old. 4

me - What were they like back then

Mr. M - Well they were pretty rough I used to go to work early in the morning when I first started to work in the mine the first thing I done was I went underground is they put me shoveling what they call cleaning track see the track use to get all dirty from the iron ore going down it and I use to go along and clear the track up. Then they put me on shute men what they call a shute man they used to have a shute were the iron ore came out of and went into the car you had to lift that up with a bar and you used to lift that up with a bar on your shoulder first you started with the bar, when you couldn't lift any more with the bar you got under it with your shoulder & lift with your shoulder. I used to come home at night my shoulders were all raw from lifting that board to open the shute

me - what were the working condition like

Mr. M - Very Very Lousy, they didn't care about no safety at all. All they thought about is getting the iron ore out.

me How long were you working in the mine

Mr. M - 45 years.

me - Did you do any special thing like on holidays or anything

Mr. M - Yes years ago Christmas time we used to always bring a Christmas tree down, and then for instance if I was late they would bring me a watch. they would hang a watch on it. and any thing you had done during the year, little different things you had done during the year they'd put on this Christmas tree and it had your name on it. We sang Christmas carols going down in the cage, the cage would lower the men down underground.

me - like an elevator.

Mr. M - like an elevator "right"

me - How much did you get paid

m.m - 35 cents an hour.

me - Do you remember anything about the Great Depression

mr.m - any thing about the what.

m. - Great Depression

mr.m - Yes I do, I remember the Great Depression I was working in the mine in the Great Depression all we were working was a half a day a then some body decided work a half a day a w. P. A. we used to have a w. P. A. in their days they used to make more money than we made. some of my checks were only seven dollars that was for two weeks

me - what does W.P.A. stand for

m.m - It stand for ^(students) a government project. Its a government project the people were out of work. they were given work so they could make a little money to have. they were given \$4 a month they were making more money than we were

me - What did you do on the 4th of July

m.m - On the 4th of July we used to have quite a celebration. We used to have parades and we used to have horse races, and they used to have boxing, they used to have wrestling, wrestling with a greasy pole, you climb up the pole take the flag off and there were a ten or five dollar bill up there for you and then they had catch the greasy pig. butchy playing throu one little ball down and see who can get closest to the ball. that was a kind of game they use butchy balls. they use to play cards, and have dances out side dances (students) at the park here, I do know what the name of that park was up here between ~~something~~ & ~~something~~

Mr. M - They had a regular park up there, this is where
all the horse races happened, and everybody had a good time

Me - we there any other days that special.

Mr. M - Any other special things, well a you mean when we were
boys we use to build camps out in the woods, then days you didn't
have to buy properly you just picked out a piece of ground
out in the wood and you built yourself a camp. There was
about four five of us young fellows built a camp and then
we used to go and get stuff & go & stay out there at the camp
& stay out the camp we used to stay out there a bunch of young
lads go out there & have a good time out there. Later on we
used to have what they call straw ride parties. We get a team
of horses and get a big sled, and get maybe 14, 15 couples then we
would go out in the woods with the horse and sled in the hay. They
ride parties. Then when we got to the place we wanted to go, we'd
have a camp out there we had an old crank up phonograph that
we would play. we used to dance & sing, and roast ~~wieners~~
and do thing like that.

Me - Do you think that the working conditions ~~improved~~ the mine
improved as you got older.

Mr. M - Oh yes! they sure did. Years ago when I first started to work in
the mine we had nothing except what they call an air scuber. An
air scaper is a thing with two handles on that draws the iron ore into
like a scute. The scute is like a pocket that they drop the iron ore
in and that how they get the iron ore from down below. The
main level is sometimes down about 25, 30 feet below the
working. were the people are working,

Mr. M - were they are cutting the iron ore, then when you cutting the iron ore your cutting like a drift, your cutting into the iron ore your cutting your, drilling, and blasting into the iron ore, then you use the scraper. The scraper is what you use to scraper the iron ore into the chute what we call a chute into this like a pocket or what ever you call it. We call it a chute and then when you scraper that in they use to have an air tugger. Oh that was hard ever time you used the air tugger somebody else had to go behind with a bar and push the iron ore along. The first electric tugger was only 15 horse power tugger. That was a little bit better. Well lets start from the begining. I mad a mistake here. When we first started we used to the iron ore with our shoulders with a little buggy you used to shovel it by hand into the buggy. That's when I first started. Then they got that air tugger that I was just telling you about before. Then we got the 15 horse power scraper tugger that was a little bit better. Then they came to a 20 horse power then a 30 horse power when they came to a 50 horse power that was perfect. The working condition weren't as safe as they are today. You put up 8 foot timbers and you drive the drift and then a eight foot cap. On the bottom it comes to between nine & ten feet wide. then you put they timbers up then you put the cross on them you then you put string on the top so the dirt would come down on your head you know like a string.

M.M. - then you put that up so when you blast you
don't knock it down. as you go ahead you keep
driving your pole. what they call lagging on top
of them poles then you get your other dirt out then you
put them timbers up like I told you a timber is eight feet high
and eight feet across. but on the bottom its between 9 and ten
feet or a low even ~~top~~ ^{wide} you want to make it. Its got to come
down on an angle so when your weights comes down it pushes
it out instead of in because there is a lot of weight that comes
down on top of that timber. all right when you drill & blast
you get anywhere from ten to fifteen cars of iron ore out. You
drill these holes ~~that~~ five feet into the big wall of iron ore.
M. - was there any set distance that you had to drill them
in.

M.M. - yes 5 feet when you blast that iron ore you put down
a row of holes in the side. You put 3 holes across the top
4 holes across the top then you come down around the side all the way
to the bottom then on the bottom you drill your holes on an
angle so you ~~have~~ ^{leave} enough room to put your legs up. then you ~~blast~~
take and you drill in the center to blast your holes you drill 6 holes
in the middle they all come in like an ice cream cone. It comes in narrow
so when you blast out you blast the center first. when you
through blasting the center then you blast the sides out. then you blast
the top down then you blast the bottom up. these are all charged up before
you set them. then guys they used to have a fuse that you would light with
a lamp, but you had the cut ~~and~~ with
about an in from each fuse away.

Mr M - You cut the first one ~~short~~ long then you keep on cutting them shorter and shorter so they go off consecutively. So each hole will go off a little at a time. Like there times

me - The order that you shut them off does that help it from coming in

Mr M - Yes, but some times you get a cave-in. Once-in-a-while you get a cave in. It hard enough on the side that it holds it in place. When you are through blasting you go in there & put what they call a jim pole. A pole that is nailed from the timber to the breast to make a little hole in the breast with your pick that pole goes into the breast then you can block the end of the pole after you pulled your scraper back to pull the iron ore out of there.

me - Now they have machine that do that right

Mr M - No they didn't have any machines like they have today

~~me~~ - There all automatic today. These are wonderful, then they came out with machines that they used to use in there. They weigh 50 lb. and there air machines. They had years ago

me - How would you get the iron ore up to ground level then

Mr M - To the ground level you mean to the surface. They use a what is called a skip. You have a shaft, the men went upon one side & the iron ore on the other. They have two skips one on each side like a counter balance when one skip is down the other is up dumping. When the people below ring a bell three times they raise one skip & lower the other to be filled

me - when one is dumping and the other one is filling are they still blasting

Mr. M - Oh yes because that's maybe $\frac{1}{4}$ mill in side the drift. that's what they call the main drift were they bring the iron ore out that empties into your chute. The iron ore come down into these cars. That's the ones you used to have to lift with your shoulders and there was a bar

me - how did they haul the iron ore from the mine to were they process it

Mr. M - They hauled it by rails + cars. the cars each had ^{motors} run by electricity. the cars had poles that electricity ran through. the poles touched the electricity and these cars ran out into the main line

me - It would be something like those bumper car at amusement park then

Mr. M - Which ones do you mean.

me - the ones with the pole

Mr. M - no. It was more like a box and runs on a track with a pole that goes up and runs along a trolley line. that were the electricity comes from that what pulls the iron ore that's what pulls the cars into the shaft. They had \odot five, five ton cars that used to bring the iron ore to the shaft.

me - what about the police in the mine

Mr. M - That's a piece of cake compared to what it used to be. I sunk the mother B mine. that was under ground at the time they gave me a choice of bossing or security. at that time I had hurt my back, a timber fell down on top of me and I had to have an operation state when the strike was going on at the time. a big heavy strike here. They used to roll cars over and every thing else. 11

M-M - It was really a bad strike we had here. They told me either crossing or security. So I took security.

When I first started security at the matter B any injury men that came up we took care of it we didn't have any nurses or anything when we first started security in the mine later on then we got a nurse, but the police had to call a doctor depending on how bad the injury was.

On morning I had to check all the checkers had you the checks + you put their name down. We had to keep track of how many men went down in the cage. You were only allowed 60 men under ground. We had what it called a double deck. 30 men on each deck. Then we check them all out that was are job. Sometimes we had some pretty rough jobs. We had to take control the properties were the carving grounds and different places. We had to go and check out. Then we need to have visitors. The police man would take the visitors around and show them what the mine does and how they operate the mine not under ground just on the surface.

me - do you remember any thing about the big snow storms

M-M - yes we had some awful big snow storms like the storms of (thinking) 1938 we came up from under ground and we couldn't go home so we stayed there but I managed to make it home and got a pair of skis and hauled some stuff out to the men at the mine. When I went to go home I couldn't walk so I rolled home about two miles from the attens mine to here from bluff st. here to the atten mine its about 2 miles. down ~~over~~ the end of annas st. there used to be a mine. the men were at the mine for three days before they could get out

me - how did you get the stuff out there on your back

M-M - yes, pack sack it. I put stuff in the pack sack + carried it that's the way it used to be years ago.

me - What did you use for skis

m.m. - skis

me - by

m.m. - Barrel staves. When I was a youngster I had barrel staves that I used to go out trapping with. We used to make our own skis out of white birch and oak and we would make our own skis. bend them and then cut them + strip them. I never had a pair of skis, only barrel staves. That's how finish people made these skis. I used to go on mine trap line with them barrel staves

me - what did you use to hold your boots on the skis belts!

m.m. - just straps across the toes and then a rubber band from your toes to your heel. Instead of heavy sock we used to use newspaper to keep our feet warm.

for gloves we used ~~some~~ rabbit skin sewed together by wife. We used to take a little nail on face the were around to keep our hands warm. The mitten didn't have any ~~thumb~~ thumb holes. So then one thing I didn't have a gun

so what I done ^{was said} ~~with~~ red rose saw. to buy my self a .22 with a brass barrel ~~with~~ ^{well} a one shot. You used to rest the handle down + put the shell in put it put and the shoot