

Interview with the Johnsons  
(George and Goldie Johnson)  
August 1972 – on South Manitou Island

Indented text: George Johnson  
Indented italicized text: Goldie Johnson  
Text on the margin: Other family members

00:00 August 16<sup>th</sup>, 1972

Grandpa, how many families lived on the island when you were little – about 1900? You'd have been about eleven. Do you remember how many families there were here?

Well, I ... go back about ten years before we came here ... or I'd say about twenty years ... there were about one, two, three, four families ...

When was that?

... five families. I'd say it was about 1860. And then three of them came from Germany, one family from Sweden, and one from Ireland ... I think the Burdicks is Irish.

Where did your folks come from? Where did your dad ... he came from Norway, didn't he?

Yes, Mother and Dad both came from Norway.

What year was that? Do you remember?

01:00 Well, Dad came from Norway and went to Chicago with his brothers, working in the banks there. But ... see he couldn't get along with his one wife, and then he quit and went sailing again. He sailed into every port in the Great Lakes.

02:00 He had a sister also in Whitehall ... and my mother had a sister in Whitehall too. But she, of course, was married and living life in Norway, and had two boys. Her husband died with TB, and then she came over to see her sister, and who did she run into ... but my dad, in about 1885, and she got married to him and first thing you know, we moved away from ... she had five by ... ah, two ... her boys were born in Norway and was there for about two more years after she came to this country,

Which boys were those?

Tom and Theodore. They were about eight and nine years old ... or ten years old ... that was too young ... and my dad met her in Whitehall in about 1885, and he married her, and he was sailing the Great Lakes a while. They lived in Whitehall until they had four children. The first one was a boy, and Gusty was a girl, and then I was born in Whitehall, and so was Bessie. I was born in eighteen and ninety ... ninety-nine, I mean ... 1895 ... 1899 rather ...

You mean "89"!

03:00 Yes, 1889. And my sister was born right after we came up north ... she was born in 1892, about. That was Jessie. Then we came to this country, and ...

You mean to the island?

No, we came to ... yah, we came to the island in about ... 1893 ... or two. And then Jessie was born in about 1893.

Then Jessie was the only one born on the island?

04:00 Yah, we got here in about 1892, and Jessie was born in about 1893, and then it's gonna be that fall, in 1894 or five. 1895 ... we were gonna leave for ...course Jessie was born on the island ... Jessie was a year and a half old ... in 1895 ... and we were going to leave that year for Milwaukee. Mother told Dad that Spring, that was no school here ... that we should go ... she wanted to get us kids all off to school. And Dad promised to take ... have a place in Milwaukee in 1895, and move there in the fall. But Mother died in June, 1985 [sic] ...

What was your mother's name?

Her name was Gabrielsen ... her last name. But she married a guy in Norway; and Theo and Tom's name was ... they went by Johnson until they went to get married, then their name was changed to Gabrielsen.

I thought you said it was "Thomassen" ...

Yeh, I guess I ...

05:00 We used to go to ... Dad went to find us, in Milwaukee, a place for us to stay, and that morning, every one of us ... Mother was carrying Jessie around ... the rest of us, every one of us, was picking strawberries. We picked quite a lot of strawberries that morning, and we had lunch ... and strawberries for dinner that day. That's all I remember about that. And Gustie and Jessie ... Gustie and Sig ... Tom and Theo ... was working for the farmers every year ... different farmers ... working the whole while in those days for the farmers. One of them was working at Beckses, and Sig and Gustie went, and Jessie and I stayed to home. And after we were there a short time ... an hour or so ... why, Mother didn't feel good, and she lay down. And I was kind of worried.

06:00 After we'd played outside a little while, I went in there and she says "I want you to go to the swamp, where the mushrooms are, and Mrs. Haas is there, and tell her I'm sick." And then she said ... I said, "There's a woman coming though the lane." And she said, "Now watch her, and if she comes in, don't say nothing; let her come. And if she goes by, run out and holler at her and get her to stop to come into the house." So I watched, and she come to the gate, and she opened the gate, and went to the ... come to the house. And I took her in the house, and I had a chair sitting there by the bed, I had her sit down, and said "Mother wants to see ya." ... and then I went out and played ... with the two girls.

07:00 And finally I was a little worried and went into the house, and this woman was sitting there sleeping. And I said to her "Mother, how do you feel?" This woman woke up, made quite a fuss, she says "Well, I gotta leave; I gotta leave!" And then Mother says to me, "You go down and tell Mrs. Foster to send the girls out." They had three of them ... three or four girls ... to send the girls to the swamp and tell Mrs. Haas to come at once. I was five years old.

08:00 So I started ... and after a mile and a half or two miles, and I got pretty near to where the new schoolhouse now, and I run into a bunch of horses. Some of 'em was in the road, so I went to one side of the side of the road, and there was horses there, and I cut across the road and there where horses there. Then coming back again to go across the road, I tripped on something and fell in the dirt, and the horse went down the road and I got by the horse. Then when I got down to the Foster's, she looked at me and she says, "What have you been doing. You're dirty, and black!" And she took and washed my face to clean me up. And then I went on to tell her about my mother being sick, and I was going to get Mrs. Haas from the swamp; and they were picking mushrooms. And she cleaned me up, and took the baby in her arms, and said "Come on; we'll go." And she started running and I followed, and finally all I remember from that time, we walked fast and run and when I got home there was two boys at the pump. And I think one of them was Lawrence Haas ... and one of the other boys that come from the swamp. But I didn't see Mrs. Haas.

We stayed there a while. we walked around, and first thing the orders was to go over to Mrs. Haases. So, all of us, were sent over; we slept upstairs ... all the boys slept on the floor on blankets, and the girls had the beds; they was upstairs. And I don't know anything what happened on Monday or Tuesday, 'till the next time I see my mother, she was in a gray casket. And that's all I know about my mother's going to the grave.

09:00 And after that I seen the dog that my mother thought quite a lot of ... the big dog ... always hung around the grave; where the grave was, out under a couple ... three trees.

Was the grave on the island?

Yah. Out on the farm land. By the maple and two beach trees that ... Mother always went over there because she admired that place so much. And Tom was the one that suggested that, "Why not bury her there." And she was buried there, and then, ah ...

Where was your dad? Was he on the Great Lakes sailing?

10:00 Dad? They tried to contact Dad. See, this was on Sunday, and next thing I know, on Monday, Mother died. (unintelligible) Monday night she died. (unintelligible) And meantime, Dad was telling ... he went down to see, and the boat Captain said to him, "We're not leaving now, it's blowing pretty hard." ... and that was in Milwaukee. He never said where he was, but he said he was up looking around at different things, and he said, "When I got down to the boat that evening, the sails was flying, because the Captain says, "We're not going, on account of the wind." And when he got down, the sails was up, and some of the sails had reefs in 'em, ... and he says, "C'mon," he says to Dad, "We're in a hurry. We want to get started as soon as we can." And he couldn't get through his head, why ... Dad ... the captain wanted to go from Milwaukee that night. And after they got outside of Milwaukee, and everything was going along pretty good, why ... he said, "I got a telegram here for ya." And on the telegram it says, "Your wife is very sick, and like to have you home at once." He said, "That boat never went as fast as that night." he says, "Every bit of wind we could get on the way, I sailing her

just as strong as we could.” And he went there on Tuesday night, I think it was, and she was dead ... died, I think, on Monday night. He’d got there Tuesday night.

11:00

Haases ... they come from Germany ... Mr. and Mrs. Haas ... and Mr. and Mrs. Beck ...

When did they come over? About when?

Well, I’d say in 1830. And the Beckses had four boys ... no, three boys and one girl. And Haases had four boys and one girl. And there were ... up above them were Becks, August Becks. August Beck got his father’s homestead. Then he took up part of a homestead. Then he married one of the Haas girls ... the Haas girl. That was one of ‘em.

12:00

And then ... let’s see ... there was Henry Haas, there was August Haas ... eh, Henry Haas, Joe Haas, John Haas and Bill Haas. Four boys. But August married their daughter, Lizzie Beck.

And August Becks was Theodore Beck, Albert Beck ... they turned around and took up a homestead on the south side of the island. And August Beck lived next to where his mother and father was. The all lived in log cabins ... log homes ... and log cabin barns. But the had wonderful orchards, in 1990 [*sic*] they had wonderful orchards! Cherry trees and everything, in big ... where their folks ... where they came here.

Where was that located?

13:00

Up on the northwest corner of the island, and just down about a half a mile from ... that was Haases, and next was Beckses ... and now, when he married the Haas girl, she moved next to ... moved down below there and August Beck, he lived there all his life.

What was that ... just short of the sand hills?

No, it was all timber land in those days.

You mean even up where the sand hills now are ... that was all timber land?

They come around the south side there, on the northwest corner of the island. Just back from ...not so awful far from the lake. After the land goes down, that’s where ... they’re up pretty high. They had a BIG home after ... they had the log cabin for a long time. Then they got the big home. And after they had the big house, you could sit on the front porch ... they all admired that big front porch, because you could see all the boats in the bay. And they were quite a sight to see, when we’d go up there. I remember once we were all invited up there for supper ...

You mean in this bay ... all the boats in this bay?

14:00

Yah, this, ah ... the old folks were living then ... the Haases. But you’d never see the Becks. They were died, and were buried right near the log cabin.

Whose place is it where that Indian teepee was, last year? That was the old Anderson place, wasn’t it?

Yah, that was the old Anderson place.

Where was that in relation to the Becks and the Haases?

15:00

Well, they came here ... about the same time as the Beckses. Then there was the Hutzlers; they were Germans. I don’t know what the Prices were. Anderson bought that, and then ... Boales has it now. So that’s a ... when all of the Haases boys and girl got married, and the Beckses girls and boys got married, why the ... the girls, of course, when they got married ... the girls, all the Beckses girls ... they had to run away, and they married in Leeland. And they never come back, and most all went and lived at Grand Rapids ... or Cedar. I think I told you about Cedar. He was the one who married the Beck’s girl ... the August Beckses. That’s the second or third generation.

Your father married Theodore’s mother?

Yes, and Tom’s mother. They were from Nor... But he met her in Whitehall, when he was sailing out of there. After he left Chicago.

And her name was Thompson?

Yes. I forget now what her first name ... I believe her, ah ...

Well, was that ... “Gabrielsen” was her sister, it’s possible if she wasn’t married, that her name could have been Gabrielsen.

No, Gabrielsen was married too.

Oh, well she was married. So that probably isn't her name then.

Do you know where your mother's buried now? Do you know where the spot is?

Whose buried?

16:00 Where your mother is buried ... on the land? Do you know the trees ... where she's buried? Or have they been cut down?

She was moved ...

Everybody's cut trees off ... and cut down. After she was buried there, I wouldn't say how many years ... yah, that was after ... between a maple tree and two beach trees ... Then when I come home; of course Tom, he was working for, well Theo and Tom, soon as Mother died, they took over the farm. They run the farm and ...

How big was the farm? How many acres?

It was 150 acres, but there was only about 40 acres cleared. And then they cut ... we all cut wood and everything cut down before they left. I would say there was about 70, 80 acres cleared. More than that I think, because there wasn't much cleared after Tom and Theodore left.

17:00 Is that the land right up at the corner near the little lake, where the road ... where you go up to the road that forms a "T" and you can go either left or right? Is that the farm on the corner there?

Yah, that's on ... that farm ... just after you get through the woods here where that lumber pile is, from there, clear to the little lake, was our property.

You went all the way to the little lake, then?

All ... from one end of the little lake to the other, we had fenced in.

Then you owned that one field, then the woods, and then the other open field out to the lake, then?

Yes, that ... field, ah ... we owned ... when Mother ... the year before she died, we put the lane through there. That cut off three acres of our 150 acres, and made 147, and that's what Burdick, I think, got, was 147. And I shows him where we were cut over on ... what'd ya call its land ... Henry Haases land ... 100 feet, But he was the one that done marking ... in the trees ...

When was that land sold to Burdick?

18:00 Well I'd say the land was sold to Burdick about ... I left in eighteen seven ... ah, nineteen seven, I mean ... nineteen seven, and I think Tom died ... something around 1910, and he's the one had that cemetery put in ... and what was the question there?

I just wondered who the ... when Burdick bought the land?

19:00 Well, when I left ... Dad and Jes ... I left in the fall of the year and went to Big Rapids, and then my father turned around and our ... Jessie ... when I left in the fall ... my two sisters ... Gustie and Bessie, left in the Spring and worked for their cousin in Muskegon. And then they ... then Jessie and Dad run the farm. Jessie said she done most all the work. But Dad had never worked on a farm, or anything, and finally she wanted to go to business school ... had graduated the eighth grade on the island here, and she wanted to go to school, so she went to Grand Rapids for a job ...

Big Rapids, or Grand Rapids?

Grand Rapids. And she worked there, and the people she was working with in the ... the lady had worked in the college, and ... the business college ... in Muskegon. And she took my sister over there and got her with the President of the school there, and so she was ... stayed there until she got a ... that was Jessie with a ... she was a ... it was shorthand and typewriting.

What year was that?

Well, this was about ... nineteen ... Tom died ten. It must'a been about eleven. Nineteen eleven or twelve.

20:00 (break, with unrelated chatter ...)

When did you meet grandpa?

(laughter)

You're not going to say anything?

If I turn it off, will you tell us? Will you talk about it?

You're not gonna talk about it? Don't wanna talk about the old times?

(continuing ...)

Tom died in about 1910, and he had her body ... he was the one who wanted the cemetery on the island. And he was about the first one to be buried in the cemetery on the island, there.

Then they must have moved her?

21:00 But Tom was the first one that died. He was the one who got the farmers to pay so much to buy that land and set up the cemetery. And then, wha'dyacall ... after he got everything squared away, I don't think ... I think Mother was moved before, then he was the next one that died ... the first live person that died after they bought that property. And that was Tom. And then my mother's body was moved to Frankfort when my dad died ... right after my dad died. But when they moved Mother's casket ... that must have been about ten years ... nine, ten years ... the whole casket was just the same as the day it was made by the farmers. And when they dug it up and moved it in the cemetery, that was about the same looking outfit as it was put in there. But when they ... let's see, that would be about forty years ... they dug it up when Dad died ... dug it up and put it to Frankfort, they had a copper box. And hardly ... had trouble finding the bones. But when they took it out from the farm, with that wood ... just the same as the casket was when they put it in there. And they thought sure ... Theo thought sure ... I didn't approved of it ... and Gustie and Allison ... just because they hated the island ... was the reason they wanted her off of there. But Dad always said to me, "I wann'a be with my dad ... " or "... I wann'a be with my wife." He said, "My first wife is in ... (unintelligible) ... see that I'm buried by my first wife.

22:00

What year did he die? Do you remember?

In nineteen ... in nineteen thirty-nine, I think it was. Thirty-nine or forty.

You just ... you met him that one summer when you stayed at the house.

*Ya ... well, I met him when you lived down on Sanford Street. Is that where you lived when he died?*

See, we left Sanford Street ... he was there the last year, that we lived in Sanford Street. Then we moved up on the hill there in nineteen thirty-eight ...

Thirty-seven, wasn't it?

No, when we moved in there, that was 1938, I think ...

*Thirty-eight, to thirty-nine. He was with us all winter.*

He died in thirty-nine. The fall of 1839.

So he lived up in your new house with you then?

23:00

*No.*

I wanted him to stop with us ...

*He wouldn't go up there. He was with us all winter the ... the year before he died.*

Well, Grandpa, when did your dad marry her second ... his second ... wife. What was her name?

Mrs. Beck. I don' know what her first name was.

It was Florence!

Florence ... Florence Beck? What that her name?

Oh, you're thinking of Florence Haas ... Haace.

Oh, all I know is ... I forget what her name was. But it was ... she married one of the Beck's boys. Lived down on the ... owned the club house down there. She was the one running the club out there.

24:00

When did she ... when did your dad marry her? Do you remember ... about the year?

Well ... done that, lived in a little sh ... bought the ten acres down there in the middle of the bay. Had a nice little cottage there. And I happened to come home that summer, and kind'a bawled him out because there was a

lot of widows here ... the Hutzlers ... Mrs. Beck and .... three women ... three or four women ... and we wanted him to get somebody to do the cooking for him and take and help him out. And then I left here, and I didn't know this until after it happened. Dad ... Jessie came home here and then she jumped all over him ... why he wanted to do the fishing and cleaning fish and packing fish, and had to do his own cooking, and she thought he ought to pick up somebody that would stay with him and do the work. But then just a year after that, gal' darn it, he got married. Then we felt sorry we didn't keep our mouth shut.

Why didn't ... you said Theodore and Gussie hated the island.

25:00 Not Theodore.

Not then. That was a different time.

Why did they hate the island, though?

*'Cause they'd seen too much of it, I suppose.*

When did you meet grandpa?

(laughter)

When did you meet grandma? What did grandma look like when you met her? How old was she?

She wasn't no spring chicken!

(laughter)

See ... we went together for about five years. One time ... I dunno ... she quit me or I quit her, or something.

*Twenty-three! That's "Spring," if you ask me!*

26:00 She thought I was going to go marry a (unintelligible) of a guy that owned a lumber yard, and his wife ... I took lessons ... I was taking music lessons ... on Wednesday. And she wanted me to quit. And when I wouldn't quit taking my music lessons on Wednesday, she turned around and says "You don't think enough of me, why you might as well stay away from here." So I had to stay away.

It was either grandma, or the music lessons, huh? What kind of music lessons were you taking?

Piano lessons. I was taking singing lessons, and I was taking music lessons.

That was the "other girl," huh?

... her mother had died, and her father was running the lumber business, and he was pretty old.

Well, when you were dating grandma, what kinds of things would you do? You didn't have movies then.

*Did the same things that you did, I'd guess.*

27:00 We went ... we happened to go to the same church, And on Friday night, once a month, there was a young people's night, and she happened to be there, and I happened to be there. But all that, why ... Siggie's the one that bawled me out. I was twenty-five, twenty-six years old, and he jumped over me all the time because I didn't get married. He was always telling that, "Why in the heck don't you get married, because you're going to have children whether ... you'll have kids and you'll be fifty years old, and that's about the long as you'll live. Why don't you get married now," he says, "and then you'll get the kids you'll have through school before anything happens to ya."

Sounds like all you Johnsons had to be told when to get married. Was Sig married then?

Oh, yah. He was married and had a couple of kids. Boys. We always had a nice presen ...

Bernie was one of 'em, wasn't he?

No. He was the last one. It was always Roger and Howard.

Howard's the oldest, isn't he?

No, Roger. Bernie; he was the youngest. They had a girl ... I believe the girl was the oldest, wasn't it, Goldie?

28:00 *She was ... yah. She was the one ...*

She only lived a few years, and died ...

*I didn't know them then ...*

That was the way things went.

Well, grandpa, when you were on the island, do you remember ... well, how many shipwrecks do you remember. You were involved with the Frost, weren't you ... when the Frost went down?

Yes ...

What happened that night? Do you remember? It was in the winter, wasn't it?

No, it was in the fall of the year. She went ashore there, and of course I didn't have so much to do ... Tom and Peter had the boat right away, 'cause we had the boat quite a while before that, and they were getting the dry corn out of the ... when they dumped the corn overboard, why, but it only lasted one day, and the water was clear up to where they ... well, they scraped off the top to the second (unintelligible). And, of course, they were in the boat, and the farmers got the bags, and everybody worked together, and ...

It was mainly corn? That was the cargo, corn?

29:00 Yes. The farmers come with the bags and helped shovel unload, and they'd take so much to each place, and come back again, and raid the ...

What year was that? You remember?

Oh, that must have been in nineteen ... nineteen, six.

That was the year before your left then?

Yes.

Was there anyone killed?

I believe that was in nineteen, five when that happened. Siggie left in nineteen, four, and I ran the farm two years after he left.

Was there anyone killed in that?

No, nobody was killed, or anything.

Was the light working then?

Oh, everything was perfect.

Why did the Frost run aground ... you remember? Was it foggy, or something?

30:00 Well, every year when we'd get like a seed a day ... if it stayed foggy for two days, the boats coming from Chicago ... they'd be worried when they'd be off Point Betsie. And when they'd measure the water, and when they'd find the water was shallow, they'd turn right around, and they thought sure that was the island. And they'd turn the boat around ... I mean they thought that was ... they turned Point Betsie too soon when they thought ... they'd turn right away, they'd run right on the island. They didn't realize they were here.

Boat after boat, that was. And, of course, there wasn't hardly a year went by when there wasn't some boats ashore. Sometime we didn't get nothing ... come that one year, they were loaded with grain of all kinds, and iron ore ... they shoveled that over ... for a couple of days they had sleighs up there.

You remember any of the other wrecks?

Well, I remember three boats burning up in the bay here.

When was that?

31:00 Oh, I don't remember the names ... at different times. And then pretty near every year, there'd be a boat ashore ... somewhere along. Who was I telling the other night about Sig and I going out where the ... I guess that way you too ... about the dog? Licked the guys face that was living on ... we were going out to look at the beach ... at the Burdick field, that was one step higher than the regular level there. And we looked at the house ... it was a beautiful house there ... and it'd been built quite a while, and the barn was ... a big barn was built up there. And we looked at all of it. It was all closed up. That used to be Burdick's great grandfather. And Burdick here has got the store; his grandfather owned that twenty acres down there.

And ... to tell about ... and as we was going to look at the bank up above there, our dog run. And we see something lay; we didn't know it was a man, or anything. The dog ran out that way and licked his face, and the guy jumped up, and he was just about ready to ... and he thought it was a bear, I guess, or something. And boy,

32:00

was he excited, and scared. We told him we was very sorry, and ... that it happened. We called the dog too, before it licked his face. And then he told us, "My ship lays down here on the beach." And there it was ... three masted ship, ready to be pulled off. But they had a plank ... we went down and looked at it, and everything. But the guy, oh, he was just scared to death almost.

But they got the boat off, in a day or so. They generally had to fol ... the biggest ... the "Favorite" was the biggest wrecking tug, and they generally got that as quick as they could, and that's what helped.

What happened the time you were telling me about, when you had to ... you had to bring a boat back across ... when you had to sail it back across. Somebody had to ... you were over on the mainland playing baseball, or something?

Yah, we had played baseball ... that was in the last year I was home. Nineteen seven.

How old were you then? Let's see, it'd be ...

33:00

Seventeen. And, what'd ya call it ... we played the mill down ... ya see, the mill had been running about two years then, and we got about six guys from the island ... farm boys, it was ... and the others was from the mill ... it might have been more than that from the mill. I think it was eleven of us. We had been to Glen Haven, and Glen Abror, and played the station down here, and ... Sleeping Bear wanted us. And we went over to Sleeping Bear. And, of course, I was running the boat all the time ... to take the bunch over, and back.

All sail, right? Sailing.

34:00

Yes. Two spars, and a jib. And we always had about a ton and a half of rock in the boat ... because it was kind'a wide ... and of course, when we ... we tried to keep it as near a center as we could, and then we'd get in the Coast Guard's ... and we played the Coast Guards there ... and we played, I guess, seven or eight innings, and the Captain ordered us to quit. We didn't quit right away ... we'd ought'a had a kick in the pants ... but he sent another guy up, and we had to quit. And we got down there, and he bawled me out for fair. And he said, "I want you to get off of here," he says, "in less than ten minutes, you're going ashore, cus you ain't gonna get off."

Oh, we see the storm was ... far west storm coming up.

How long did it take to sail across?

Well, that time must have taken us two hours. We come across different times, sailing, in fifty-five minutes.

Yeh, with the wind behind you ...

Yeh, or sideways. So when we had to tack a nor'west wind, and when we got to where the lighthouse ... the guy there ... Lawrence Haas was four years older than I was, and he was going across a few times with his father all the time, to get the mail, and one thing or another. And I wanted him to take the boat. I said, "How about you taking the stick." He said, "I don't want nothin' to do with it." I told him, "Well, put a reef in the sail ... right away as quick as you can." And I got off the point right away, so I could be sure to ...

What's a "reef in the sail?"

35:00

That's where you shorten the sail up. You have generally two rows, where you can take and tie it down ... well, one or two ... you wanna get as much down ... only tied down was one. He wouldn't drop the sail, so I put it ... just slacked it off, and it didn't have no use to sail at all ... just let it flop, and they tied it up best they could, and let it go at that. Then I ... scar't to let 'em touch the other sail, so we tacked back and forth, and I just ... Tom showed me how to ... hold ... you just put it half way round in a loop, and jerk that line, and just as you did the boat will head right into the wind. He showed me that, and ... all the while I sailed with him. And ... wha'd ya callit ... so I got going alright, and I didn't tack so very far. Just short tacks back and forth, and when I got back on the south side of the island there, where all the rocks was, those guys begged me to run ashore. "We'll pay for the boat! We'll pay for everything!"

36:00

And, oh gol', I thought maybe they would throw me overboard. I never said a word. I just sit there, and ... determined. And he said, "You'll never make the point! You'll never make it round the point! Something will happen!" That's all I could hear. And I just ... I seem 'em standing up and hanging onto the line, and everything and begging to be run on the rocks. 'Specially the mill men. They're were men who were working at the mill. They were the worst ones. And Lawrence Haas ... he wasn't much better. He was the one that I was sure that he would ... have nothing to say. But ...

Well, was it rough then? Were you in a storm? Was it raining?

Oh boy! It was really an old hurricane! And then we made the point. And then I had to watch out when I come up ... down here where the buoys were. 'Cuz the wind was nor'west, and pretty good ... and if I missed the buoy, I was sure I wasn't gonna let it go ashore. I wanna ... gonna make another tack out and come back in and try the same thing over again. And, gol' darn it, they had me catch the buoy, and got the rope through it. And, boy, I was really tickled. And the Coast Guard come out and took 'em off. And when I got off the boat, the Captain says to me, "Fine work, Johnson. We watched every move you made. We worried all the time. But you done a fine job" he says, "and we're proud of ya." That was the only thing. And I never said a word, but Dad knew all the whole darn outfit before he come home. But, that was a ...

37:00

How many were on the boat?

There was about eleven of us.

How big was the boat? How long was it?

I think it was thirty-some feet. About seven feet wide ... or eight.

Who did the boat belong to?

Dad. He bought the boat just for Tom and Theodore, because they all loved to sail, and ... Theo was the one who was gonna take Tilli off, when he got married and run away. Tilli got ...

Tom and Theodore didn't play softball? ... Or you played softball or baseball?

It was all baseball. No, they were at home. They were both married then.

He must have been quite a tyrant ... August Beck ... from what you said the other day. Did he have all girls?

38:00

No, he had three boys. The boys ... well, the oldest boy, he died when he was about twenty-one. He was working for the Coast Guards ... or for the government.

Here's a question for you ... you may have to think about this. What did you like about being young, when you were on the island ... when you were in ... fifteen, sixteen, seventeen? That ... what did you like about living then, when you were young, that you wouldn't have now, if you were young now. What did you like about that time? That if you were growing up ... let's say if you were seventeen now, you wouldn't have?

Huh! I don't know.

(break)

Was it all kerosene?

No, it was all wood.

You mean you didn't have any light at night?

Wood, and all oil lamps.

You mean kerosene lamps?

39:00

Kerosene lamps, kerosene lanterns ... everything on the island was that, those days. And the cattle and the horses all run wild. The far... the turkeys were always in the woods ... they'd do a little damage to your farming, but in the fall of the year, you'd much rather have a turkey from the island, than from anywhere else, because they lived on beechnuts.

They were living on what?

Beechnuts, in the fall of the year.

What kind of crops did you grow on your farm?

40:00

Our land wasn't so awful rich ... more or less. We'd had to raise wheat. We raised a ... we had a lot of cattle. We would put cattle on the see ... where we had a ... well, the first crop would be ... cow manure, horse manure, and then you plant potatoes on there. And most the time it would be ... hay. If you had hay, you take two crops of hay off. Then you put the fertilizer on the hay, then you turn that over and you plant potatoes on there. One year. The next year, you plant corn on there. Then the next year you more likely put wheat, or rye. And they you'd seed it in again. And then, when you seed it in again, why, you maybe harvest two crops of tim ... ah, thimady [*sic*], and clover ... mix those two together. And that's the way all the land was farmed. The more cows you had, the more fertilizer you had to put on the land. But we generally raised ... the big crop most of the people on the island raised was potatoes. Potatoes, and the wheat, and rye ... we had every winter,

maybe have four or five barrels of white wheat flour, and maybe two or three barrels of rye flour. They give you three barrels ... you give them one bushel, I guess, and ... they took one out of two bushel.

41:00 Well, did your dad both farm and ... he fished out here, didn't he? He fished too. While you ran the farm, he was fishing?

Oh, no. he was sailing while I was on the farm ... the last year. And then he quit, and him and a guy that owned the ship, fished in Sturgis ...

Why did he quit sailing? He was the captain of a ship, right?

42:00 No, he was ... on a steamship. He was Mate. He run the ship. But he never wanted the job as Captain. But he run the ... took over the ship, at times. And then he turned around, when he got in with my mother, him and another guy, before he married my mother, they run a two-master vessel. They sailed that ... for several years. And then he turned around and he happened to get with this guy ... the two-mast vessel from north Muskeeg ... ah, North Manitou ... and then they were taking ... how he happened to ... when he got sailing with him, they was taking wood from the island. There was about a thousand cords of wood a year was taken off the island ... from the farmers, that cut it. And, of course, they cut logs ... ah, trees that made beautiful logs, and it all went into four-foot wood. And, of course, they cut a thous ... a hundred, a hundred twenty-five cords of wood that went to the lighthouse here every year.

Now, which docks did they use ... the one up here by the Morizan? Or did they use the one in the bay?

No, the one up there by that club. It was about two blocks long, and they piled ... oh, I guess, four or five rows as the dock was made up wide, where the ship come in, and the loaded the ship there.

Do you know what the wood was used for? Was it used for building?

No, it was just four-foot for Chicago and Milwaukee. Most of it was for Milwaukee. And the farmers here took all the money, and everything that they had got, and put it in the bank in Chicago. And, then see, that was nineteen and eighty-nine, and all the banks went broke in Milwaukee, and they lost all the money. After that, they got a safe ... each one got a safe, and they kept the money locked up at home.

43:00 Well, you went to the World's Fair, didn't you ... in Chicago? You remember going down there?

No, I remember going to the World's Fair in ... ah, California. In Los Angeles.

*You went to the World's Fair too, in Chicago.*

I was married then. We were married. We went down, and lived in ... about two ... outside of Chicago. Lived in a tent. And then the next year the Fair went on for the second year, and she wouldn't go, and Douglas didn't go ...

*Well, he was sick. He didn't feel good.*

... so Kenneth ... no, Kenneth was at ... ah, do you remember that, Kenneth, when we went to the World's Fair in Chicago, the last time?

*Oh, that was in 1933!*

What'd you do for excitement on the island? You said you played baseball. What else did you do ... besides chase girls around?

44:00 In the winter time. There was no chasing around in the summer time. It was just working from ... long hours, and most of the time in the summer time, all the boys'd go down and swim ... and swim. And the girls would come to the lake sometimes, and go by, and take our clothes, and we didn't know how the heck we's gonna find them, and then they'd throw them in the woods somewhere.

The girls would do that?

Yeh, they stunting ... was a stunt they had. And we was always swimming. I went in as high as five times on Sunday.

*They wanted a little excitement to here!*

Where'd you go swimming ... what part of the island did you go swimming at?

Most of it was right down at ... see, we had the fence running in on both sides. The cows never got ...

You went in the little lake. You didn't go in the big lake?

Well, we'd go in the little lake in May, June, and soon as July would come on, the water was too warm, we thought; we'd go in the big lake. Usually beyond the Burdick field, next it was the Furst place. And even down here at the lighthouse. Sometimes we'd go down here in the bay.

What'd you do in the winter, when you weren't farming? Did you do any lumbering? Or were there enough chores, to keep you busy?

45:00

There was som ... all I remember when I was five-years old, my mother wouldn't ... she didn't believe in dancing, or card-playing. But instead of playing cards in the winter time, and dancing, there was a party every Saturday night. You'd be surprised ...

(break – background chatter)

Well, grandma, now that we're finished, tell us about how you really met grandpa.

*Christmas! He wasn't the only one I ever met.*

Oh, did you have a lot of boyfriends?

Of course she did!

When did you meet grandpa, thought?

In the church where he was stationed, wasn't it? At a church social?

*We both sang in the choir, I think.*

Oh, yeh?

You sang in the choir?

46:00

*Yah. Well, you know ... young organizations ... the girls and the boys ... and ...*

How old were you then?

*Seventeen.*

How come you didn't get married until you were ... twenty-three?

*I had enough ... my mother was sickly, you know, and I really didn't have a chil... us kids ... eh, you know ... a life? And why jump into do it right away?*

You were smarter than most girls ... then you got married.

What was grandpa like though ... when you met him?

*Oh, boy! He was dashing!*

Oh, yeh? (laughter)

Dashing!

Did he have long hair then?

*Oh my, no.*

No beards or mustaches?

*No. Nope.*

How did he propose to you?

*I don't know.*

We used to go roller skating once in a while, on the pavement. And another girl, the Superintendent's daughter, use to go too ...

47:00

*She never went with us!*

No, but I ... she and I ... I skated with her different times ...

*Oh, well that was ... in between.*

One Sunday, the guy ... they didn't run on Sunday. They don't work on Sunday there; they shut the mill down ... seven o'clock. And then they have a watchman for the daytime, for the wood yard and the sulfide mill, and

48:00 the paper mill and the finishing room. And one Sunday, I was on ... work at six o'clock, and the Sunday ... he knew where I boarded, and he called up, and here was the Superintendent of the paper mill. He wanted to know if it was possible for me to ... ah ... didn't have no watchman there that day ... and was it possible for me to come down and take over the job as watchman for the sulf... wood yard, sulfide, and the whole thing. I thought, yeh, I guess I can all right, since I got nothing more to do. And, what did he do ... I was dumb then in those days ... and here he brings his daughter down to the office. And when I made the trip around, why, and got back in, here was him and his daughter. Just as soon as ... I got back in there making the round, then he says ... to me, he says, "I got to run a certain color Monday morning", he says, "and I got to see whether we go the color, and just about how much color we got to put in the beater", and all that stuff, you know, and ... I don't know if he expected me to sit there and talk with her all the while, but I sit there and gossip quit a while, as we use to go skating together ... roller skating ... and she was a teacher then. And ... ah, gol', I said to her, I says, "I think I better go" I says it looked like over an hour since I make the rounds. And, I think I'd lost an hour already. I thought afterwards, that old man, he'd 'a been back before then if he didn't want me to stay there. So he got back, and I doubled up; I kept right on making the rounds, and when I got back, they were gone. Well, I think the old man, he didn't have us down there for nothing. He was gonna try and patch us up some way. The old man and I always did get along pretty well.

49:00 You went to Niagara Falls on your honeymoon, didn't you?

When was that ... in nineteen ... ?

*Seventeen, I guess ... sixteen, seventeen.*

But she was Catholic, and I was (unintelligible) Catholic.

Yah, that would've been a conflict.

You were married on ... was it June 4th, or May 14th? June 14th? I keep thinking it was 1914, but it's June 14th, isn't it.

*Must have been 1916.*

Did your dad and mother come over from France? Were your mother and dad both French?

*No. My dad was full-blooded.*

Didn't you say there were from Canada ... or no?

50:00 *My grandparents were French Canadians.*

How about your parents then ... where they born in Canada, or the United States?

*No, my dad was born in Indiana.*

Oh, so their parents were French Canadian.

*His parents. His parents, yeh.*

But your parents both spoke French, didn't they?

*No. My mother could understand, but she couldn't talk.*

What was your mom?

*She was Dutch-Irish. She was full of ... full of the "old Mick" ... you know, when she felt it.*

Well, what part of France was your dad from?

*I don't know. They couldn't talk English ... my grandparents couldn't.*

What did your dad do?

*You mean his work?*

Yeh.

51:00 *He was what they called a "fireman."*

He was a fireman ... like on a train?

*No. At the paper mill. Isn't that what they called them ... "firemen."*

Yeh, he would be a fireman.

You mean, like a stoker ... or a ...?

*Yeh, sort of a*

He was working in the boiler room.

Where was that ... in Muskegon?

*Um-hum. Central Paper Company.*

Were Clayton and Clair both born in Muskegon?

*Um-Hum*

And Dad was born in Muskegon.

Where were you born, grandma?

They weren't born in Muskegon. You were ...

*Yes, I was.*

But your mother and father ...

*No; they was born in Indiana.*

Yeh ... born in Indiana, and they lived there for quite a while.

What town?

*Attica. Attica, Indiana.*

Where are they buried?

52:00

*Muskegon.*

When was the first time you came to the island?

*Ah, Clayton and Clair ... they were small. They were about ... Kenny's and Jeff's age, I imagine. Was it before Kenneth was born? I don't think we had Kenneth then.*

Tell 'em what I'd tell you'd run into on the island. She'd kinda believe everything I'd tell her.

*Oh, I did not! He said that the pigs .. that, ah ... if they had curly tails, that was a sign they was ... ah, what was that ...? If they had curly tails, they were healthy?*

Don't all pigs have curly tails?

53:00

*I dunno (laughing) ...*

You must have sailed across? Oh, no, they've had ...

*No, we come on ... grandpa had an old stinky boat. Ah, it had that old ... greasy you know? ... oily, you know? Cheap grade of oil? And, boy! If nothing else made you sick, that sure did.*

When first ... when I was here, all we had was a sailboat. He never believed in a gasoline engine. He'd say he'd never have anything like that. And the first thing you know, why, when I come home here he didn't have no oars in the boat, and just see this engine in the boat. A good size engine. And he had that for fishing, and delivering fish,

54:00

Oh, I can remember coming up here. I remember we came ... I don't know whether we came to North Manitou or South Manitou.

Yah, we went to North Manitou.

In Dad's boat.

Yeh. Then he come and picked us up. And you got sick as a dog, on the boat coming back.

Well, that was a motor boat you were on then ... that smelled so oily?

*That was his boat.*

That was the second time we went over to the island.

I don't remember. I was sick more than once coming across there.

Get that little paper there ...

This one right here? Says, 'Thomas Thompson, 1878 to 1910. Matilda Thompson, October 23rd, 1881 to July 7, 1912 ...'

Who was Matilda Thompson?

That was Theodore's wife. Theodore married her.

55:00 '... and Joseph Haas, 1853 to July 7th, 1912, and the Coast Guard Station was built in 1902.'

The Coast Guard Station. When was the lighthouse ...?

1858's on the building.

The lighthouse was 1958.

1858?

Yah ... 1858 was when the lighthouse was built. Then they tore the light down that that had there ... before my time, though ... then they built that in 1871 ... the one that's there now. I was up, all over the top today. This morning. Yeh, I was up for the exercise.

*You know these old coffee grinders? We'd take these little things, like here, and ... ah, grind 'em up, and make sugar.*

Umm ... like a little treat, or something.

You mean the popcorn?

*No; these ... the cornels.*

56:00 You say you'd sniff 'em? (laughter)

*No! We'd grind 'em up in the old coffee grinder, you know? We used to have an old coffee grinder, and ... you'd put them little old hard shells in there, and we'd grind them up and make some sugar.*

Well, you were brought up in Muskegon, weren't you?

*Um-hum. Yeh.*

This here one ... July the fifth ... we came ...

*Kenneth was born in Muskegon. Kenneth, Clayton and Clair was born in Muskegon.*

When did you move ... when did you move to North Carolina?

*You was a baby!*

What does that mean ... about nineteen ... I was born in 1921. So did you go that year, or the next year?

*You remember when you moved down to North Carolina? I don't.*

You said he was a baby.

57:00 *Yes, he was a baby then. He had ... you had the mumps when your dad went down there, and left the whole bunch of us home ... and, ah ... he was down there, I guess, about six months, or so. And I sold the house. Sold the car. Had the furniture all packed ...*

Well, what time of the year did you get down there?

*You remember? I don't remember what time.*

How long were you in North Carolina?

*Two and a half years.*

How come you moved back ... 'cuz you didn't like it?

*n'Yeah!*

You made grandpa move back, 'eh?

*Well, I didn't make him. But he ... either I moved, or I was ... going back to work!*

Then, you moved from Muskegon to North Carolina. Then you moved back to Kalamazoo? Back to Parchment. That's when you got the house on Sanford Street?

*Yeh. They're rated there. Well, we were sick all the time, you know?*

58:00

Well, I was going to say, back in October, when we come to the island ... Tilli died. That's Theodore's wife. We got word, and Jessie, and Gustie and Bessie ... we all came to the island. Well, they didn't notify me ... they got the word in the office, and they thought it was somebody else, and they told him, and he never said a word, 'til a couple days afterwards. But I got here in time to, ah ... that's my ... Theodore, my half-brother's wife died. She'd been to Grand Rapids to fix her teeth, and they couldn't ... they wouldn't do it, and they sent her back here and, of course, she died. She'd been on the ships too, here, but they're the ones who told her she should go to Grand Rapids.

I wonder what she died of?

She was infected, wasn't she?

She had, like pyorrhea? A gum disease?

59:00

I don't know just what was the matter with her. But she died. So we come to that funeral. And when I come on the boat, the day after the funeral ... the day before the funeral, there was a boat at the station down here, and Sig was working on somebody. And when I looked who it was, gol', it was Joe Haas. He went out there ... he was carrying the mail, with his wife ... and he went out there to get a case of beer off the boat, and when he ... it was in a small boat he had that case of beer ... he lost his balance, and him ... the case of beer and him fell down, and the boat slid over, and he drowned. And when I come in, there was Sigval working on him, and trying to bring him back to life again, and picked him up. Somebody must have seen it, and they picked him up on the bottom, and brought him in to the Coast Guard, and he worked on him. So we was staying July the twelfth, to the fifth. That was when Tom's ... er, Theodore's wife's funeral was. Then we stayed a day or two longer, and that was ... ah, Hasses ... Mr. Haases funeral. And then it was right after that when Dad bought this property. Well, I'd say two years after that.

1:00:00

Was Florence Haas ... the one who drowned ... was that his wife?

Yeh, that was his wife. Then, of course, Lawrence Haas built this place, and when the Frost went down, all these doors and windows here is off the Morazan.

You mean the Frost.

1:01:00

Yeah, the Walter L Frost. And, ah ... Tom said to me when we were sawing four-foot wood for the lighthouse ... we had to cut up 125 cords of four-foot wood ... and George Hutzler had the contract. He done the hauling, and we done the cutting. And that night Tom says to me, "Let's go out and look at the Frost." So, we goes out there and watched, and oh, the old waves were really beating up there, and the first thing we got up there in the morning, just about ... well, we got up just before daylight in the winter time ... he said, "Let's see how she looks this morning." Gol' darn, all that was standing up there was the two cylinder heads. Everything else was laying along the beach. But I don't remember seeing any ... these people must have went down there and picked up all the stuff, because they were building this place then. Must have been about nineteen six or sev... about nineteen five, I guess. About nineteen five, it was.

So this house is about nineteen five ... sixty-eight ... sixty-eight years old?

There were the big doors, and the closets ...

This house is about sixty-seven years old? That would make it sixty ...

Well about fifty ... sixty ... fifty-nine years.

1:02:00

Sig, he'd get out of a lot of work, more or less. He'd go to school because he'd go to school for two or three months, and I had to go in the woods, and then that ... (unintelligible) ... teacher ... (unintelligible) ... then she came in, and boy, she just took right after me on different things. She said, "Well Johnson, you started with the rest of 'em, and they're finishing school." ... five months it was. And Dad, he was after ... the last year I was home ... he was after me, and wanted me to ... but I was into logging then, and I didn't go to school at all, the last year. I was about fifteen then,

How far did you go? Eighth grade? Or ninth grade?

No, I think it was the third grade.

Just the third grade.

But I went to school all my life.

Yah.

All my life. I went to school ... and took up music lessons ... and singing, and every other gol' darn thing. I didn't have much time for girls.

(laughter)

Well, you found time, though!

(laughter)

When does he come back for you?

Let's see ... when did you come back? Milton was just a baby?

*He was six-months old, when we came back from North Carolina.*

When was he born, then. Would it be nineteen ... about twenty-five ... twenty-four?

1:03:00 *Yes ... (unintelligible) ... he was ...*

You rented that house on Sanford Street.

*Yah, we ... (unintelligible) ... we were there about eighteen ...*

You sure it wasn't nineteen, five?

I had that nine years before we're married. There were seven lots ...

*No, he's talking about the house in Parchment ... on Sanford Street ... the one we rented.*

Well, yah ... (unintelligible) ... first got married.

*I stayed home ... ah ... then (unintelligible) ... we got back*

We paid twenty dollars a month there.

*Ah, that's what made me didn't wanna move, ya know.*

Twenty dollars a month!

A good price!

The Furst's paid our lights and all that stuff too, and ... (unintelligible) ...

What time it was ... before that ... we moved up north?

*We moved up there in thirty-eight, or thirty-nine ... I think it was.*

We lived there 'til thirty-eight, when we were building, or thirty-seven, or something ...

1:04:00 *No, I think it was built in thirty-seven, and thirty-eight we moved (unintelligible)*

*And they was supposed to be, ah ... kind of a sample home, or something. And ours was one of the first ones. And they went ... we, ah ... had four on one side, and... ah ...*

*... three on the other.*

*Three on the other.*

Seven houses.

That house is still standing there, isn't it? Is that house still there?

*Ours?*

(remainder is mostly unintelligible, unrelated conversation)

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[End]

1:05:38