Archives and Special Collections
Mansfield Library, University of Montana
Missoula MT 59812-9936
Email: library.archives@umontana.edu
Telephone: (406) 243-2053

The following index lists the major topics in the audio recording and the approximate point when they occur in the recording according to an analog cassette recorder’s tape counter. This tape counter index (TCI) has not been edited for accuracy by Archives and Special Collections.
This is an interview with George M. Petaja (GMP) on the subject of the Depression of the 1930's. Gladys Peterson (GP) mentions that he is of Finnish descent. She asks him where he was born. GMP says he was born in Milltown, Montana. His two older brothers and family came from Finland in about 1900. They stopped first in Michigan. His father was a coal miner. He worked as a miner in Stockett (sp), Red Lodge, Sand Coulee (sp), Roundup, and Cumberland (Wyoming). GMP's brother was born in Cumberland. He thinks his parents went to Ironwood, Michigan. He thinks his father was a coal miner for about ten years. There were seven boys and three girls in GMP's family. His father didn't want the boys to work in the mines so they moved to Milltown. The father got a job with the Anaconda Company. GMP remembers when they built the Western Lumber Company mill.

GMP thinks there were about 22 different nationalities living in Milltown at the time. He lists them. And most of them weren't able to speak English. GMP could only speak Finn when he first went to school. He says there were two teachers in the first grade because of the size of the classes. GMP family home was in Milltown. There was a Finntown in Milltown. Finn Hall. His family owned their own house but the land on which the house sat was owned by the Western Lumber Company. They rented the lot for about one dollar a year.

He talks about the corral and barn Western Lumber kept their horses in which was near to GMP's family home. He gives a description of where the corral and his house were. GMP claims he was the first white child born in Milltown. He mentions shaking hands with Granville Stuart in the Bonner School in 1913. Stuart was at that time librarian in Butte.

Continues talking about Stuart. GMP's father died when GMP was 13. GMP didn't finish high school. Had to support the family and at the age of 16 went to work at the Anaconda Company. Worked there for 18 years.

He worked in the molding department. Times were pretty good in the 1920's. When the Depression hit, GMP worked part-time. Sometimes he would work one day a week, sometimes two. There wasn't a demand for the
lumber. Mr. Lubrecht was in charge. GMP talks about getting the job. He talks about the Company store where the workers' family could buy and charge merchandise.

250-299 Continues talking about the store. Purchases which were charged at the store were taken out of the paycheck. Store was attached to the business office. During the Depression most of his earnings went to the store since he was supporting the family. He mentions that he didn't get married until he was 35. He mentions that there were lots of young kids riding the freight trains. They would leave home because they felt they were a burden on their families. They would take off in search of work. But GMP says there wasn't any work.

300-349 GMP says he made big money, $3.20/day. Most of the ACM employees traded at the Company store. Also mentions the Missoula Mercantile Company and its impact on many people. Employees at ACM could get a voucher to use at the Mercantile to buy clothing. The general stores in Milltown also let people charge, but the accounts had to be settled at the end of each month. Oscar Hamgrin(sp) and a Phillips(sp) owned the stores. Oscar Hamgrin and Charlie Sutton were owners of one of the stores.

350-399 Gives location of the stores. Talks about the construction of the Hamgrin store. GP asks if he owned a car during the Depression. He says he had a Model T but didn't have it during the Depression when he was working only part-time. There weren't too many cars in Milltown during the Depression. GMP says his brother was in the CCC.

400-449 Continues talking about the CCC. He says there a lot of the men in Milltown who went into the WPA. Talks about them making toilets in Missoula and hauling them to Milltown. He describes the toilets. Also roads built by the WPA workers, Hoover Road, and trails. GMP says people felt fine about the WPA since it offered jobs and income. He says people were supportive of Roosevelt's programs and thought that Hoover put the country on the bum. Talks about the difference in attitudes and policies between Hoover and Roosevelt.

450-499 GMP says there were some people who went to college, but not very many. For women there weren't very many jobs. Only jobs available were in cafes, clerical positions, in hospitals. Most women generally quit their jobs when they got married. In some cases married women weren't allowed to work. His wife, Doris Petaja(DP) was working at the University at the time and didn't tell she was married so she could continue
to work for a while. This was in 1939. GP asks if there were many people on relief or welfare in those days.

GMP says there were quite a few. He says he isn't sure how that worked. Churches tried to help out, but didn't have a lot of money for such works. There were the Lutheran and Catholic churches only. GMP attended a church which was predominately Swedish and Norwegian. Itinerant Finnish preachers would come through and hold services in people's houses. It was an occasion for all the Finns to get together in someone's house.

GMP says not very many people moved out of the Bonner and Milltown areas during the Depressions because there was really no other place to go, it wasn't any better any place else. Hunting, fishing and poaching was done for food. GMP also mentions there was a lot of moonshiners around, one up every gulch. Whiskey would be hauled in from Canada.

GP asks if people in Milltown had gardens. GMP says people had to carry water for washing, cooking and everything else, so it was impossible to have a garden. He does mention the community gardens on the ACM property. GMP doesn't think the gardens were going during the Depression. GP asks what people did for entertainment during the Depression. GMP says hunting, fishing. He was in scouting work for about 20 years. Describes his scouting activities. Dances were held above the pool hall in Milltown. Movies were also held there.

Mentions some of the movies which came there. Cost ten cents to get in. He would go into Missoula for movies also. Mentions the Wilma, the Alcazar. Goes on to talk about listening to the radio. Not very good reception. Phonographs.

He left the ACM at the time of a strike. Went to work for the Missoula Mercantile Company. Worked there for 13 years. Worked another 13 years for Bon Marche when it took over the ownership of the MM. C.H. MacLeod and the Walter MacLeod were managers of the MM. It was a part of the Bonner Mill, but was no longer connected to the ACM.

END OF SIDE A

GMP is talking about A.B. Hammond. GP asks when he thinks the Depression eased up in the area. It was when the orders for lumber began to increase and more workers were needed in the forest and in the mill. In
Missoula, the Forest Service started hiring more men. GP asks if the Depression had any lasting impressions on him. GMP says it made a person aware of money in an ambivalent sort of way. Tells a story about a person who didn't have anything during the Depression but became a successful farmer afterwards.

050-099 Tells another story about a man he met hunting who was living out the Depression in a cabin, waiting for it to be over so he could go back and find work. GP now begins to ask DP some questions. She came from Grinnel, Iowa, to Montana in 1934. She came because of her mother's poor health. Some of her relatives were already in Montana. She tried to find work but wasn't able to. Did find some work at Flathead and then at the University dealing with cooking and food. Her father and mother sold most of their possessions before moving out and had a tough time of it when they first arrived. DP talks about getting married. At the time, she was working at the University and living at Corbin Hall. She got room and board and $30 a month.

100-149 This would have been in 1937 and 1938. She met GMP on a blind date. Got married in Hamilton. No one was supposed to know since she continued to work. She had to quit though when she announced she was married. After she had been married for awhile, she went back to work. Policies about married women working changed with the war. DP says that in Iowa, they had huge gardens and they always had plenty of food. Her father had worked as an engineer in a school back there. Although it was difficult when they first arrived in Montana, her father finally got a job in maintenance at the Federal Building.

150-153 GP asks if the Depression had any lasting effect on her. DP says she doesn't think so. She doesn't remember it as too much hardship. She had a happy home and that was the main thing.

154 END OF INTERVIEW