Dennis Sain: Today's Thursday, June 4, 2009. We're talking to Manx Skillicorn about his life growing up in Camp 9 and growing up at Woodworth and his history of working for Anaconda Company [Anaconda Copper Mining Company]. So Manx?

Manx Skillicorn: Okay, where do I start? From the time I went to school at the Woodworth School?

DS: Yes.

MS: Well, I was born in Missoula, raised here on the place that we still have today. Went to the Woodworth School through seven grades. Then in 1958 when they shut Camp 9 down, they moved my dad to Bonner and to the Twin Creeks operation. So I went through the eighth grade in Bonner and then high school in Missoula, of course. At the Woodworth School there were times when there was probably 15 students, and then there was other times when there were two of us in school. Donald James' daughter was one, and I was the other one. So it was quite an education growing up. It was quite a shock to me when we moved to Bonner and went to a school where there was more kids in my classroom than there was the whole school here.

Then after I got out of high school, I spent three years in the military—in the army. I spent 13 months of that in Korea, and then when I came back from the service, I went to work for the BFPA, the Blackfoot Forest Protective Association. I worked there for several months. I went to work in June of [19]66 and worked until that fall. Then that fall I was hired by the Anaconda Company and spent most of the winter scaling logs, learning to scale logs in the Bonner Mill with Percy Manning.

That spring then they had...We moved to the Thompson River in Thompson Falls. Anaconda Company had a reload operation up there where they would bring logs in on trucks to the landing, and then we'd off-load them and put them on rail cars for shipment to Bonner. That was in '67. Then I scaled logs and ran the Wagner unloading logs. There was two of us that worked on the landing—myself and Bob French—and we worked there until the Anaconda Company sold out to US Plywood in 1972. At that time they shut everything down, nobody really knew if they were going to have a job or not. Me and my family came back here, and spent several weeks back here on the place while they were cruising timber and making a
decision what they were going to do, I guess, and who they were going to hire back.

Anyway I got a call that they wanted me to come back to Thompson River so we went back there, and I worked for US Plywood who eventually became Champion International. I worked at Champion basically doing the same things—scaling logs, running the Wagner, running the troll (?)—doing just about everything that needed to be done.

We were a hundred miles from Bonner so if something broke down, you fixed it. If we had a major breakdown then they would send Shorty Thompson out of Bonner to come up and work with us. I spent several Christmases, two New Year’s Eves, underneath a Wagner, fixing a Wagner, so it would be ready to go the next day.

My family life. I had three children at that time and never got to spend a whole lot of time with them because I was at work at seven in the morning and got home anywhere from six o’clock at night to midnight. Sometimes we would be even later than that if we had a breakdown.

Then in...trying to remember...1977...Well, let me back up a little bit. When I first went to work for the Anaconda Company, I went to work for Dale Karkanen. Then I worked for Dale. He was still my boss at Thompson River, and then Rob Peterson was also a scaler and had been around for a long time. Rob eventually took over as my supervisor from Dale. Then in 1977 the position of scaling manager opened up in Bonner, and they asked me if I’d be interested in moving from Thompson back to Bonner, which I was. We loved it in Thompson Falls, but all our family and this place here—40 acres that we have—was my home so I wanted to come back here.

So in ’77 I left the landing and turned the reins over to a forester named Michael Thane (?), and Mike worked there as the supervisor until they shut the landing down. I can’t remember what year that was.

DS: You told me earlier, but growing up basically around Camp 9 as a kid, when your dad would take you to Camp 9...We’d like a little bit of what you did there at Camp 9 with your dad.

MS: I had a great time. Dad was working. I played the whole time. (laughs) No, at that time they had, during the summer months, they had a fire watch. Somebody had to be around camp, and I was pretty young, don’t remember or probably never really knew exactly what all Dad’s responsibilities were when we were there. I spent most of my time trying to catch some fish out of Twin Creeks...not Twin Creeks but Blanchard Creek. It was a lot of fun. The camp cook was there. We got great meals the whole time, for the weekend, and it was just a weekend job when the camps were...when the logging was shut down, well, somebody had to be around, I think, to man the radio and if they got a fire going.

At that time—and, Dennis, I know you know—that the first responders to a fire on Anaconda ground was Anaconda employees. When I worked for the BFPA, we used
to joke that the size of the fire was how many cases of beer it took to put it out (laughs). We used to put out fires when they were still small and not let them get big and turn into major projects.

That was about it as far as Camp 9. We'd go up there and spend the weekend. It was fun just being around the equipment for me, and then, like I said, fishing in Blanchard Creek. It was just different.

DS: Well now the days at Woodworth School...You said there was only a couple of you.

MS: Yes. When headquarters camp was going at Woodworth, they had a bunch of homes where the employees stayed. I can remember some of the old lumber jacks coming into the Cozy Corner Bar, and there was a little grocery store there. The folks that lived there were...I believe this is correct. I know Ben Schreckengost and his family lived there, and Donald Gains and his family. I believe Buster Johnson still lived there, but that one I'm not totally sure of. I used to run around with Ronnie James. When Ben and Isabel Schreckengost, when they lived there they had three children that went to school. Don and Lucille they had two that went to school—Ronnie and Jeannie—and then myself. There were some people that lived down at Cozy Corner, and they had a couple daughters that went to school there. I can't recall their names now.

Like I said earlier, it was an adventure going to the Woodworth School because the number of students fluctuated quite a bit. Ben and Isabel Schreckengost, they moved out first, and they moved, I believe, to Victor...Well, Buster Johnson, if I'm correct when he was there, he may have moved first, and then Schreckengost and then Jameses moved out.

We had some great teachers. One of the teachers that I will never forget...she just passed away here not too long ago. She lived up in Ronan and that area—Mrs. Dinwitte (?). Whether it was two students or eight students that she had, she taught us. I was learning seventh grade stuff when I was in the fourth grade. Everybody was taught pretty much the same. She was a real nature lover, which we used to take a lot of nature hikes. We'd go up Cottonwood Creek, and she would point out all different kinds of plants and just everything. We'd turn over rocks and find bugs, and she'd tell us what kind of bugs they were. That was different. Like I said, it was quite a shock going to the Bonner School because we didn't do any of that kind of stuff. In some ways when I got to Bonner, I felt like I was behind the students that were there and the learning curve, but I made it through the eighth grade and into high school, through high school, so I guess I done all right.

DS: How about the days at Cozy Corner? Your famous family band and some of the parties at Cozy...I came to a couple of them. (laughs)

MS: Well, yes. My dad played the drums and then the bullfiddle, and my mother played the guitar. I had one uncle that played several instruments. He played the banjo and the Hawaiian
guitar and saxophone. Then years ago another uncle played the mandolin but he...that was in the early days, and that was before I was born that they had that band going. The only thing I know of that is the stories that my uncles and my dad has told, and some of them might be a bit embellished (laughs). I don’t know.

Cozy Corner used to be a hopping place at times. You had people coming in from Ovando, Missoula, Seeley Lake. They’d come in, and the folks would play all night long. Every once in a while in more recent times, and I’m talking about the '70s, the '60s, late '60s, '70s, Bob Simes (?) would come up with his banjo, and he’d join in. Then there was a couple people from Seeley Lake that would come down, and they would join in. Old Pickle—old PD—played...not the flute but the...

DS: Clarinet?

MS: Clarinet! Yes. That must be your other...There was a fellow up there named...boy, that’s stretching my memory...played the accordion, and that was...I'll think of it in a minute, but I lost it now. He was a really good accordion player, and he'd come down and join the band. Partied all night (laughs).

DS: Well, just your life here in Skillyville. I mean—

MS: Well, I thought it was a great life. I have a sister that's five years younger than I am. Her and I pretty much grew up here by ourselves. I mean as far as kids go, we were just the two. I done a lot of exploring, and at that time...

(knock on door)

Judy Matson: We have a guest coming so we’re going to pause this.

Note: This interview was paused and never resumed. It is not clear if the interviewers returned at a later date to finish the interview.

[End of Interview]