

Maureen and Mike

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**Oral History Number: 422-028, 029**  
**Interviewee: Oliver "Ollie" Hill**  
**Interviewer: Suzanne Vernon**  
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Suzanne Vernon: Tell me about your folks? What on earth ever gave them the idea to move here?

Oliver Hill: Well, there was a bunch of Finlanders. They all worked at the ACM in Bonner. When the Homestead Act started up, they all wanted to come up here. Most of them were living in the ACM housing. There was Jalmar Maki, Jacobson, Becks, Kohlemeinens, and my dad and mother. My dad and mother got up Buck Creek because it had birch trees. There are no birch trees down here, but there are up on Buck Creek and in the old country, birch is one of the prime trees going. In fact they had birch farms, where they raise birch. They'd cut it up and use it as firewood, when it gets to about three or four inches. So that's how my folks ended up up there, instead of down here with the rest of these Finlanders.

SV: So the rest of them did come up together?

OH: Yes. They were all in the sequence here. Maki, Jacobson, Becks, Kohlemeinen. Then there were Hollopeters...(discussion) Then Drury's on the end of Charles Road. That's where everyone went to get their mail. Hollopeters lived up on the corner where the pole yard is. Then up the road they lived, too. Just beyond the ranger station in there. They had property in there. Ann Hollopeter had a place across the road. The rest was all government land. Later on Lydia Strom come down and put the store in. After her husband died, they lived up on Rumble Creek, she come down and started the store up. As far as I know, there was quite a few of us went to school at Rumble Creek school. I went there. It burned down. That ended my school here.

SV: Where were you born?

OH: I was born on a streetcar between Missoula and Bonner. My mother was on the way down, 1916. See, you have 1918, the year all these people filed the Homestead Act, all recorded. Well, they were here in 1916, to do the improvement on the land and stuff. By that time they all had the improvement on the property. Houses, cabins, buildings. So their improvements were in so they filed. That was all done in 1918. But everybody was in here in 1916. I was only 6 weeks old when I come back. My mother went down from here to Missoula, July the first, she got on a streetcar in Bonner, going to Missoula. My dad took her down in the horse and wagon. Half way between Bonner and Missoula I was born. Dr. Reynolds. He was the ACM doctor. He happened to be on the street car. He delivered me then he dropped me off at the Thorton Brothers Hospital, that's what it was called, on Front Street. Then we come back. Mother had to stay there, in those days, about a week. Then we come back and went to flat, Milltown, Buck

Martin's wife, Ailee's folks (spelling?) and we stayed there until Dad was able to come down and pick us up. And we come back with an old Buick. That Buick ended up on the other side of the Summit.

SV: Didn't make it past . . . ?

OH: There were stumps in the road and everything else. It just tore the bottom out of the Buick. Dad just took all the stuff off the running boards. You know they had accordion pleated running boards with all the stuff you store in the back end, piled it on the bank there. Just cramped the wheels and pushed it down towards the lake. It set there for years. Finally the last I seen was the back end of that thing. That was it. Then we came up with Rains, he was a packer for the government, Forest Service. He come along, he lived right at that big place down there where there is a meadow, field. Big buildings and stuff. That was his place. Pete Rovero bought it later. Anyway he come along with a horse and a wagon and brought us up to our place. That was in 1916.

SV: It sounded like you guys all got together. . .

OH: They all worked together down at the Bonner mill. They were all pilers on the big lumber piles and stuff like that. Dad later on when we left here, mother and I went to Fort Missoula, Dad went to Bonner and he became the (river) ? boss at the mill there. Unloading logs and stuff off railroad cars. They used to load the cars up there. Used to have a big log pond there by Clearwater, just when you cross the bridge. Clearwater Bridge on 200? Well that big, whole field was all logs and they used to roll them into the river. They had big log runs in those days. Later on they put the railroad in. Clean up to Cottonwood. My dad was down on the other end, course. Whenever they got a log jam or something he'd have to come up and find out where it was. He'd break the logs loose or maybe even have to dynamite the things, the log jam, to get the logs going down the river again.

I would come up here during the summertime when I was going to school to help Maki make hay. Any of the families that were here, they are all gone, except me.

SV: Well, Maki's didn't have any kids?

OH: I was like adopted son to them. So was Ernest, down at Bonner, Milltown. Ernest Rante (spelling?) Arnie just passed away a few weeks before my wife did. They used to come up all the time in the summer. From Butte. We used to have big hoop-te-dos here. You know where the Cold Creek Bridge is there? On this side there's a big sand bar? That's where the Fourth of July party was for years. Then we'd catch fish all over. Big fish fry. And homemade beer. Wine. And then they'd get Canadian whiskey down in a keg. Bootleg. Well, Doctor Koessler, Gordon Ranch, he used to have big parties. Had all his Eastern friends come out. All the people. Everybody would get through with haying? He'd throw a big wingding. Barbecued maybe two or three beefs. It would last for a week. My dad used to play accordion.

SV: What kind of people were the Finlanders?

OH: Industrious. Hardworking. Friendly. There were locks on the doors, but none of the doors were locked. Our place up there? Our place up there? If you stopped in you helped yourself. Or you'd leave a note: "Why the hell don't you stay home once in awhile?"

Andersons, the old lady Anderson. She's a Finlander. Northern part of Finland, Sweden, you know. My mother and Mary Harris. We used to walk down to see her. Then the Thomasons up there. Morris and Henry. You might be down to Andersons overnight and somebody come to your place. Well, they'd make coffee. If there was anything around to eat they'd help themselves. Didn't make any difference. Everybody expected it. But nowadays I don't think you could do that.

SV: Did your dad work in the woods in Finland?

OH: He worked on board ship. He jumped ship. See, in the olden days in Finland it was a serfdom. A lot of people tried to escape. The higher families had them as servants. You had a lot of that in the old country in the old days. Finland, Sweden, even Russia. Norway. A lot of those people. . . escaped. My dad happened to be on board ship, him and his brother. And my dad jumped ship in New York. Course he was a musician, so he was able to get by playing music and stuff. He ended up in Hamilton Montana, where he met my mother.

SV: And your mother was from Finland, too?

OH: Finnish, Hollander. Dutchman. My great-grandfather was a Dutchman. Anna was her name.

SV: Did your dad play other instruments.

OH: Played the violin, accordion, saxophone. Whatever you wanted to put in his hands. He was with the Casaloma (sp?) band when he come into Missoula. He liked Montana so he went up to Hamilton. Then he went into lumber business. Mills and stuff. They were all good log men. I don't know where they learned their craft. They helped each other build their houses. Like Henry Kohlemeinen, and Maki. In fact they come up and built ours, up there. My dad was down here helping them build. I don't know how they knew communications in those days. But they seemed to know. "We need help," and so they'd all come down. Beck, Maki, Kohlemeinen. . . Hollopeters and all of them. They'd help anybody, building and that. They turned out to be pretty good log builders. All hand work. No chainsaws, those days.

SV: Your house was a little different.

OH: Yeah. My dad decided, they made the dove corners. Ours was overlap. Ours was the first overlap house that was in here. Another one was overlap. Ousleys. (spelling). It was leaning

toward the creek. Where Greenough lives. The old building. That's where that went to. Stroms was in on all this, too. Same time. See, the two sisters here. Mrs. Strom and Mrs. Kohlemeinen, were sisters. That's how they come together. All together, see there was Becks, had two boys. I was a one and only. My sister died, she'd have been two years younger than I am.

SV: She died when she was little?

OH: Yeah. Maki's didn't have any kids. Jacobson's had a boy and a girl. And Strom's had two boys and a girl. Uno, Tauno and Eria (spelling?) And Thompson's (Thomason?) had three boys and one girls. Henry Thompson. Ousleys had (where Greenough lives) they had two (kids). I used to walk down from their place to go to school. Used to walk across the creek. They even had a foot bridge for me. Then I'd meet Uno, Tauno and Eria and we'd walk to school, Rumble Creek school.

SV: Do you remember what the country around there looked like.

OH: It was all trees, until the homesteaders opened it up. It was done by hard work, I mean cables and hooks, blocks and tackles. They were pulling stumps and pulling them up. See that pile out there? (Points out the window.) Trees growing out of it. That was a pile of stumps that Jalmar (Maki) never burned. Our place you wouldn't even know it was cleared. Fifty, sixty years. (Trees have grown back.) Good seventy years ago.

SV: Did your folks bring up milk cows.

OH: We bought some from over by Ovando. And we had seven cows at one time, compared to Maki's who had fifty. But then Pete Rovero would pick up our cream. We had a separator up there. We'd separate it. We'd get maybe one can of cream and Jalmar would get maybe three or four. He'd mount them on his ole' Studebaker touring car and haul them to Missoula to the dairy. A week later we'd get a check. We'd have to go to Drury's, they had about the only place then, that had any kind of supplies. Or somebody would go to Missoula with the horse and buggy, or a car. They'd go around gathering from everybody. "What you want? What you want?" And you'd sign your check, you know, and send it along with them. They'd come back with the supplies.

SV: Do you remember what you had for meals?

OH: A lot of wild meat. And we had a big garden. Raised all potatoes and all the vegetables and stuff like that. Then we had a couple pigs and we'd butcher then. Then whenever they'd butcher a calf or anything like that they'd have a feast. See the liver and the heart and that, you couldn't. . . it was sent to Missoula to a packing company. So most people when they'd butcher like that they put them in cheesecloth like that and take it down to Missoula to Daily Meat Packing plant. And the heart and liver and everybody would have a feast.

SV: It was fun though?

OH: It was hard work. All those hay mows in that lower park, that's where they'd hang those animals when they'd butcher. You'd butcher in a bunch. We'd maybe bring down a calf or something, or a steer. Jalmar would have one and maybe Kohlemeinen would have one. maybe four or five animals would be butchered. Then somebody would take all the animals down to Daily's. I don't know how they did it. It was a big deal. Then that was at the start. Then later, the buyers would come out. But that was later years. Just about the end of our session here. They'd come out and buy the animals. They'd have ways of getting them out. Maybe by truck or something. People didn't have to worry about butchering their meat that way. They'd butcher them at home, I mean, what they were going to use. Wild meat most of the time. A lot of pig and a lot of elk and deer.

SV: Do you remember that you had elk?

OH: Oh yeah. We had elk. Elk Ridge, right between Strom's and our place. That was Strom's favorite place, and our favorite place. And Thompson's favorite place. Wait for the elk to come along that ridge because they had a salt block. A salt flat or whatever you want to call it.

SV: Did you ever have trouble with bears?

OH: Not too much. We had dogs. Pretty good dogs. In fact one time we had quite a few dogs up there. Jalmar had his dogs, maybe one or two (at his house) but he'd have two or three dogs up at our place. They used them for hunting mountain lions and stuff, and bear. They were vicious. I had a shepherd dog. She'd protect me from Airedale. Shoot a mountain lion out of a tree and boy they'd tear right into it. You'd have to have chains and stuff to keep them (under control.)

SV: I used to wonder why they had Airedale up here. . .

OH: They used them on bears and mountain lions. We had a dog that would really bay go along with the bunch, but most of the time it was the Airedale. Something about the way they barked would scare a bear and would tree a mountain lions. . . A lot of the hides are sold. Primarily. Like in the rest of the trapping. A lot of the hides. . . Karakanen, John Karkenen, was kind of a taxidermist. He mounted a lot of the hides. He'd sell them back. . . to New Yorkers. They'd come out here hunting. Big droves of them. Koessler would haul them over into the Bob Marshall. They'd see a mountain lion skin with a head attached to it. They were willing to give quite a bit of money. Take it home and display it. There was one hide here. It's gone now. In our place, I think it's over in Maki's. Yeah, it was in Maki's and Gregg's got it. It's over in the other house there. That's about the last one I know of that's a mountain lion. That is maybe fifty, sixty years old. Oh, we had a lot of them. A lot of mountain lion. And grizzly.

SV: Did you ever have grizzlies, sows and cubs, come around, just feeding?

OH: The only thing we had was mountain lion tracks around. Looking in the window. Looking for something to eat, I guess. That was when snow was on the ground. We didn't have too much trouble with bear. They were more. . .

[End of Tape 1, Side A]

[Tape 1, Side B]

SV: Did you ever hear how Condon got its name?

OH: There was an old guy who had a little log shack up here on Condon Creek, almost to the foothills. And Conklin, when he opened the store here. He's the one who named it Condon. The store. He was later on kinda the mail center, you know where the drop off place for mail. Later on became a post office.

SV: But this Condon wasn't a homesteader?

OH: He was a trapper.

SV: Maybe he was only here fall and winter.

OH: I don't know. But he had a cabin on the creek up here. But he used to go down to Conklin's store all the time and hang out there. And I guess Conklin liked him so well, he put down the name Condon.

SV: It seemed like the Forest Service had called those old buildings "Condon" too.

OH: Oh yeah, but that was after this mail stuff.

SV: Some of those Finlanders built some of the buildings at the old ranger station?

OH: Yeah. Even at Salmon Lake. They built Clark's place. That was built by Finlanders. And Kelly's on Swan Lake. Ole' Peavy Kelly, from Anaconda company. We used to go down there and watch ole' Clark and him, and Daily. They'd have boats. Who could get the best boat, the biggest boat. They'd have races at Swan Lake. Dad used to carry me on his shoulders down there to watch them. They'd have big old motors on them. They'd belch and smoke was all over the place. Oh man. They'd race up and down that lake. I had a good seat all the time. Well, all these guys worked on that lodge on the point out there, that house of Kelly's and the cabins they had out there for his guests. He was head of ACM. Man, I was only about six years old I guess then.

SV: You would remember stuff like that. Pretty impressive.

OH: Oh it was. I wouldn't have minded being on one of those boats. They'd sputter and roar? Man. I don't know where they got the motors for them. They'd really belch. I don't know why they picked Swan Lake. The main reason was Kelly's place. They'd bring their boats in there. You couldn't get in on the other shores unless you had a boat. Go in Sixmile and go across to his place on boat.

SV: They almost had the whole place to themselves.

OH: Well, practically. Where the sawmill used to stand where the saloon is there and stuff. And I think there's a bar in there now. There used to be a sawmill in there. A lot of guys worked there in the wintertime. A lot of these guys worked on the sawmill. Hiked down there from up here. Snowshoes, skis.

SV: But your dad never had to do that?

OH: He stayed and later came down at Bonner. We were already living at Fort Missoula. Came up in summertime.

SV: Do you remember anybody talking about a fire in 1917, or 1919?

OH: Oh yeah. My dad was on that fire, years ago. All these guys were on that fire. That was 1916, 17. When that fire burned through there, it burned that whole country. It took in a big area.

SV: But then there was a later fire. In 1929?

OH: I was on two fires here. Lion Creek fire. And what's that. . . back of Jim Creek, up in there, there was another fire. It wasn't Jim Creek but it was over a ways. But the Lion Creek fire. Art Anderson and I won the contest. I was about sixteen years old. Fifteen. (Summer) We had to fell these big trees into the fire. We had a contest. George Erickson was down there. He was another one that helped everybody. Sept has his place now. From Polson. Just on the other side of Gregg's here. Jalmar's place, if you want to call it that. He had both these places (one homestead?).

SV: Did that Lion Creek fire burn quite a bit?

OH: No. We got it under control. Maybe twenty five acres, something like that. We caught it before it got going. It was calm. No wind. We got it pretty well controlled around the perimeter of it. We were cutting all of these bigger trees, felling them into the fire. Always try to fall them into a bunch of trees, knock them all into the fire. Art Anderson and I were on one saw, a two-man saw. Crosscut saw. George Erickson was on the other one. I think it was Fritz Kaser with George Erickson on the other one. Fritz worked for the Forest Service in those days. My dad worked for the Forest Service. He was already over in Philipsburg, contracting.

SV: What did your dad do for the Forest Service?

OH: He was an assistant ranger in those days. That's was before you had to have a college education. Once he got out of Forestry School then they got to be assistant rangers. Just about all of them, Jalmar Wirkkala, my dad, and Henry Thompson. They all quit. They'd send out a

bunch of these college kids. It kind of irked them a little bit, so most of them gave up on the Forest Service.

SV: Did they supplement their income with trapping?

OH: Trapping and anything they could think of. I mean, to make money. Log house building and all of that stuff. That bunch of hides that was in front of our house (in the b&w picture that Swan Valley Historical Society has) come out of the South Fork. All that stuff. Jalmar Wirkkala and my dad, and Jalmar Maki was in there for awhile. I have pictures of my dad, in fact I think with the old tipi tent. The tent was down in the snow. It was down below him, and had a stairway built into the snow so he could climb out of the tent. That's where they trapped. Him and Jalmar Wirkkala, they all had their own tents.

SV: Did they all use the tipi style tents?

OH: Oh yeah. It was easier to handle. Had a floor in it. Which is quite unusual. The Indians didn't have floors. The Indians used to camp in our yard. They'd come over from St. Ignatius.

SV: What did their camps look like?

OH: They'd put them right in our apple orchard. There'd be three or four tents. They'd come over hunting. (Families, kids) Hunting parties.

SV: What route would they take over to the Bob Marshall?

OH: Over Holland.

SV: I bet they fished.

OH: They done everything. There was a lot of salmon even along these rivers, you know. They'd hang them up and make jerky out of them. (Maybe talking about cutthroat, given the date.) Sometimes it kind of got rank. They used ashes to make jerky. You don't see that done nowadays. Now they've got salt and brine and all of that stuff. Ashes, they was white. You know, ashes after they burn they turn white. They'd use that preservative for the meat. They camped in our yard for about three years. Dad knew them, being in the Forest Service and stuff. Later on one of the kids, that used to come over, he became. . . Camas Hot Springs, you know where the Indians built that nice plunge over there and everything else? He came in charge of that place. The last time I went over to Hot Springs there was nothing there. I don't know what happened to that place.

SV: Were you just a kid when the Indians camped there?

OH: I was just a kid. There'd be two or three Indian kids there. We'd play...cowboys and Indians and everything else. We had a lot of fun. They were a good bunch. They were Salish. I got along good with the Salish.

SV: Probably looked forward to them coming.

OH: Oh yeah. They'd stay about two weeks. Get their old drag things out, and hook them up to their horse packs and take off. Dragging everything. What they call travois.

SV: Do you remember them cutting the inner bark off the trees?

OH: Yeah. For medicine. Well, what is that stuff they got now? Yew tree. That's medicine. It's supposed to be for medical purposes. Quite a few places along the valley here I guess they would use that.

SV: Do you remember your folks being afraid of Forest Fires?

OH: No. We had everything cleared around our place. Except for where we had the spring and stuff. But the rest was all cleared off down to Buck Creek and all of that. We didn't have any trees around at all, real close. It was just about like Maki's place. Second growth there now. After so many years, it grows in.

SV: It doesn't seem to take too long.

SV: You must have hayed the meadows where you cleared out?

OH: Yeah, we had alfalfa. Alfalfa done good here. But you had to hay it. When you hayed it, you'd only get one time for the whole year.

SV: Do you remember picking huckleberries when you were a kid?

OH: Yes. I used to sit in a patch and I'd pick about half the thing and then I'd eat half of it. I was one of those who wasn't a good picker. I've got a grand daughter who can out-pick me now, ten to one. My dad was the best picker of the whole works, maybe because he had musical fingers or something. He could take a water bucket and fill it while everybody was picking a ten-pound can. I don't know how he did it. We had all kinds of huckleberries, even made wine out of them. Good huckleberry wine. Everything you can imagine. Everything was canned. Canned your meat. That was the only way, outside of the wintertime, the only way you could keep it. Ball jars with the glass top and the rubber. Clamp it down. That was about the first kind of jar they come out with. Later on with the screw cap. The aluminum type of cap on it. Gray color. The inside had a glass interior inside the cap. Finally they got the ones nowadays.

We used to can everything. We'd put elk meat and pork together. That made good meat. Take a long time to can it, though.

SV: Then you had the garden stuff, too. And a root cellar?

OH: Yes, we had a root cellar. Couldn't find it, though. I know there's huckleberries in there, in jars and stuff, that could be pulled out of there. When we pulled out of there, we left everything there. In fact we went back, oh years later, there was nothing left. They even stole the grates out of the Monarch stove, the wood stove. They'd taken the front part out, pulled the grates, you know. Somebody needed it, so they took it. We had one of these fancy cupboards, there, with two drawers, one for flour and one for sugar, you know? Big. Hoosier. Glass front. That was gone. After the logging roads got in there, or maybe even before.

SV: Then the vandalism increased?

OH: All the horns off the front end of the cabin, they were all taken. Couple of royal crown heads there. Elk heads. Horns was all, not the head.

SV: Did they come out of the South Fork?

OH: I don't know. My dad got them. We had all kinds. Mountain goat horns, deer horns. But they were all. . . somebody just took the whole works. They were huge. About like Randy's down at Hungry Bear.

SV: Otherwise I just can't see why people would steal them.

OH: It was just the horns. Hide was gone off.

SV: Did you hunt a lot here.

OH: Not too much. I fished. I had a picture, I can't find it. Of Gyda and Jens and I fishing on Holland Creek, on a log across the creek. Three of us. . . my mother took pictures. See my mother was a photographer, around here. She was the only one who had a camera. She took a lot of pictures.

SV: The pictures that your mom took are probably scattered around.

OH: Yeah. She took a lot of pictures.

SV: Maybe the one I saw at Anderson's of Wirkkala was one of hers.

OH: I wouldn't doubt it. She had a Kodak, you know, lens and everything else. I think it was the only one around the country like that. She was quite avid at taking pictures.

SV: Where did Wirkkala come from? He didn't come at the same time as Maki's and the rest?

OH: Him and Dave Halme come about the . . . I'd say later. But they never homesteaded. Well, David did. Because watchacallem has their place. Meyers. Has Dave Halme's place across the river. But Wirkkala never did try homestead. He was more of a hunter and a trapper, and guide. He done a lot of guide work for Easterners into the Bob and all over, wherever they wanted to go. Never had any horses or anything else. They'd go like to the Gordon Ranch and get horses, or somebody else that had horses. He'd take them out. But he was here about the same time as the rest of them. But he stayed at Maki's or he stayed at our place or he stayed at Beck's or, you know. . .

SV: What did he look like?

OH: He was a fun guy. Although he had horses. Two horses. One was a pack horse and one he rode. But he was a guy that could shoot. We went to Missoula once, later on, and they used to have turkey shoots. They'd put the turkey in the box with the head sticking out. (Ollie makes a popping sound, and shapes his hand like a gun: "Pop. Pop") They wouldn't let him shoot anymore.

SV: He kept getting them all.

OH: But he'd go along, riding a horse and get gophers. Bang. With a pistol. That's all he did. A lot of those dudes would give him all their ammunition so he had a lot of ammunition to shoot with! He kept practicing.

SV: He didn't have family?

OH: Yes. But later on. He married Mrs. Hill down in Milltown. I think he adopted the three girls: Lily, Violet and (?). Her kids. And later on she married Meskie, after Jalmar died. (Meskie was Virginia Stark's dad, had the Sorenson place where Kauffman's and Stark are now.) She was married to Mick Hill first, then she married Wirrkkala, then she married Meskie. Meskie and her had two kids. And Virginia Stark is one of their kids. The other sister is over in St. Ignatius.

SV: Well, Meskie was a homesteader?

OH: No. He married Mrs. Kohlemeinen. (After her husband passed away. Henry.) Henry gave me my first haircut. I wouldn't let my dad cut it. My dad was a pretty good barber, too. He'd do a lot of the guy's hair around here. But I wouldn't let my dad cut it, so Henry says, "I'll be easy on you. I'll cut your hair." So right in front of the place that got burned down the other day (Old Kohlemeinen homestead, log house next to Super 8 with big barn) on the porch there, he cut my hair. And I was crying. I had curly locks and everything else. My dad was standing right in front of me.

SV: So you knew this Henry?

OH: Oh yeah, he was quite a buddy of mine. I'd let him do anything, but I wouldn't let my dad! My dad was quite a prankster and a joker, so. . .

[End of Tape 1, Side B]

[Tape 2, Side A]

(Discussion continues about Finlanders. . . )

OH: Martha Anderson and Eria Kohlemeinen, were maybe a little bit older than Ed Beck, but pretty close to the same age.

SV: But he (Laine) stayed here and his folks left. So when that estate sold and he died, it went to Older?

OH: Yeah. Older was the sheriff here. And then, I don't know if Kathy Koors bought it from him or what, but she has it now. But that's where Jalmar Laine's cabin is. They've made it into a sauna. Later on, he built another one, it's been added on. Bigger. Older done a lot of work there, fixing that up. It's still there. The river might take it, I don't know. I don't think you could build there anymore. Flood plain. This part down here, on this side of the river, belonged to Beck's. Can't build there anymore. Graham wanted to build there but couldn't. Benington bought part of that now. He's buying the whole works, even this place (Ollie's three acres). I'm going to be in Arizona.

[End of Interview]