

Maureen and Mike

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**Oral History Number: 396-070**  
**Interviewee: John T. Hoag**  
**Interviewer: Bob Brown**  
**Date: September 2010**  
**Project: Bob Brown Oral History Collection**

BB: Okay, I'm interviewing John Hoag at his residence, or near his residence, at the head of the Lake McDonald in Glacier National Park.

JH: I'm the senior resident up here. Possibly.

BB: (laughs) How long have you been here, John?

JH: Well, I first came here in 1927. My folks were divorced. My mother and Elin Parks' mother, Genevieve Gudger—

BB: Genevieve Gudger was Senator Walsh's daughter.

JH: Senator Walsh's daughter.

BB: And Elin Parks as granddaughter.

JH: My mother and Genevieve, Senator Walsh's daughter, had been roommates at Vassar College in the class of 1912, I think. And in 1910, I know my mother came out here as a guest of Genevieve's and the Walshes. At that time they came up to the Walsh cabin at the head of Lake McDonald in a boat from Apgar. That's the only way you could get here in those days. There's no road up here. Over the years, I was lucky to have that connection and that's how I came to get to Glacier at all.

BB: How did your family acquire the property here?

JH: In 1927 I was living with my mother in Poughkeepsie and my mother and father got divorced, and I think Genevieve touched base with my mother and thought it would be a good idea to come out for a vacation out here. My mother and I, who were living in Detroit at that time, were invited to come to the Walsh cabin and spend a couple of weeks. 1927. We came on—the Orient Limited, I think, before they had the Empire Builder, the Great Northern. They were still running steam locomotives there.

BB: So, John, you were born in New York?

JH: I was born in Poughkeepsie. My mother had gone to Vassar and married a townie in Poughkeepsie. My dad—

BB: What's a townie?

JH: A townie is somebody who's a resident of Poughkeepsie. My dad had been born in Kinderhook, New York, lived next to Martin Van Buren, and had moved to Poughkeepsie and met my mother while she was a student at Vassar in Poughkeepsie.

BB: And when were you born?

JH: In 1914.

BB: And so you first came here in 1927?

JH: 1927. And we came out here and stayed at the Walsh cabin, the lovely log cabin on the north end of Lake McDonald. And while we were there, Senator Walsh was there, and he was nice enough to take me to Snyder Lake up back of Lake McDonald lodge on horseback and taught me how to fly-fish.

BB: Really?

JH: I had fished in the Catskill Mountains around Poughkeepsie while I was a kid, but I didn't know how to fly-fish. I didn't know anything. But when you go to Snyder Lake, the fish converge on your hook up there. Anybody can catch fish up there. All you have to do is put your fly out, and they come from all directions. The idea is to pull it away from the smallest ones.

BB: (laughs)

JH: Anyway, he taught me how to fly-fish up there. I'm not saying he was a jovial fishing companion; he was a very laconic individual, Senator Walsh. His idea of going on a trip was to say, "C'mon, get on the horse and let's go." We would go to the hotel, and he got the horses—in those days you could get a saddle horse at five dollars a day, and they furnished a box and had a wrangler go along with you to take care of the horses. So when you went fishing up there at Snyder Lake, you didn't have to worry about the horses running back to the corral or something.

Anyway, that was the start of my lifelong addiction to flyfishing. He was a master fly caster so I learned from an expert. Otherwise, I was not regarded as an equal on these trips. I went several trips with him, also to Trout Lake, and I don't think he fancied me as a conversational equal by any means.

BB: You were just a teenager.

JH: Yeah, I was like 12 years old, and his total conversation with me was "C'mon, let's go get on the horse." When we came to leave, "Well, let's get back on the horse and go home."

Both: (laughs)

JH: Otherwise, he left me to my own devices while we were fishing over there. But he was—I totally appreciated his concern to even bother to take me along.

BB: That's wonderful. It was just you and Senator Walsh.

JH: Yes, right.

BB: Would you describe him as athletic because of his ability to cast a fly?

JH: No, he wasn't athletic. He was a bookish person more than anything else. But he had a—he was very adept at fly-fishing, very intense about it. When he did something, he devoted his entire attention to that job at hand. There was nothing else going on at all there.

BB: Was he a good horseman?

JH: He had the ability to get on these rented nags and ride. I don't know whether I could appreciate whether he was a good horseman or not. He was a horseman to the extent that he didn't get thrown off.

BB: Did you know him in context with your parents visiting with him? Did you ever sit in on a conversation that included him?

JH: Not that I remember. I don't think he ever thought that I was up to engaging in any sort of rational conversation.

BB: But were you able to eavesdrop on conversations he might have had with your parents or other people who were here?

JH: No, I always saw him as interacting mostly with his daughter Genevieve and his grandchildren, Elin and Gloria Gudger.

BB: Did you meet Elin? When you were there then?

JH: Oh yes. While we were staying at the Walsh cabin, Elin and Gloria, Genevieve's two daughters, were there, and they were—well, let's see, I was 12. They must have been—

BB: 6 or 7?

JH: They were 8, or 7 or 8. Elin was 6, maybe 7. And Gloria was several years younger than that, four years younger than that. And they—I was allowed to eat at the table with the adults,

Senator Walsh and my mother and Genevieve, and whoever else was there, possible Jeannette Rankin or someone like that. And Mrs. Nolan...

BB: Judge C. B. Nolan from—the widow, from Helena?

JH: Yes, forget her first name [Harriet].

BB: Well Judge Nolan was a law partner of Senator Walsh, I think.

JH: All right, well, she was there most of the time when we were there, I think. Then the children, Elin and Gloria, had a nanny whose name I can't quite remember and they sat at a separate table and ate by themselves. Somehow they weren't deemed of (laughs) adults yet or something.

BB: Was it a formal kind of dining situation?

JH: Yeah, it was a quite set affair. I was sort of mute most of the time while the adults carried on a conversation. Anyway, we had very nice meals, and they had a cook bringing the food out. The atmosphere was congenial but not relaxed.

BB: And I suppose Senator Walsh was the head of the table?

JH: Senator Walsh was relating stories of his political things that went on in Washington and Helena that I really didn't appreciate too much. I didn't understand what was going on. He had a lot of conversations going about all that kind of thing all the time.

BB: Describe his voice. (Pauses.) Was he authoritative, was he a heavy voice? How would you describe his voice?

JH: I don't think that—his voice was rather muted, soft. But he commanded your attention certainly. People were not interrupting him by any means.

BB: He presided over the Democratic National Convention a year later in 1928 when he would have probably had to project his voice.

JH: I can remember, I don't know what time of the year this was, this convention.

BB: It probably would have been in the summer of '28. You were here in the summer of '27.

JH: Yeah, but we were here for several consecutive summers, and I can remember listening to the Democratic Convention on the radio down in this big old house that we're talking about. So my mother and I were guests for two or three years running down there. Then in '28, it must have been that we were listening to the convention when he was chairman, and then we

thought that we were possibly running out of our welcome there. Maybe we were overdoing things, and so next door—Geduhn, Frank Geduhn—who had been the homesteader up here at the head of the lake—

BB: G-A-D-O-O-N?

JH: Geduhn. G-E-D-U-H-N. He was an old German who had been one of the first rangers in the park and had homesteaded the whole head of the lake here. His homestead comprised every bit of the property that was now at the head of Lake McDonald, including the Ladows(?), the Hoag home where we now live, which is the remnants of the old Geduhn homestead. I think he had sold also to the Senator Walsh. And I don't know how the Wheelers, Senator Wheeler, acquired his property, but it all was part of the Geduhn property at one time. We decided we would rent a place from the Geduhns, so we rented their big house for several summers or part of the summer. Then in 1937, after Frank Geduhn had died several years before that, Mrs. Geduhn decided she didn't want to live up here anymore. She offered to sell the property to me and I bought the property in 1937 from her and been living here ever since.

BB: You did meet Mr. Geduhn?

JH: Pardon.

BB: Did you meet Mr. Geduhn?

JH: Yes, I remember him.

BB: He was a colorful, early forest ranger.

JH: Yeah, he was an old German, hearty old gentleman who was a very accomplished woodsman and horseman and everything else. He had ranged over this whole country and knew it all very well. And built all the cabins on his property. He had built them with his own hands with some local help possibly. A very accomplished all-around woodsman.

BB: Did you ever go into the backcountry with him?

JH: No, I never did. He had retired from the Park Service by the time I came out here in 1927 so he had—his career at Forest Service had been over several years before that.

BB: Now also another one of the neighbors here was Senator Burton K. Wheeler.

JH: I can't quite remember when I first met up with the Wheelers, Senator Wheeler. I don't remember when he was elected to the Senate, whether he was a senator in 1927 or not.

BB: Yeah, he was first elected in 1922.

JH: All right, so I can't quite remember when I first touched base with the Wheelers. But I did have a lot of memories about the Wheelers at various times. I can't quite remember exactly what year it started, but I—they were a large family. Senator Wheeler had how many children? Four or five? Let's see there was Edward, there was—

Another voice: John.

JH: No, no there was—

BB: Five I think. [Wheeler had three sons and three daughters: John, Edward, Richard, Frances, Elizabeth and Marion.]

Another voice: No, there were six.

JH: Five children.

BB: Were there six?

JH: There was Elizabeth, there was Edward—

Another voice: Elizabeth, John...

JH: Hmm. John. There was...

Another voice: Edward, Robert

BB: Richard?

Another voice: Diana's mother, Francis.

JH: Francis.

Another voice: And there was Dick.

JH: Dick.

Another voice: And then there was Marion.

JH: Marion. Right. They were a family of go-go people. They came to the lake here, and their idea was to range all over the whole countryside. And they went fishing practically every other day to Trout Lake, I think, or they went to Logging Lake. They had horses. They got around here. They knew the country as well as anybody. They were much more adventurous as a group than

Senator Walsh ever was. Senator Walsh, to my knowledge, only went to Trout Lake when he wanted to go fishing. But the Wheelers would go hiking and they would go climbing and they had sailboats, they had horses. They were go-go people, and they included me in lots of their trips. (laughs)

Interestingly, in those days the senators had wielded a lot of influence over the Park Service people. Somehow or other they had a real sense of command. They would call up (phone rings)—I can remember the story was that Senator Wheeler or Mrs. Wheeler would call up the Park Service and say, “ We want to go to Kintla Lake.” The Park Service would jump, and they would get the ranger to go over to Kintla and get the boat ready to go up to take the Wheelers up to Kintla Lake. Up to the head of the lake they would have the Snowshoe Cabin open for the Senator’s party, and they would go and spend a week at the Snowshoe Cabin up there. When they wanted to come home, the Park Service would come with a boat and take ‘em back home. I can’t imagine Senator Baucus doing anything like that nowadays. That would get in the paper.

BB: (laughs) Different era.

JH: Yeah, totally different era. Rank had more privileges then, somehow or other.

BB: Were you a particular friend of any of the Wheeler children?

JH: Yeah, I was friends with all of them. I used to go fishing with Dick, the youngest boy, and had a semi-sweetheart attachment to Marion. I got along with all of ‘em very well. And I got along with—Senator Wheeler was a much more easy person to get along with than Senator Walsh. He was affable and told stories and treated you like an equal. Where Senator Walsh was gruff and distant and a man of few words, why Wheeler was always talkative and jovial.

BB: Do you remember a story? Do you remember an experience or anything with Wheeler that typifies him?

JH: I remember, I think I went with both of ‘em one time, and also with Genevieve Walsh’s husband, Emmett, who was a naval captain. We all went to Arrow Lake and after dinner Senator Wheeler and Emmett Gudger went out in a rubber boat, and when they came to shore after fishing, Emmett got—they pulled the boat up on the beach. It was a very steep beach with a drop-off, and Senator Walsh had been sitting on the tube on the back end of the boat. When Emmett got out of the boat, the boat flipped up and Senator Walsh went down in the water with a lot of expletives—

BB: (Laughs)

JH: With a wet mustache and had lost his hat. His son-in-law was in the doghouse even more than usual.



BB: Was his son-in-law in the doghouse with him sometimes?

JH: Yeah, he was always in the doghouse. I think the son-in-law had a hard time keeping up to his wife's estimation. Genevieve had a fixation on her dad, Senator Walsh. He was a prominent man, and it was a hard thing for the son-in-law to live up to that.

BB: Now did Wheeler go in the lake too?

JH: No.

BB: He might already have been out of the boat.

JH: He was trying very unsuccessfully to suppress a lot of laughter.

Both: (Laughs)

JH: Yeah, it wasn't a good idea to be laughing at Senator Walsh. He didn't take things in a jovial way like that. (Laughs)

BB: Did you meet Mrs. Wheeler too?

JH: Mrs. Wheeler was sort of the invisible hand that had the agenda for the whole Wheeler family there. I don't believe that she was a shrinking violet by any means. She never appeared to have control, but somehow she did. Behind the scenes she seemed to be pulling all the levers there.

BB: You know, there are historians who believe she had a great influence on Senator Wheeler.

JH: Yes, there's no question about that. That was quite apparent to me. Although I never had any real reason to back that up, but I could tell that was the way things went there, the Wheeler family. I think this was perfectly acceptable to all of them. I think Burton was very much in favor of that arrangement.

BB: (Laughs) Did you have dinner at their home around the table with them ever?

JH: I was there for dinner quite a few times. It was always a very pleasant affair.

BB: More informal?

JH: Yes. That was a happy camp there. They always had lots of guests there, including the Native Americans from over at Browning would come over. They were very welcome there with the Wheeler group, and I never saw them hanging around with the Walsh family. I don't think they were really asked to come to the Walsh cabin. But they were always welcome at the

Wheeler cabin. The Wheelers knew a lot of the old homesteaders up in the North Fork, like Jean Sullivan, who later became head of the road crew up here on the pass and in the Park Service. They made quite the—be friendly to everybody. Was no problem with them. That was just their nature.

BB: Do you remember any conversation or anything ever with Senator Wheeler? 'Cause you would have been a little older then. Wheeler didn't leave office until 1946—

JH: Yeah.

BB: So you would have known him for many years.

JH: Yeah, I knew them for a long time. I can't remember any real anecdotes about it, but I always had a very pleasant time with them. I was welcome there, and I felt (pauses) at home when I went down.

BB: Did Wheeler have a sense of humor?

JH: He had a great sense of humor. He told anecdotes. He could reel 'em off one after another about his early days in the law practice in Helena and various things. Even his some—stories about his senatorial colleagues in Washington, but I don't remember the particulars about 'em. But he had a host of good stories going all the time.

BB: Anything else about the Wheelers or the Wheeler family?

JH: I probably could come up with a bunch more things, but right offhand I can't quite sum it up.

BB: Anything else about Senator Walsh?

JH: I think I've about had it for a few moments anyway. Let's take a little siesta here.

BB: (Laughs.) Okay. There you go.

Interview Resumes:

JH: I feel I was pretty lucky to come as an outsider here and to have fairly intimate experience with two U. S. senators. Not often that you get an experience like that, so I think it was something I've always appreciated.

BB: Now there's only one Wheeler daughter left, right? That's Marion?

JH: Right.

BB: Rest of them have already passed on, I think, haven't they?

JH: But Marion is carrying on the Wheeler tradition. She still has the spark about representing that family, so I treasure her friendship.

BB: She still returns to Lake McDonald in the summer?

JH: Yes, she's been here every summer. (pauses) Her children, her two boys were good friends of mine, and they worked on the trail crew here for years. They have a lot of experiences here, and they're rough-and-tough couple of boys, very accomplished. One of 'em is an architect and the other is a teacher of botany, I think at New Mexico State or someplace. Very accomplished people.

BB: Now Edward Wheeler was Burton K. Wheeler's law partner.

JH: I think he was; I don't know. I'm sure he was a pretty able attorney. That's just my impression that he had a pretty sharp mind. I don't—he was not the most affable person in the world as far as I went, but I always respected his intelligence. He had a lot of go power on the trail. I know I used to go—I went on several hikes with him and I had a hard time keeping up to him. I had little short legs, and he was—(laughs) I had a lot of endurance. I could keep up with him, except with a little extra work on my part, but I did it.

BB: Did Senator Wheeler go on any of these hikes himself?

JH: Oh yeah, he was a good hiker, good horseman, and he loved to go in the backcountry and go fishing. He was—his children got their ability and love of the outdoors from him certainly.

BB: Was he a good fly caster?

JH: He was an average fisherman. I wouldn't say he was really great, but he enjoyed it. I think he had other things on his mind possibly more than I did. I was single-mindedly after a trout, but he was probably thinking of senatorial duties.

BB: Now you know there was a—he was under serious consideration to run for president in 1940.

JH: That's right. I can see him as a vice president better than as a president ,somehow or other. I think he was too mercurial in some ways. He switched parties and he switched his ideas several times. I think he would have been a very iffy person as a president; although I admired him as a person, I just don't think he was possibly presidential.

BB: When you describe Senator Walsh, you described him as a man with a powerful intellect who people naturally took seriously. When you describe Senator Wheeler, you describe him as a sort of an affable, easy-going kind of an individual. Are those descriptions pretty accurate?

JH: Yeah, that's a very apt characterization of both of them, I think. I think they were—Senator Walsh, you could say he was formidable. When you were talking to him, you watched yourself and you didn't treat the thing lightly. He was a person that you had to take very seriously at all times. There was no fun and games with him whatsoever.

BB: And Wheeler?

JH: I never worried about saying anything to Senator Wheeler. I could talk with him like a Dutch uncle because he took things in stride. If you said something wrong, he would laugh it all off.

BB: How would you describe the relationship between Senator Walsh and Senator Wheeler?

JH: I really have no idea what they thought of each other, although I just gathered that Senator Wheeler thought that Walsh was sort of a stick-in-the-mud. (laughs) He wasn't fun to be with so I think that Wheeler possibly just treated him with kid gloves and he just didn't interact with him anymore than he had to. (pauses) That's just my impression, okay? I have no really—I don't know exactly what went on in these people's minds about the other one but—

BB: Because the Wheeler children were around a lot—

JH: Hmm?

BB: Because you had a lot of contact with the Wheeler children, you probably didn't have much contact with Senator Wheeler by himself like you did with Senator Walsh.

JH: No, I did. I had more contact with Senator Wheeler than I did with Walsh, yeah.

BB: Even one-on-one? Even just one-on-one?

JH: Yeah, I did. I got along—I saw much more of him over the years because, of course, Senator Walsh passed away in 1932. Right?

BB: 1933 I think.

JH: '33, and Wheeler was still around here for a good many years after that. So I had more interaction with the Wheeler family by far than I had with Walsh.

BB: Anything else? (laughs)

JH: I think you've pumped me dry on this one.

BB: We've pumped you dry?

JH: No, I could probably think of other things if I have enough time.

Another voice: Did you ever go to Arrow with the Wheelers?

JH: I think I was there at the same time that Walsh was up here, and I described this incident with the rubber boat. I think they were all there together at that time. I can remember going to Kintla Lake with the Wheeler family and spending a whole week up there. Mrs. Wheeler was in the Snowshoe cabin up there at the head of Kintla Lake, courtesy of the Park Service. She acted like—she and Simeon, who was the Filipino houseboy they had, actually he was treated as one of the family there. He was not really a servant, but they treated him as one of the family. Mrs. Wheeler and Simeon would keep the cabin going and they would both go out fishing, but then they cooked all the meals. I stayed up there with the whole family several times for a whole week with them. We had a wonderful time up to the upper lake. Went up to—walked up to Boulder Pass, went swimming up there, went fishing in both of the lakes, and went huckleberry picking. I was privileged to be treated as one of the group up there.

BB: Senator Wheeler was defeated in the Democratic primary in 1946 and you mentioned that he was mercurial. That he—I guess—I only know what I read, but I've read that he started out as—they called him Bolshevik Burt. He was a left-wing Democrat and when he ran for vice president in 1924 on the Progressive ticket, he and Robert La Follette accepted Communist electors in some states.

JH: (Laughs)

BB: So he was a real left-winger in the 1920s. Then he had some clashes with Franklin D. Roosevelt from the 1930s. He ended up near the end of his career in the U. S. Senate as one of the most conservative Democratic senators.

JH: Right.

BB: Okay, did you ever have any conversations with him after 1946 when he continued to come up here? Anything that would give you the impression that maybe he had drifted into the Republican camp? The Republicans wanted him to run for governor.

JH: Well, I didn't hear that from him personally, but I heard that from Marion, from his daughter Marion. That they never said that nasty word Republican, but they did have Republican ideas somehow or other, that family had. So I gathered that this had come as a result of Wheeler's shift over to these same type of ideas. I never heard that officially from him

or they never said that out-and-out to me, but I heard talk that made me think that they were actually—had bolted the party completely.

BB: Now Wheeler lived until the early 1970s, I think. He was still coming up here when he was a very elderly man and you would have probably had conversations with him in the fifties and sixties and seventies when he had gone through this period and become more conservative? I don't know if you can remember any ideas or any comments he might have made during that period of time.

JH: No, I never talked politics with him much more than I can remember. So whatever ideas that I got about his political leanings were gleaned from the remarks of his children in that regard, not anything he said particularly.

Another voice: Elizabeth? Did she talk about that?

JH: (pauses) No. I don't think I got it from Elizabeth. I got whatever I gleaned in that regard would have come from Marion, although I knew Elizabeth pretty well. Elizabeth and her husband, Ed Colman, asked me to go to Jamaica one time and spend a couple of weeks with them down there. They had a winter home in Jamaica and I went down there and had a delightful time with them. I say, Jamaica's not my idea of great place to go, but (laughs)—

BB: Now Colman family is one of the lantern family. They had the gas lanterns and stoves.

JH: No, no.

BB: Oh, different family?

JH: This was another—they had, I think, Ed Colman had some kind of a manufacturing business in Milwaukee, some machine tool outfit or something like that. I don't really remember exactly what his business was.

BB: Anything else?

JH: No, you've exhausted my limited mentality here. (laughs)

BB: Okay, well thank you, John.

BB: Okay, Robert.

Another voice: Jack, Jack, I bet you most people your age can't give nearly that much.

Another voice: He's got a ton more, but he just needs to recharge the battery here.

JH: Yeah, well I possibly have some more, but I can't think.

Another voice: It'll come naturally when it's—

BB: Well should we wait for a couple minutes and—

JH: No, I think I've had it for today.

BB: Okay thanks, John.

[End of Interview]