

INTERVIEW WITH MARTHA JOHNSON
MCFARLAND, MICHIGAN
APRIL 10, 1981

SUBJECT: Life in Lathrop, Michigan

START OF INTERVIEW

UNKNOWN: Where were you born?

MARTHA JOHNSON: In Sweden, my dear, you ought to know that by this time. [laughing]

UNKNOWN: How far did you go in school?

MJ: Till I was fourteen going on fifteen. That's the time they graduated over there.

UNKNOWN: Did you go to school in this country?

MJ: Yeah, [inaudible]

UNKNOWN: What were things like when you were young in Sweden?

MJ: It was wonderful.

UNKNOWN: Did you do much when you were young over there? Did they have much to do?

MJ: Well, had to go to school to learn to knit and learn to sew and crochet. You know the government made you do that so you know how.

UNKNOWN: Were you allowed to go to dances or that?

MJ: No. No. [laughing]

UNKNOWN: What was it like coming over on the boat?

MJ: Oh, it was wonderful. We had good food and good bed, a room of our own. We didn't have to [inaudible] at anybody. Cause I had first class ticket.

UNKNOWN: How long did it take?

MJ: Let's see now. We stalled in England for three days on account of the storm. So, the time was seventeen days.

UNKNOWN: What was it like growing up in Lathrop?

MJ: Well, it was kind of a quiet town. Two beer taverns. [Laughing]

UNKNOWN: Where did you meet dad?

MJ: In Lathrop.

UNKNOWN: How did you meet him?

MJ: Oh, I don't know. At a dance, I guess. [laughing] He didn't dance but I did.

Sharon: Ask her about her school here.

UNKNOWN: How long did you go to school here?

MJ: Let's see, about three years.

UNKNOWN: In Lathrop?

MJ: Yeah.

UNKNOWN: Did you work anyplace?

MJ: No, I only had my poor sisters. We had seven kids. [laughing] It took the both of us to take care of the brats. They were all boys. And they were devils.

UNKNOWN: Was there much social life in Lathrop? I mean many dances or that?

MJ: Well, I don't know, people got along good, you know. We did have a minster of our own. They had one come from Marquette. And then later years reverend Hammond took over. I suppose you all remember him.

[giggling]

MJ: He did look kinda cute. Years ago.

UNKNOWN: When were you married?

MJ: In Lathrop. The minister from Escanaba came up there.

UNKNOWN: When? What year, do you remember?

MJ: 1909?

UNKNOWN: No, no, 1907. My brother was born in 1908. 1907. And you had seven children?

MJ: Yeah.

UNKNOWN: Where did dad work when you married him?

MJ: He had a tavern.

UNKNOWN: Where did he work before that?

MJ: Then [inaudible] he started the store business.

UNKNOWN: But where did dad work before the store?

MJ: In the woods. He had timber. He cut timber.

UNKNOWN: When did he learn to be a black smith?

MJ: Well, I guess he learned a little in Sweden but he took it up in this country. It was an old man by the name of Eguild[Inaudible] that learned him.

SHARON VELLA: Ask her how many children she had.

UNKNOWN: I already asked her.

SV: No.

UNKNOWN: Oh, how many children?

MJ: Did I have? Seven. You asked me that one before. [laughing]

SV: Good work.

MJ: I think she's more [inaudible] than I am.

UNKNOWN: What else?

MJ: Now what? When I was around eleven, there was just a little girl that was killed, you know. Some women run over her and killed her. On the picnic ground. Lost control of her car and plowed in on the picnic ground.

UNKNOWN: What was her name?

MJ: Mona.

SV: [inaudible] Okay. When did her husband die?

UNKNOWN: When did dad die?

MJ: Let's see. I had it all up there in my book, but it got, it was at Rosie's... Well, you was married. What year did you get married?

UNKNOWN: He died in 1954.

MJ: I think so.

SV: What did you do after that?

MJ: [Inaudible] I didn't do anything.

SV: Where?

MJ: Here, [inaudible], Chicago.

SV: What did you do in Chicago?

MJ: Oh, yeah, but my daughter Helen, yeah, I stayed with her for quite a while.

SV: Did you work?

MJ: No.

SV: Just took care of the kids?

MJ: Nah, I didn't have to work because Uncle Sam gimme enough. [laughing]

[BREAK IN TAPE]

UNKNOWN: Do you remember the Depression?

MJ: Oh, do I? I guess I do.

SV: Can you tell us about it?

MJ: They came with some food, you know the government, you had to go to the town hall and get a little of something. And meat wasn't for sale anyplace. You know that you buy, like you buy ham. You buy a little can, a small can, like a soup can. And that be little meat and gravy in there. And then you had to look for your own potatoes. And they were fifteen cents a can. And, medicine you couldn't get unless you had a doctor's prescription. And the county didn't pay for it, you had to pay for it yourself. You had to pay for your own doctor. And the bread that you get at the bakers, you get twenty, twenty five cents for a small loaf. And it was half rye and half wheat, there was no white bread. And you get no white flour to buy, either. Even if you had the money you didn't get it. That was all shipped across.

UNKNOWN: I think she's kind of confused with the war.

MJ: Especially when we had the World War when Eisenhower was over in France. That was awful.

SV: Can you tell me about it?

MJ: Yeah.

UNKNOWN: Was it worse during the First World War or the Second World War? Which was worse?

MJ: Well, I don't know. They were just about the same. The Second World War you know, anything that was able to be moved, clothing and food, had to go across to help them. And they never helped us back. They put the French on their feet in England and Ireland, and we were left to hunt for our self.

UNKNOWN: Who do you think was the best president we had?

MJ: Ol' Ike.

SV: Why did you like him?

MJ: Well, he saw business start to pick up. He saw that the old people got care, medicine and food. And, you could get a free doctor. [Inaudible] The worst people around us was the Russians. They robbed, they stole, they stopped the boats and took what they wanted. [inaudible] I had one nephew, well, he got hurt over there a little. And they had to ship him back to this country. He lift something and he got ruptured. And there wasn't very that many good doctors over there, you know. So they shipped him back to New York to get medical care for his rupture. Well, that was a flop. Then there was a place in California, they shipped him there. And they patched him up a little there. But he died with his rupture.

SV: What was his name?

MJ: Carl Dieburg[inaudible]. It got to he could be [in] at school for a couple of years but he had to give that up. And he married, but his wife never got any help from the government. She had a little money of her own. Bought a little place. She's still living. Merckle's her name. And least I hope so, I never hear from them.

UNKNOWN: Do you think that is better to live in this time than years ago?

MJ: Oh, yes.

UNKNOWN: Why is it better?

MJ: The government helps you. And you have free doctors, the older people have. You have health care and dental care. Its better.

UNKNOWN: What do you think of them always shooting the presidents?

MJ: Well, I tell her the truth. There's some outlaws from Mercer who had to get over her and get jobs and [inaudible] their records and, and in the first place all they wanted to do was do away with it and take the land. In the first place.

[BREAK IN TAPE]

MJ: When my father went to have Sweden, Finland and Norway, the Russians had invaded Germany already. And he could take us children and tell us all about it. They, you know the food was scarce. And they got hurt. There was no doctor. But he got home safe.

UNKNOWN: Do you remember when they used to have a lot of Communists around Rock?

MJ: Do I ever, them ol' devils.

SV: Tell us about it.

MJ: Well in the first place, they had money you know. It seemed so they were never lacking money. And they built a little place, Laverne could tell you were that was about. There they had their communist meetings. And tried to destroy what the American people was trying to build up.

SV: What happened to them?

MJ: Well, they finally cleaned them out. I don't think there's very many there left now. And the building was torn down. Laverne remember all of that. Ed could have, you know, my nephew, but he did. But Laverne could've tell you. They had their meetings and tried to destroy everything that was good. There is a few left. You remember that guy, what was his name? He had something to do with the insuring. He was a woman chaser and somebody shot the gun and lost his arm. What was his name? Neil Crokey[inaudible]!

[laughing]

MJ: Well, he finally up and died, anyway.

[BREAK IN TAPE]

UNKNOWN: How big was Lathrop when you lived there?

MJ: Well, it was quite a few families. There was a lot of timber you know, and there was job. I imagine at one time it was about, let's see, must have been close to two-hundred people in that little town. There was camps all around, you know. And that rich family, that was about fifteen, twenty in that family that had that great big house. Yeah. It was quite a few.

UNKNOWN: How many stores did they have?

MJ: Oh, Heavemen's[inaudible] had a big store, then Gibson Perkins bought them out, and then Pa bought them out. Somebody had itchy fingers, it burned. [laughing]

UNKNOWN: How many churches?

MJ: Well, that was quite, it was up my where Labombard's used to be. There was a red building. It was quite big. But when Labombard's bought it, nobody came anymore and they tore it down.

UNKNOWN: They had a school there, didn't they?

MJ: Well, our school lasted until the busses started to run around.

UNKNOWN: Did it only go up to the eighth grade? How high up did it go?

MJ: Yeah, they taught to the eighth grade. I think, no, the last teacher Miss Gleason was.

UNKNOWN: And then they had a creamery too, didn't they?

MJ: Oh, yeah. That's where grandma's house is now. I don't know who owns it.

UNKNOWN: And they had a big depot, didn't they?

MJ: Oh, a wonderful depot. That sell the [inaudible] from all the way from Escanaba to Ishpeming. There wasn't any smaller ones in between. There was agent there days and there was one there till twelve o'clock at night, an extra one.

END OF INTERVIEW