

*Note by interviewer about the interview*

AN ORAL HISTORY INTERVIEW

WITH

AMBROSE J. AIRAUDI

Submitted By:

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## INTERVIEW OUTLINE

### I. Family Background

- A. Father
  - 1. Birth Place
  - 2. Work

### II. Mining Employment

- A. Mines Worked At
- B. Technology
- C. Safety Conditions
- D. Rate of Pay

### III. Unions

- A. Historical Development
- B. Problems in Organization
- C. Benefits

### IV. Mine Disasters

- A. Accident Sites
- B. Fires
- C. Flooding

### V. Personal History

- A. Occupational Selection
- B. Jobs Held
- C. Food
- D. Hours
- E. Mining Conditions
- F. Regrets
- G. Personal Achievements

### VI. Future Trends

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After the initial class meeting I was anxious to get started on this project. I had previously been unaware of what an oral history was and its importance to historical documentation. My first impression was to believe that this would be an easy task requiring little preparation. I soon found that I was greatly mistaken and that an effective oral interview requires a good deal of preparation and practice.

The first barrier I encountered was in locating a person to interview. I asked friends and relatives for assistance and this eventually led me to an attempt to contact Dr. Daniel Hornbogen. Dr. Hornbogen was acquainted with Chief Kawdawgum and was instrumental in Marquette's business community. I had learned that he spends winters in Florida but was hopeful he had returned to Marquette. I decided to contact his son, Dan Hornbogen, for further information. After several attempts I finally reached him and learned that Dr. Hornbogen was in Florida until May and was unable to do an interview.

After my initial setback and disappointment I spoke with Dr. Ruth Berens, who gave me the name of a neighbor, Frank Taccolini, who she felt would be an interesting person to conduct an interview with because of his vast mining experience.

My initial contact with Mr. Taccolini was by telephone on Tuesday, April 14. I introduced myself to him and explained my purpose in calling. He seemed a bit confused at first but after I thoroughly described the project he seemed eager to help.

I learned over the phone that Mr. Taccolini had worked in twelve different mines, all of which were now closed, and had done just about every job possible in mining. I set up an interview for Tuesday, April 21 at 11:00 a.m. I realize that I took a short cut here in going from my initial contact to the interview. I should have set up a meeting with him to have the legal release ready and present him with a copy of possible questions. However, with my transportation to Negaunee limited and the April 25 deadline nearing, I decided to conduct the initial meeting and interview at the same time.

After the phone call I started to do research on mining to prepare relevant questions for the interview. I also had some prior knowledge of the development of mining in the Upper Peninsula through previous history courses. I was particularly interested in technological changes in the mines as well as mine disasters, so my questions were centered around these topics. I also became interested in the development of mining unions and hoped Mr. Taccolini would be able to answer questions about this as well.

After preparing questions, I proceeded to organize my equipment for the interview. I bought two high quality, one hour cassette tapes as well as fresh batteries for the recorder.

I tested my voice on the recorder and read the operating instructions to be certain I would be prepared in the event of a malfunction. I also collected a note pad, two long extension cords, two pens and pencils, extra batteries, and the legal release form to ready myself for the interview.

As fate would have it, I developed a terrible cold over the weekend before the Tuesday interview. My recorded voice lacked some of its usual clarity, but I set out to complete the interview anyway.

My interview was set for 11:00 a.m. in Negaunee. I left 45 minutes early in the event I couldn't locate his home or had car trouble. I arrived at his house at 10:35 and while I waited in the car, read over my questions. At 10:45 I went to the front door. The house was freshly painted and the yard well groomed. I knocked on the door several times but there was no response. I returned to my car to wait until 11:00 in case he had gone out and would return in time for the interview. At 11:00 there was still no movement in the house but I knocked on the door again. There was no answer so I decided to phone him in case he was home but timid about answering the door for strangers.

Just as I was about to leave, a neighbor called me over to his yard. He informed me that Mr. Taccolini had been taken to the hospital the night before with kidney problems and wouldn't be able to meet me. The neighbor, Mr. Ambrose Atraudi, told me that Mr. Taccolini suggested I interview him. He also told me that he had been a mine worker and was also

appointed to do safety inspections for the federal government. After hearing this I was anxious to interview him. I attempted to set up another time to meet because I wanted to do some preparatory research first. However, Mr. Airaudi said his wife was terminally ill and that they would be leaving for Marshfield, Wisconsin for an operation that day.

Realizing this was my only opportunity to do an interview with him, I thanked him for his willingness to talk with me. I described the purpose of the interview and explained his legal rights. I inquired if we could go in the house so I could set up the tape recorder but he requested that we stay outside so that it wouldn't disturb his wife. I then suggested that I take him to a restaurant for coffee and do the interview there, but he didn't want to leave in case his wife needed him.

Mr. Airaudi then suggested that I set up my recorder in his garage and we could do the interview there. (It was fortunate I had packed the two extension cords.) As he signed the release form I tested the recorder. Since I had no background information on Mr. Airaudi at all, I had to play it by ear in asking questions. Reflecting on this experience I realize that although these circumstances are unusual, there are occasions where an on-the-spot interview becomes necessary.

Ambrose J. Airaudi is 66 years old and has been retired from mining since 1969 because of an accident on the job (explained in detail on the tape). He appears to be in excellent health and was very eager to do the interview. I was very grateful for his willingness to help, especially because of his wife's illness. He has an excellent memory

Mr. Airaudi was providing some interesting information on CCI's benefits and the houses they built when his wife's doctor arrived. This forced the conclusion of the interview. I thanked him and we parted.

That night at home I was nervous about playing the tape for fear nothing would come out. I started the machine and the tape started "with Ambrose Airaudi at 957 Pine Street, Negaunee, on Tuesday, April 21, 1981 by Leonard Olson". My first sentence didn't come out clearly and throughout the tape my voice, due to the cold, came out softly. As I listened, in the first question I said "um" and I was terrified that the whole tape was going to be poor. After a few minutes the tape got better but my voice was still quiet.

As I listened to the tape many more questions came to mind. I would like to have asked Mr. Airaudi about his schooling, details of his father's immigration, and other family history. I also wondered if there were any difficulties between the workers due to ethnic backgrounds. Other topics might have included the reason for mine failures, which current technological advances he wished were devised earlier, or if mine work had any effect on his health.

I now realize it would take a lot of experience to be able to think of good questions while doing an on-the-spot interview. I feel I asked good questions for the most part, although I wish I could have prepared in advance. If I had to do it over again I would also use a better recorder and have been in a better place to conduct the interview. The tape picked up a whirring sound and our place to do the interview was cold.

and dates and places came back to him quickly. He was able to expand on my questions and even anticipate what I was going to ask.

His recollections seemed very good and credible to me. He seemed proud of his life and praised CCI for all they did for him, even though he was injured and forced to retire. He is a very intelligent and well informed man and it was truly a pleasure to meet him.

As I began the interview we were standing by a work bench in his cold garage and were both nervous. My first question about his family background was delivered sloppily but he answered it well. After the first ten minutes we settled down and things went more smoothly. My major worry was that the recorder would not pick up our conversation and the interview would be lost.

As the interview progressed we got onto the topic of unions, which he had helped organize. I tried to get in-depth information on them, especially about the feelings of the employers and workers, but he seemed reluctant to talk about it. After my third question he looked rather disturbed so I dropped the issue.

About midway through the interview I found myself asking questions of little historical importance. He expanded on them but the information was trivial. We were interrupted by a neighbor at this point wondering what we were doing in the garage. This provided me an opportunity to collect my thoughts and mentally prepare some additional questions.

I tried to use good interviewing techniques and my questions warranted detailed responses. I particularly avoided asking questions answerable with a yes/no response. I felt that although the interview could have been better, in places it turned out well and it was a good first effort.

Mr. Airaudi provided a good deal of information of historical value. For example, he told me of a flooding accident at the Barnes and Hecker mine in which 54 people were killed. This mine was built too close to a swamp and because of heavy November rain flooding occurred, trapping these men inside.

Because of the variety of mining jobs he held, Mr. Airaudi was able to give me a fairly comprehensive impression of daily mine operations. His position as mine safety inspector also enabled him to give me information on many different mines.

As I mentioned before, the circumstances surrounding this interview were fairly unusual. However, I felt gratified to receive the information Mr. Airaudi was able to provide. I was pleased with the interview for the most part and learned that although the oral interview technique is hard to develop quickly, it can be of great historical importance when mastered.