

Louis Forsell, Clancy, MT. Swede-Finn from Butte, former Assistant Attorney General, former chief attorney for the University System, Interviewed by Teresa Jordan at the Montana Historical Society, January 2, 1986.

Notes taken at time of interview; not audited against tape. Notes checked and corrected by Louis Forsell.

Born 1914 in Butte, at home. Probably only the wealthy went to hospital. Father was from Finland, mother from Sweden. Father came to Butte in 1907, at the age of 18. Finland was part of the Russian empire at the time, the Grand Duchy of Finland, and at 18 Finns had to go into the Russian army. Many Finns wouldn't do that, left on their 18th birthdays. L's father was the first of his brothers to come directly to Butte. Others went to the mining regions of N. Michigan and then made their way to Butte. L's uncles--Emil, Richard, Arvid; also grand uncles, Victor, Joseph, maybe some others.

Butte paid highest wages in the US. They hadn't had mining experience in Finland, but the Finns were good workers, and they were not afraid of dangerous work.

L's father was a sawyer. In 1940, he went to Port Angeles, WA. Two men he came over with had gone to Aberdeen, WA, set up a cabinet shop. Successful. Had a plywood co-op. 40K acres of Olympic Peninsula pine. To belong to the co-op, you had to be Scandinavian. Father made more in 10 years in the plywood mill than he had in 35 years in Butte.

Mother came from Sweden, died when L was 2. Father remarried Swede-Finn when L was 6 years old. L is not sure why his natural mother came. A number of her family came over--she had, L thinks, 14 in her family. Her father was well to do. Her grade

school teacher had been Selma Lagerlof, who won Nobel prize in literature. Mother was from a beautiful part of Sweden--nothing like Butte. Some of her family went to the Puget Sound area, which is more like Sweden. She made the passage over with 2 other women.

L's early ambition was to be a donut maker, and then a fireman. Father, like most of his compatriots, said "no boy of mine will ever work in the mines." Father had had only 3 winters of schooling in Finland. It was always expected that L and his sister would go to college. L thinks that was a Butte characteristic--not like that in the rest of the state. Only a few went to college from other parts.

L remembers a study, can't remember exactly when, that Butte had more PhD, MD, lawyers, than high schools in 5 other MT cities combined. Thinks might be able to find out year of study from Sadie Erickson or Miss Blongren.

Went to Emerson grade school and Butte high. Went to the School of mines for 2 years. Graduated University of MT. Law school, U. of M. Had year at U. of Wisconsin. Undergraduate degree was in Liberal Arts--eng. and history. Had over 50 hours in Italian--was an N.C.O. intelligence agent in the service. Was sent to S. Pacific; never used Italian.

Raised in the Swedish language--flunked 1st grade because of language. Had an accent for quite a long time. Won an extempt contest--judge said that the only thing he could grade him down on was his accent. He was not ridiculed in school because of his accent; Butte was a very ethnic town. Emerson area on the flat had variety. Mostly Cornish.

Father was a Swede-Finn. Finland had been a Swedish Colony for centuries. Swedes lived in Fin. from 1600. But a distinct culture. There was intermarriage, but they maintained the Swedish language and culture. Talks about famous writers who were Swede-Finns. Like the Northern Irish, who were really Scots--except not that sort of animosity. Swede-Finns looked down on the Irish. "They didn't clean well enough under their stoves," was an expression used.

Forsells owned their home, a beautiful four bedroom English Bungalow on the flats, Lowell Ave. Uncle Emil built it--he had to leave Butte because his oldest son was ill. L's father bought the house from him.

Metallurgist, George Griswold, lived next door. Very famous, very honored. His Son, Gilette, now lives at Flathead lake. He is retired, was director of the Ft. Sill, Oklahoma museum, Very learned. Interesting family.

L's sister went to Montana Normal College at Dillon. Taught at Eldorado Bar--a gold ridge on the Missouri not too far from Helena, another other places. At Eldorado Bar, eight grades in one room. Married Bill Perry, who ran the school Board. He had gone Phillips Exeter, MIT, was from a first family of Helena. She now lives in Honolulu.

When L was a boy, Butte had many ethnic neighborhoods. But the flat was mixed up. Irish, Italian, Finn, Americans.

2 types of Americans: the managerial type, mining engineers, doctors, etc. And the poor white trash. Everybody else looked down on the white trash--didn't pick up their yards, etc.

Foreigners were very clean. They had contempt for the white trash-- of which were believed to be from Missouri.

Had friends on the flats; also up on Broadway. The Order of Runeberg. First was called the Finnish Temperance Society. Two types of Finns--Red Finns, who drank, and Blue Finns, who didn't. Many Finns recognized that Finns just can't drink. They now lead the world in alcoholism. Like American Indians, they lack an enzyme in their livers which breaks down the alcohol. L's father joined the Western Federation of Miners immediately on coming to Butte, and then he joined the Finnish Temperance Society. On E. Galena.

Father walked to work--didn't wear gloves or ear muffs. He would criticize L because L would wear them, say, "You won't be able to stand anything if you do that." But L had his paper route--6 miles. Remembers day when it was 67 below zero--coldest day in the nation. Had to have his papers out by 6 a.m.

Father was union, socialist, probably IWW. Until 1936, voted for Eugene Debs and Norman Thomas, and then he supported Roosevelt.

In 1924, Forsells for LaFolette and Wheeler; only one on block for them; everyone else was for the democrats.

Father would sing L to sleep as an infant with IWW songs. "Live on Hay/ Work and Pray/ There'll be pie in the sky when I die." The Internationale. "Keep the red flag flying."

About 1928, L got interested in Joe Dixon, great Montana Bull Moose Republican.

L had a little dog, made a blanket for the dog, said "Dixon for Senator" on it. He met him, shook his hand. Dixon said, "I want you to remember that you have just shook hands with a man who shook hands with a man who shook hands with a man...who shook hands with George Washington. Not at all condescending. L still remembers it. Dixon was very Patrician, a great orator, known as the Spellbinder of the Rockies. Had his glasses on a ribbon, a long cigarette holder. Anac Co spent a fortune to elect him governor over B. K. Wheeler. L's uncle told him that when Dixon got in the corner office, he snipped the wire to the direct telephone line to the Anaconda Co. Went for metal mines tax, other things like that. [Tax defeated in legislature in 1921 and 1923, but Dixon prepared Initiative 28, took it directly to the people. In 1924, Dixon voted out of office, but Initiative 28 passed.] Senator, Congressman, governor of MT. He had been bane of Anaconda Co, so when Hoover appointed him assistant Secretary of the Interior, Co was embarrassed, but nothing they could do about it. [Dixon died in 1934].

At that time, principle opposition to the Company came from the [progressive] Republicans. Wellington D. Rankin was an opponent of the Company, as was Jeannette Hauswirth, Republican mayor of Butte, overwhelmingly re elected because of his opposition to Company.

1912, Dixon was nat'l campaign manager of TR's Bull Moose campaign.

What L remembers of union activity growing up. Mine, Mill & Smelter Union--quiet for long time, revived in the 30's; a long

strike. [International Union of Mine, Mill & Smelters workers, reorganized in July, 1933; 6500 Mine, Mill and Smelter and craft unionist went on strike May 8, 1934; ended w/ victory for unions in September] L knew a lawyer who quit working for the An. Co when had was asked to go "behind the fence"--[behind the picket line; this was later strike].

L remembers bands of men going to houses whose men were behind the fence. They would demonstrate, yell, beat pots and pans. Not really any violence.

L. was Democratic chairman of Lewis & Clark County for a number of years, actively involved w/ Dem. party.

Politics in Butte--Anaconda dominated legislative slate from Butte. Elected from Butte were mostly popular employees which the Co managed to get elected. Hard for opposition w/o a paper.

When L graduated from law school in '54, 2nd from top of class (transfer student from U. of COLO had all A's; A's were much harder to come by at UM at that time). Had three prospects--to work as clerk of Federal Court of Appeals at San Francisco; it took seven graduates a year, top students from around region. Offer to work in Baker, MT. Offer to work for Arnold Olsen [then attorney general; US Congressman from MT's Western District, 1961-1971]. Took position w/ Arnold [as assistant attorney general at that time?].

Like many people who grew up in Butte, feels kinship to her. Says "Helena is my wife, but Butte is my mother." Butte had most gorgeous girls in the country; third, fourth generation, all mixed up ethnically, made for gorgeous girls.

No "400" in Butte. Butte values--not lie; not a coward, in

other words, courageous; never cross a picket line; women were almost sacred, even though we all knew the red light district when we were 18 or 19 years old; very moral; no promiscuity; no drinking among high school kids--at that time. By time L's sister graduated two years later, HS kids had drunken bashes.

During prohibition, it was estimated there were 250 Blind Pigs [speakeasies] in Butte. Had the cooperation of the police, they figured it was a Federal offense, and not their concern.

L never had a drink until he was 19.

Total abstinence in the home. Mother [technically, his step mother; L always thought of her as his mother] had a gall bladder operation; doctor told her to have a couple tablespoons of wine with each meal. Had no problem getting good port wine--Italians in Meaderville made wonderful wine. And mother would have her spoonfuls after dinner, would make a terrible face.

Mother worked, made tamales for Truzzolino. Lots of Swedish and Finnish women in his kitchen.

Had friends who were not Scandinavian because of the neighborhood. Remembers father's friend Harvey Duncan--he was a Scot, but his wife Ada was Swedish. In time, we thought of him as a Swede-Finn.

L met wife in Great Falls. L was a banquet speaker for the American Association of Univeristy Women held in Butte; he had won intercollegiate oratorical contest rep. Montana School of Mines. Afterwards, a lovely lady from Great Falls came up to him, said if you ever come to Great Falls, you must come visit. She was granddaughter of Sidney Edgerton, first governor of

Montana; her mother was Mrs. Plassman who founded the Great Falls Leader, had been on the faculty of the U. of MT. Later, L's buddy and he were going up to Fort Peck to work. Jobs very hard to get. Got on Elk Park Highway, each had 5th of whiskey in suitcase. Ended up in Great Falls next morning, in lumber yard, sick, broke, hungover. Went and looked up this Mrs. Maxwell. Went to her house. About 7:30 in the morning. She greeted them graciously, like nothing unusual about two derelicts. She was having breakfast. Uncle Max, her husband, there. And for breakfast they had this beautiful neighbor girl from next door with them. Unquestionably the prettiest girl in Montana. And certainly at the University. That was Doris. 4 years later, L looked her up and married her. Yesterday, had 46th wedding anniversary. Booze isn't all bad!

Tape 2, Side A

Wife, Doris, is "Old American." Has aunt who is Plymouth Rock Society, DAR, etc. Doris doesn't have much truck with that. But comes from very old American family--family pioneered in Ohio and especially Nebraska. Her great grandfather was in Sherman's Army of the West. Other family came to Utah w/ Brigham Young, though not Mormon now. Independent, Yankee type family. She was a philosophy major, straight A student. Trained in logic, good adversary on legal arguments.

Had arrangements--L would name the girls, D. would name the boys. Had three daughters. 1st, named after L's mother, Signe. She is Chemist for dept. of Agriculture, Salem, Oregon, before that, bio-chemist at excellent lab in Hamilton; also worked for

Horner Waldorf in Missoula; also a metallurgist for the Anaconda Co. Married name is Shepherd.

Lisa Perry--lives in Springtown, Texas, is commissioned to do statue for colliseum of Fort Worth. Very successful and much lauded Western artist. Member of Women Artists of American West. Very well known, many, many awards.

Youngest daughter is Chris.

Things that work towards Butte's success in the future: Don Peoples, Chief Executive. Quite a man. Also, work ethic in Butte. L remembers reading report when Port of Butte went in many years ago. Butte was chosen for the Port because of the work ethic there. Butte had highest worker productivity in the state. In Butte, you were just raised with the idea of hard work. L worked for the CCC, worked in the mines two years, worked as a gandy dancer for the rail road. You just did those things, did what you had to. He wanted to make money to get back to school. "There are people in Butte with wooden legs, but not many with wooden heads." The toughest of the tough races settled in Butte, made it. To be a miner, had to have high native intelligence. You could be illiterate, but to survive, to drill 40 holes, to know how far to put them in, to know how much powder to put in, to bring that drift out so that it was 7 feet wide and 9 feet high, and all that went with it--that took intelligence. Foremen used to come up through the ranks; those that came out of school, out of School of Mines, used to work underground. Democratic people, feeling that all men are equal, this man is as good as you are. Don't know if later management, out of school,

not coming up through Butte system, had that.

Eccentrics accepted in Butte. L remembers Serbian Mary. If you had social gather in your home, maybe at 10 o'clock at night, L remember her knocking on the door. She was a wanderer. Don't know if she had a real home. His mother would let her in, give her coffee and some cake. Then she would go on. She was retarded, probably. She was never molested.

Shoestring Annie--L remembers her crutches, her anger.

Nickle Annie--"do you have a nickle, mister? A nickle, mister?" Much later, when she was in the county home, someone told L that one Christmas she had wanted to buy presents for the nurses, left the home and worked her old beat to get enough money.

L remembers Dynamite, the dog. Used to sleep on the heat grates at Park and Main. Would ride the streetcar to the Gardens with the kids. A real character. He disappeared; evidently some people took him south with them on the train for the winter, he never came back. A lawyer named Holloday wrote a novel about him in the paper; L thinks it was never published separately, bound. That book not included in Roeder's study of Butte novels, nor in Nelson Algren's.

Future of unions--people are disappearing who knew what the union did. It was the unions who insisted on the buddy system, the requirements for clean air, higher wages. Butte will undergo transition--too many young people take the results of unionism for granted.

William Sagin would be good to talk to about Butte and MT politics. Sagin is short for Saginovitch. He a Montenegrin.

Scholar of labor history, politics. Retired school teacher; excellent teacher, dedicated to students. First to take classes to testify in legislature. He was a boxer. Degree in Political Science. Knows a lot about Frank Little, even has theory about who hanged him.

Tape 2, Side B

L's father was so upset when L went to work in the mines. Working in the mines, you are independant. You don't have a boss over you. It is dangerous, challenging. And, it paid well.

L mined 1936-38. Worked at the Rarus, which is now about the center of the Berk. Pit. Worked at the St. Lawrence. Had a Norwegian for a partner there, they had pretty good division of labor. They were mining fill in drifts--with better techniques, it paid to mine lower grades that had once been discarded. L's partner would muck and L would tram, run the ore car down the tracks to the station. By the time he'd get back, his partner would have another car filled. Pretty good division of labor. Also worked at the Belmont.

Arnold Olsen--his father was foreman of the riggers. They lowered mine machinery into the mines, worked on machinery, did high work, built head frames, etc. Some of the sort of work Ironworkers do, but more. Pretty much everything to do with ropes and cables. Arnold's father had been passing through Butte, got a haircut--and it was \$1.00. In 1910, \$1.00 was high. He thought that anyplace they charged \$1.00 for a haircut was a good place; he stayed. Had only one employment policy. Anyone

who worked for him must have worked in the Navy or Merchant Marine for Denmark, Sweden, Norway, or Finland. Because then he knew they knew what they were doing, they were good workers. He was Norwegian.

L delivered papers on the Flat. Also, sold papers in the Cabbage Patch. He never felt danger anywhere in Butte--no one did. Butte had best law enforcement in the state. And people were honest. Typically, if someone found a roll of bills, even with no identification of it whatsoever, he would turn it into the Police Station. You didn't lock your doors, your cars.

When L was boy, several mining companies still operating in Butte; gave Butte different flavor than Anaconda, which was one-company town. North Butte, Clark, Boston and Montana were some of the other companies. Some were better to work for than the Anaconda Company, more generous. Heinze started the 8-hour day. Clark gave his workers turkeys for Christmas and Thanksgiving.

L remembers foreman at the St. Lawrence they called "God Christ Man"--because he was always saying, "God Christ, Man, why'd you do that?" or "God Christ, man, what's this..."

When L worked at the Rarus, 800 men worked there, on 2 shifts. In the Pit, a couple trucks could take out in a day what those 800 men could mine.

When L worked in mines, get off work, could have a Sean O'Farrell in the bar for 10 cents--a beer and a shot of whiskey. Only requirement was that you had a lunchbucket under your arm; then could have as many as you wanted for a dime apiece for a about an hour and a half after shift let out.

Tape 3, Side A

Part of Butte tradition that you land on your two feet. Whether go to Helena, New York--land on two feet. Figure way to survive. During depression, only about 400 people mining out of force of probably 10,000. Father was off for about a year. Sold his insurance policy to help support them. House was paid for. Mother worked for Truzzolino; L had paper route. They survived.

Columbia Gardens: a wonderful place. Thursday was children's day, the open-air street cars would be packed to the gunnels with kids. Gardens was a place for early romance, where you met girls from other parts of town than your own. L was too shy to take advantage of that. It was an oasis. Terrible when it was shut down. For L, the law giving Anaconda Company eminent domain was unconstitutional. Em. dom. given to power companies because they are regulated by the public; that's not true for the Anaconda Co. Columbia Gardens condemned; Anaconda Co. had given it over to the city but had reserved the mineral rights. [Dave Walters, historian at the MT Historical Society, in "Butte Paradise: Columbia Gardens" (Montana Magazine, Sept. Oct. 1985) says that control of the Gardens was given, in 1962, to the Columbia Gardens Foundation, of which the Anaconda Company was the sole financial support. Acc. to Walters, at the time the Gardens were closed, the Company was losing \$50,000 a year.]

L's Uncle John Lindquist--not real uncle. When L's mother died, L and his sister lived with Lindquists for awhile. S like an uncle, always called him uncle. Had been member of Swedish American Athletic Club, on way to Seattle for nat'l AAU games.

About 1903, 1904. Train stopped in Butte for an hour and a half. Walked around on Front Street, somebody yelled, hello! John Lindquist. He was amazed. It was Montana Jack Sullivan, had been member of American Olympic team in Greece in the Olympic games. Uncle John was captain of Swedish team. John was so struck by that coincidence. When he went back to Brooklyn after Seattle games, came back to Butte, lived out his life there. Started many athletic programs in Butte. Started ice skating, track and field programs. Had won 2 Olympic gold medals, and third place medals. Won many other competitions. Gymnastics, track and field--at that time, had to be versatile. Started grade school programs in track and field, speed skating. For many years, many of Canadian champion speedskaters were Butte people. Speed skating in Butte today owes debt to John Lindquist.

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