

IRON RANGE RESEARCH CENTER

Oral History Interview

NAME: Ernestine Hill

# OF TAPES: 1

INTERVIEWER: Jerre Pete

DATE:

PLACE:

ACCESSION #:

Tape 1/Side 1

(Interviewer) Jerre Pete: Okay, we'll start off with... Can you tell us what your name is and where you were born.

Ernestine Hill: My name is Ernestine Chosa Hill. I was born on Basswood. Basswood Lake.

I: Your parents were....

EH: My parents were Annie and Leo Chosa. Mother was Annie DuPoe. I attended the first grade in Winton Public School and then from then on it was Government Schools. We were in (*unclear*).

I: What about the people that, when you were young, that came down here from Lac La Croix. Do you remember anything like that?

EH: We were at Prairie Portage and didn't see very many of them. They must've gone another route.

I: When you were younger, you were a kid (*unclear*) on trapping, you said. Remember that?

EH: My mother trapped. When we lived up on Basswood.

I: Yeah. Who did they sell the furs to?

EH: Whoever was buying locally, I suppose.

I: (*Unclear*) People live on Vermilion back there? Do you know anything about that? Do you know more about any of the Indian people that, when the mines first started, that worked in the mines?

EH: Hm umm.

I: Who worked in the lumber mills? Do you remember anything about the lumber mills?

EH: There were lumber mills in Winton, but I was so little then, that I didn't really remember.

I: Who worked in the lumber camps? Do you know where they are?

EH: There was a lumber camp on the Four Mile Portage.

I: Four Mile Portage.

EH: Just off of this lake, going into Basswood.

I: There's a number of books that used to talk a little about trapping, right?

Unknown Voice: Um hmmm.

EH: He was a trapper.

I: *(Unclear Name)*

EH: He was an outlaw.

Unknown Voice: Yeah. He was an outlaw when that guy was here.

EH: Yeah, he was an outlaw too. The Canadian Wardens were always after him.

I: And then he did uh... 'Course Tommy was the one that did all the guiding up here, huh?

EH: Tommy guided, so did my brother Vince guide. He guided in the summer. Tommy was better known, but he guided. As much, I think, as Tom.

I: Now, you have relatives up in Lac La Croix too now, don't you?

Unknown voice: We're related to the Jordans....

EH: I don't know.... I wish I knew so I could meet them.

I: What about Fon Du Lac or Grand Portage? Do you have any relatives over there?

EH: I don't think there's anybody at Grand Portage. Fon du Lac, I don't know. There may be some DuPoes out there. I don't know.

I: I know there are a lot of DuPoes live around Fon du Lac.

EH: We could possibly be related to someone there, I wish I knew.

Unknown Voice: That's why it's hard in a way. Especially (*unclear*) a long time ago when they - there were so many of them, you know, they didn't know who they were related to. At Lac La Croix, for instance. People were... that are in Lac la Croix now, they used to live in Vermilion. They used to come there in the summertime and go back involved with the school there. The government school. (*Unclear*) ... a 12 hour day, maybe 2 weeks, but most of your (*unclear*) you took 'em out of school. Went back to Lac la Croix.

EH: See, my grandma came from Canada.

I: A lot of people from Lac la Croix used to travel down this way in the summertime.

They used to come on the canoe route.

Unknown voice: Yeah. They used to come this way, too. Right through Basswood. Through Basswood. Because when we were up there, a lot of them - they said they used to come here and work. Ship logs from up near Basswood all the way to up that way. Lac la Croix somewhere.

I: Then there's another route they used to go - to go down the Vermilion River that way, huh? What's that other river up there?

Unknown voice: I know they used to come down that one river.

I: Then there was another trail from Vermilion too, between Basswood and *(unclear)*

EH: There were Indians at Burnside, huh? The Anderson's and the...

Unknown Voice: The Jordans were there. Jim Jordan, Palmquists....

I: Anderson's are still there.

Unknown Voice: Yeah, my Dad and Anna Boshey's family were there.

EH: I think the reason I don't know much is that we were at Prairie Portage and that was it. We never, my Father said we had to work and tend to business when they were there. That's what we did. We didn't have a chance to roam around.

I: Did you ever have a chance to visit a school like that at Vermilion then?

EH: Hm umm.

I: You didn't have a chance to do that.

EH: My mother went to school there. I think she went through 6th grade.

Unknown Voice: How long did you... You were born and raised up Prairie Portage and that way, weren't you?

EH: I was born on Basswood Lake. Down a little ways, on Birch Island. My father was commercial fishing then. We lived on Birch Island and Henry Sam, he lived on Dog Isl... what they called Dog Island. Just a little waterway between them. So his family was here and our family was here.

Unknown Voice: Was that like a little village then?

EH: No, just the two families.

Unknown voice: Just the two families. How did you travel then. Just travel back and forth from there to here.

EH: Well I was so little, Bobby, I don't remember even that. We probably just stayed put and I suppose Dad came to town.

Unknown voice: What did you... When did you move, came out of there and start going to school then, and where you went to school.

EH: I came to town here... I boarded with the Hills for one year, because I got so homesick that all I did was cry the first year I went to school. So my Dad said "Well, she's too young." So they boarded me with Mable's family. And that's when I went to school in first grade. After that, then I was okay. A little older. I was pretty young to be away from home.

I: So you went to other schools later on - like Flam Beau and stuff like that then?

EH: I went to Hayward, Wisconsin through 5th grade and then Flam Beau. I graduated from Flam Beau.

Unknown voice: What did you do when you graduated?

EH: I went to Business College in Minneapolis. And I was also in the service. Joined the Navy. Four years in it. After I got out of the Navy I went to Business school. And after I was through with all that I got married. I wish I remembered more about Basswood, but I was too young. Mother said it was a nice lake up there.

I: You don't remember exactly how the Chosa's moved to Vermilion then?

EH: That was my mother. *(Unclear)* I think it was when my brothers had to go to school. Was it Donald? When he had to go to school, that's when they moved there. Now, how old is he? When he was 6 years old, I don't know. I mean the year. That's the reason they moved down there, because he had to go to school.

I: Yeah, 'cause they lived in that one house up there. *(Unclear.)*

EH: Yeah, my Grandmother had that built.

I: Yeah, cause it was different from all the other houses up there.

Unknown voice: Yeah, it was bigger. Yeah.

EH: How did it happen to get burned. Was it deliberate?

I: Buckshot was visiting at the time.

EH: Oh, I suppose he was *(Unclear)*

Unknown voice: Chimney fire, I think.

I: 'Cause it was about 25 years ago too. When he was there.

Unknown voice: That house was solid, too.

EH: Could've stood a little fixing, but I think with a little fixing it was a real nice....

I: Our house is still standing up there. *(Unclear)* How's the Ojibwe language in you?

EH: To think that I spoke nothing but before I went to school! It's unbelievable! I just don't remember anything. And when I hear someone talk, I listen so hard - hoping I can try and catch a word here and there. It's unbelievable. My mother said they spoke nothing but Chippewa. That was it!



Unknown voice: I know kids up on Lac la Croix, that's all they talked. Edna. She's....

EH: Well, that's the same thing.

Unknown voice: They can talk, use English too. Just didn't want.... Amazing.

EH: Well, you see, when I went to school they wouldn't allow the kids to speak their native tongue. That was what was so bad about it. We had to speak English.

Unknown voice: That's probably how you lost a lot of your culture.

EH: That's the worst thing you could have done, to take that away from us. I'd probably be able to speak today. But I was just that young, that I forgot it. My Dad never spoke Chippewa to us when he'd be home, so.... He spoke Chippewa, French and English. They spoke three languages in their home. My mother was Chippewa and Dad was French. Oh, I would just give a huge amount if I could speak Chippewa. And then we were not exposed to it, you never hear it. You lose it.

I: Well, you don't think there is anything else you can tell us then, huh? Did you know any Roy's?

EH: We were related to the Roy's.

I: Morseman's? Roy Stalins? (*Unclear. He's listing names.*)

EH: Now, that's a Tower name, isn't it? Gawbode's.

Unknown voice: How about Cladup. Calvin Cladup. You know them?

EH: I remember Calvin. He was such a big tease!

Unknown voice: What was your *(Unclear)*

EH: I remember Nellie. And Rosemarie. Her daughter. Where is she?

I: Rosemarie? She just died last summer. Last spring, wasn't it?

Unknown voice: Yeah. Last spring.

EH: Oh my!

I: She did live up here on Vermilion for awhile. What - four or five years. Then she went back when her granddaughter was up in New York. Her daughter and granddaughter took her back home. She kept trying to come back for a couple, three years and then she finally died.

EH: Everybody had a crush on Rosemary.

Unknown voice: Yeah, she was pretty.

EH: Yeah, including my two brothers. She was real pretty. Didn't she marry someone from Kentucky?

I: I think he was a lawman or some kind of... *(Unclear)*

*End of tape.*

The Vermillion Lake People:  
Vermillion Lake Bois Forte Oral History Project  
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