

**Presque Isle County  
Interview with Newton "Newt" Chapman  
Onaway, Michigan, 10-16-2008**

Magnaghi, Russell M. (RMM): Interview with Newton "Newt" Chapman, Onaway, MI, October 16<sup>th</sup> 2008.

Okay, Newton we start with my usually first question. What is your birthday?

Newton "Newt" Chapman (NC): April 22<sup>nd</sup>, 1940.

RMM: Could you tell us a little about, you lived here all your life, could you tell us a little about growing up in Onaway?

NC: Yeah, I lived right close to where the interview is being taken here and I come from a family of \_\_\_\_  
11. We had some pretty tough times, but we raised our own gardens and we got by pretty good but I've just in the last 25 or 30 years become interested in the history part of it by writing for the paper and stuff, but as far as my days growing up here we used to, my best memories were sliding on the Loch we used to, you know, they closed off the streets here in the winter times for sleigh riding and where the large IDA Family Market is now downtown, there was an ice rink and a boxing arena there and we spent our winnings there and then a lot of hunting and fishing and trapping and kind of lived off the land. I went to school here and graduated here. In fact, I'll be riding on an alumni float on the parade tomorrow in the football homecoming. Other than that we just worked hard, we all worked hard. We had to, you know, we were foragers we picked berries and harvested stuff to put up. Which I just, right now my wife and I have over 600 quarts of tomatoes and grape juice and potatoes and everything put out for the winter and we've done it all our life, but probably better set then some people right now with the crunch we've got going

RMM: Yea, how many quarts?

NC: Over 500. We can our own goods and our own fish and potatoes, pears, peaches, \_\_\_\_\_, chili sauce and we just preserve everything that we can and get us through the winter.

RMM: Yea.

NC: In fact, I use it as Christmas presents and I give a lot of it away. I've seen someone in times. I used to work two jobs. I worked in the dime store in the daytime after school and then the bakery at night and then of course in the summer time I would do a job putting up paint and I set pins in the bowling alley from the time I was twelve years old until I graduated for the local bowling alley. Times weren't always good but we had a lot of fun.

RMM: Could you talk a little bit about some of the industries that were in town like Lobdells, what was the title of that?

NC: Well Lobdell-Emery and they called it the Steering Wheel Factory and it has a lot of names it was actually, some people from Alpena come here and it was a hanger and handle company. In the beginning they made all the broom handles and all the coat hangers for all over the world. They made them right here in Onaway, because of our abundance of maple that we had here and that was what the same thing with the steering wheels, they made them out of hard wood. It actually started out as a Huron manufacturing company. They changed hands and changed jobs at different times, course we had a lot of shingle mills here too. We made all the shingles for all over the country, but when it become the steering wheel thing, it changed hands two or three times. It burnt January, I don't remember, in 1926 was when the disastrous fire, of course I have pictures of all that. They coined, a fellow that's still alive today, his brother coined the statement "Onaway steers the world" and it was a contest in school for a logo and it was actually on our license plate covers, "Onaway steers the world." At that time the only other people making steering wheels was a Surrey company in France, made some of the wooden steering wheels, but we made the steering wheels for everything until a few other companies popped

up, but my granddad was a pin striper there and I have actual invoices of what it costs for a hundred steering wheels broke down in all the different departments. I had the privilege of touring the whole grounds before it becomes a wild wood with the shrubbery and box elder trees with a foreman Vern Jackson. He took me through the whole plant, he was a yard foreman there and he explained to me how they took the cartons of timber off into the Mill Pond and washed the dirt off them because they skidded them with big steam skitters from the rail road. They would wash the dirt off before they would go up on the second floor to be sawn and he showed me the \_\_\_\_\_ shop and the whole lay out. It was a big place, it was a large place and I actually have down at our court house is the big spider gear that they used to pull the logs up into the second floor. It was a large chain, I have a table in my home made out of the chain links from that factory and hopefully someday, it's kind of in the works now, of being able to put some black top pathways through there and have some information boards where people can walk through and actually see what it was like.

RMM: So, now the site has been grown over?

NC: Some of it has been built on. The Sonic Hall is still there which was the office and the chimney to the original home, the Lobdell log cabin home there in the office is still there and then the Blue \_\_\_ Brick \_\_\_ furniture company expands a lot of the grounds, but there's still a lot there just buried in the weeds, you know. Everybody claimed that's what knocked us down, you know, we had a population in 1926 I think was like 2700 people and we're down to about 800 now probably and the plant moved to Alma, Michigan and started building lawn furniture and because some of the people were from Alma and there are a few of the people that are still alive. The direct descendants, in fact I correspond with one. The homes that were vacated and went back for taxes and there are a few of the big homes getting fixed up now in the area, but they called it the disastrous fire and that's exactly what it was.

RMM: So that ended the company and then they moved?

NC: Right and there was, at that time there was all these different lumbering camps that people stayed in. They moved with the lumber and they built tracks to them to haul maple in and of course the people way before that traded land for making roads. They built roads and took land in \_\_\_\_\_, but the actual businesses and like I say there were shingle mills, there was, we had an ashery and a tannery. They had Becks brewery from Alpena had a substation here and it was a, the town was a booming town.

RMM: Was it on a main railroad line?

NC: Yes the D & M Railroad come to Onaway in 1901, come in from the east side and from Alpena way to you know her home town over by Buellton Hawks and Millersburg and Onaway and Tuller went right onto Cheboygan and connected over there, went to Mackinac City actually and then that's where everybody connected and went across on the boats with. The D & M come here in 1901. I've actually road the D & M train from Onaway to Miller \_\_\_\_\_ several times with the people that moved on in the end.

RMM: So that was what, Detroit?

NC: Detroit and Mackinac.

RMM: Mackinac.

NC: Detroit and Mackinac

RMM: Did that continue to Marquette or that was a different-

NC: Nope Mackinac City. It come up through from Bay City from Detroit to Bay City from Alpena and it would come through what they called the Big Cut where they took loads and loads and loads of gravel out by Millersburg and it went out on the train.

RMM: Now you were mentioning earlier about the role of limestone on this area and then how it developed and the trains would take it out and then it declined. Could you talk about that?

NC: The quarry is, there are private homes built on the cliff now, next to the Onaway State Park and was called a quarry. There were lime kilns there, where they actually made lime and cement, but there was a passenger train that went, it was called the Northern Michigan Rail Road and the last engineer on it I think was Micky O' Mare's father in law, but it actually went to Black Lake, meant a ship there it was called The Queen Mary and it went from there to the Black Lake Hotel and the people from there could get down to Cheboygan. There was no road from Onaway to Cheboygan at the time. If you were going to Cheboygan you went to this end of Black Lake down on the ship and went down to the other end of Black Lake and then went from there by stage coach. At that time it was still a stage coach line through there. That train in the winter time harbored, they hauled ice out of here to the city. They cut ice out of Black Lake and shipped it and that rail road grate is still there. It goes across private property but you can still go to the quarry and see the limestone cliffs and when \_\_\_\_ opened that is what interfered with the quarry here because they could take the big shipment of \_\_\_\_ and limestone out of there and this rail road then went downhill. That was before the fire ever happened.

RMM: That took out the plant?

NC: Right, before that happened and Northern Michigan was just a spurter off from the D & M.

RMM: You know, I got a question for you. You talked about the lumbering that went on here. Did they have a people called shackers up here, at some point? Maybe not at that time, but at a later time?

NC: That term, I'm not familiar with that term.

RMM: Okay.

NC: They had Icers and Road Bumpees and there was a lot of different terms in a lumber camp, you know. We have an area called Bummer's Rue's and this was where an assortment of different people traveling through where people didn't have a place to live moved into a deserted lumber camp and used the bunk houses there. It's all gone now. The area is still called Bummer's Rue's and the Rue's grewed and all the major roads go through that area now.

RMM: Were these people cutting wood or were they just living in the...

NC: Oh, I think they done everything for a living, but as far as me knowing that term, I'm not familiar with that term or anybody that actually done that here.

RMM: Now can you talk about the Garment factory.

NC: Somewhat, my neighbor was the last foreman at the Garment factory. But the Garment factory again come out of Alpena. It was the Alpena Garment factory to start with and it was where Parents Outpost is here now, downtown here and the first Garment factory was in the upstairs of that building and then it moved to the company store after the fire. They moved into the, the company store never burned for the Lobdell-Emery plant along with another few building in the front and they put the garment factory in there and then, I can remember when that factory burnt, I totally walked down the hill to get as close as we could but then after that a fellow by the name of Rudy David started up a garment factory which the building is still here, just off of Main Street a little ways and he had several employees there and that was called Northern Garment Factory, I think they called it. Actually, the garment thing was here for a long time and during the World War the ladies made parachutes, so parachutes and jeep tops and these things are all documented in paper articles and books and whatever. My recollection of it is, you know, I knew her mother, who worked at the garment factory for a long time and you.

Woman: My mother at the Garment Factory? I don't remember that. Maybe she did and I don't remember it.

NC: I think she did.

Woman: She might have.

RMM: And then could you comment on the Calcite Quarry, kind of the opening of that and its impact on the area?

NC: I don't know a lot of the dates or anything else but I know that it's been the major employer in the Roger City area forever. There's probably 75 percent of the people in Roger City were born and raised and worked in Calcite or on the boat and my father in 55, 6 and 7 was a second cook on the W. F. White which was the boat that sailed out on the Calcite and I got to go there a lot of times and meet the boat with my mom and that was a big thing. You would go meet the boat when dad would come in. Actually the one night we went over to pick him up and he come down the stairs with his suitcases in his hands and he had taken a real, real bad ride and he quit. He was all done, so that was the end of his career for Calcite, but Calcite has been a godsend to Presque Isle County and there's just no question about it. It was a back bone of Roger City, no question about it.

RMM: Now, who owns it or what has happened? Is it still an operation today?

NC: It's very much an operation and less people bigger equipment and I think it's owned by U.S. Steel, if I'm not mistaken. I think U.S. Steel owns the major part of it but it's still very much in use and it's at a large, large, capacity and the equipment they have over there you can park a bus in the front end over by some of them big machines they operate over there. I'm not familiar with dates or anything else, you know, I know a lot of people from Onaway and Millersburg worked there and retired from there.

RMM: So it kind of focused, I mean, most of the workers then were in Presque Isle County.

NC: Oh yea, it was all local people right?

RMM: Yea.

NC: Yea, you had all your sailors that sailed out of there and then you had all your people that worked in the plants, because of all the maintenance work there. Working on the belts, the long conveyor belts and they would dynamite, all the time they would blast them to take cliffs out and then they would load them out of there and then they have crushers and they make every kind of a sand and gravel that there ever was made. They would make it right there ,any size that there is, there are just stock piles of it. In the beginning their boats were loaded by a conveyor and then unloading took forever and they called and they developed what they called self unloaders which speeded up the operation tremendously. I'm not familiar with a lot things around Roger City as far as history goes. I know I have relatives there.

Woman: (inaudible speaking)

NC: Yea, they have a regular museum, I'm sure you'll be dealing with those people probably.

Woman: (inaudible). I would like to have you put in your place because more people would see it and I said I didn't have a place to put it and it was too big to put it in the restaurant or any place. I had a garage but no door on it, so it floated around for a while and I said why not put it in a Presque Isle Museum, that'd be Roger City, so that's where it is. It's got a picture on it and it's got the binding on it from Deer Hyde.

RMM: And it just washed up on the shore?

Woman: It just washed up on the shore, and nobody knew where it came from, it's over there now.

NC: I don't know if you're familiar with the Ocqueoc falls area, the Ocqueoc is one of the rivers that there's actually an Indian burial ground there. In fact, there was at what they called Crow Dam there

was a big Gris Mill and a settlement there. It's the biggest falls in Lower Michigan, that's Ocqueoc Falls and early on the Indians used to come there and they actually have a burial ground between here and Roger City.

RMM: Is that a park now?

NC: It's not a park. It's just a, there's some markers there. It's kind of you're going from Onaway to Roger City you kind of just make a little jog in the big stand of Norwegian pine and there is supposedly eight or ten Indians buried right there. I mean they are, and the marker is right there. They had a lot of meetings at the Ocqueoc Falls, which is a big limestone area between here and Roger City and there has been, there is a lot of history in the books on that.

RMM: Were there any, you never hear of them but maybe there were, were there any caves, caverns in this area because of the limestone?

NC: Not caves or caverns that are open to the public or anything, but we have a lot of sink holes in this area. There is one over by \_\_\_\_\_ that they call, what was the name for it? They opened it up and fixed it for the public and it's just a big sink hole, but our sink holes out here all have stairs going down into them, where you can go view them. We used to snowmobile in them and they shut that all off, but they are famous. People come from all over the country to go see the sink holes, they are just eight miles south of town here.

RMM: Are they all open?

NC: There is a whole line of them that go all the way from here to Alpena and the biggest and deepest ones are right around Shupac Lake and the lake out here.

RMM: Tell us about this card game.

NC: There is a card game that's played almost solely in Presque Isle County and a little bit in Cheboygan and you can go anywhere in the world and ask somebody if they want to play ask somebody if they want to play Spitzer, they don't know how. It was developed from the game of Sheep's Head and in \_\_\_\_ one day a couple of the German people that were playing the game decided to put the seven of diamonds, the lowest card of the deck between the two black queens which are the two highest cards and the partners and they called it Spitzer and there's \_\_\_\_\_ and it's the most unique card game in the world. If you learn how to play it anything else is like playing Fish or Old Maid. In Roger City you have tournaments. You have leagues that play all winter long. Mr. Haner the other fellow interviewed here, him and my dad have played Spitzer until my dad passed away and of course Mr. Haner is quite ancient, but he has been playing a lot longer than me. He's actually a state of Michigan Checker champion and played checkers nationally. The game of Spitzer, all my children know how to play and I've been playing myself for like 56 years and it's not in Hoyle and it's a localized thing. You can go anywhere you want to go and they don't know how to play Spitzer.

RMM: And how do you spell that?

NC: S-P-I-T-Z-E-R, Spitzer and there is a set of rules that were drawn up in Presque Isle County and printed by the Presque Isle Advance.

Woman: They play a lot in Roger City.

NC: They have two leagues in Roger City.

RMM: Oh my word.

NC: We don't have a league here but we have a bunch of families. In fact, day before yesterday my two sons, my wife, and I played Spitzer for a couple hours in the morning while it rained. There is no other card game, euchre, pinochle, canasta, I don't care what you play it cannot compare to Spitzer. I bet you

in five minutes I can have three more Spitzer players together to play a game right here, right from the manor here and if not there just next door and you need to talk to some of the people in Roger City about and that's pretty unique. You can go a long ways before you ever find it and it was just developed right in the community of Moltke between here and Roger City.

RMM: Now it just started? Did it have some German connection?

NC: Well a lot of the people in Moltke were Germans as were the people in Posen where the Poles settled there but a lot of people in Moltke and Roger City were German. They come in the 1850's. This game, there is a Hoyle game called Sheep's Head, except these people that's kind of a boring game, so they take the bottom card out of the, the lowest card in the deck and put it between the two highest ones and call it a Spitzer. There are a couple different stories. One of them is the guy turned and spit in this film when he was playing so they coined the name Spitzer for it and then there is another big long poem made about it, but it's a local game that's played, there are people in Cheboygan that play now and in Atlanta, a lot of people know it from Roger City and Alpena because of the work association like through the UAW or through Tube Fab, or through Calcite plant friends and relatives have made a bigger circle, but it's a you go to \_\_\_\_ and try and get a Spitzer game going they just look at you, but here, I mean we play all winter.

RMM: But if you go out to Cheboygan or Mackinac City?

NC: A few people in Cheboygan only because they worked at the UAW center and the people from Onaway that knew how to play Spitzer taught the people from Cheboygan.

RMM: Now that would be the outer limits of it?

NC: Yea it would, I'm sure. The only people that know how to play Spitzer have lived in Presque Isle County or have had relatives that lived in Roger City or Onaway that taught somebody how to play.

RMM: So no one in Alpena?

NC: There could be a few in Alpena because Presque Isle County extends all the way to Alpena and your Posen and Alpena are not that far apart and those people play all the time.

RMM: In Posen?

NC: From Posen and that area, but the majority, the bulk of Spitzer players in the world live between Moltke, Roger City and Onaway I mean this small 20 mile radius is the bulk of the Spitzer Players in the world.

RMM: Wow, now has anyone written about this?

NC: Oh there's been a lot of different articles wrote about it and of course they keep the tournaments published in winters the whole time. We have a traveling trophy that we present from the bunch that we play with but we tried to get it in the book of Hoyle but the cards are all like Sheep's Head so they won't publish it in the book of Hoyle but they should because you don't need any other card game once you learn how to play Spitzer. I mean I learned when I was ten years old, so, and all my kids know how to play, so it's a pastime here. In fact, right over here where they eat here at the what do you call it?

Woman: (Inaudible)

NC: Yeah we rent that out every Saturday night in the winter and we'll have like 20, 24, 28 people and it takes four people and we have tournaments where you rotate each game.

RMM: Oh my word.

NC: Oh yea, it's quite insane. You ask about it when you get to the Roger City people, it's a local game. I have a set of rules if you're interested in a set of rules. They were actually been published about three times by the Presque Isle Advanced. I'm surprised that Mr. Haner didn't touch on that. It was one of his

favorite pastimes is playing Spitzer. He had been a self sufficient, self employed farmer that raised a bunch of kids off the fat of the land.

Woman: (inaudible).

NC: And he all this property on Black Lake in the UAW, Walter Reuther and him and Mort Sugar who was an attorney out of Detroit got together and the UAW purchased all that property and they built the family education center and then of course Walter went down in a plane but it's still going today and they have a huge golf course out there, but that was our biggest employer here and it still is right now for this area.

RMM: Now was that, Reuther, I remember when the plane crashed he was on his way here then?

NC: He flew into Pellston that night, in fact I was on the gate, I worked security there for 30 years and I was on the gate the night the plane went down. Henry's wife and the architect and his wife and the two pilots they missed the runway by about 1,400 feet there and passed \_\_\_\_\_.

(End of Side 1)

NC: He had the, what's it called, \_\_\_\_\_ and he had a whole bunch of building but he was self sufficient there. He had his own cattle and his own hogs and he had tanks full of gas and oil and stuff he started up right after the war, the second World War and he had like a dozen employees but when the UAW went in there and built all the buildings they had, I know when I was working there, there was like a hundred and twenty or hundred and thirty employees there and they still have upwards of sixty or seventy, not counting the golf course. The golf course has another bunch, but that alone, the UAW Center put a lot of people in good shape. They come there in a borrowed card or a small car and left there with a husband and wife both working there and two cards and it was a godsend to us really for employment here and it's still a major employer in the area. We've not had big employers. REA or Rural Electric Association has

been a big employer. Moran Iron Works has just been going ten or twelve years now or even more. Right now \_\_\_\_\_ nothing right now he had to lay all his people off and hopefully that builds back up because he had like forty employees when they started going downhill.

RMM: Just to go back to the UAW complex there. What was the name of the owner could you spell his last name?

NC: Lou Maxin, I don't really have a picture now though, but right in the top book there Dorothy had a picture of a Lou, they honored him in \_\_\_\_\_ but at Christmas time he would send the city managers money to buy coats and boots and gloves and hats and stuff for the needy kids. They always had a ball diamond for playing ball and he would invite people out there and serve ice cream out of what they called a \_\_\_\_\_ right here and he was instrumental in developing our Russell Memorial hospital. We had a small hospital here for a lot of years and actually a boy who flipped over a tennis court and hit his head. He went to the movies down here and he got a head ache went home and he died before they got him to the hospital and his mother and father were friends with this Lou Maxin and through him they started the Russell Memorial hospital and Russell was from him. His name was Russell \_\_\_\_\_ and our hospital was named after him and the hospital is closed now and they have what they call a Russell house which is a boys home for troubled teenager boy's that are halfway between being good and not being good and some of them get straightened out here and some of them move on. Lou Maxin was a, it was a summer type home and he entertained Desi Arnaz and Lucille Ball were very \_\_\_\_\_ at the Maxins and he entertained a lot of people out here but he never forgot Onaway. He's very buried right out there by the Center by on his property right next to his property out there.

Woman: I got water coals from him (inaudible).

NC: Every Christmas he sent money to the city \_\_\_\_\_ and for thirty years he supplied our fireworks every year for the fourth of July. He just bought the fireworks and now we have to have a fundraiser every

year in order to have fireworks, but he actually bought the fireworks. I can recall in 1968 I was working for the police department here part time and Lou Maxin had sent 2,000 dollars and that was to buy coats and shoes for the needy families here in town and 2000 dollars don't sound like much but in 1969 you could buy a pile of clothes for 2,000 dollars and that actually happened and I took part in the delivery of some of these clothes. He never forgot Onaway and he took care of it.

RMM: Now he was from Detroit?

NC: His business was in Detroit. He was into advertising and his Campbell Soup company, Heinz, Armor Meats, those were all his ads. He built them himself and he would bring those people here and wine and dine them at Black Lake and feed them there and it was a beautiful resort and this is where the UAW moved in and purchased his property plus more and put in, you know they can house 500 people out there and feed them, it's a huge place.

Woman: Yes, he was a great man.

RMM: What's happening now in the area today in terms of the economy? You kind of mentioned the UAW property anything that's-

NC: They don't have the people they did have because the first thing that happened was they separated from the Canadian Union and then the car companies closed and the union people that were supporting this, the numbers are not there and like I say we have a lot of people at Onaway that work at what we call Tube Fab between here and Indian River and the Moran Iron Works and the local Presque Isle Electric and other than that it's pretty much two or three employees in each little store and were not a big industrious area here. We don't have a lot of industry, but we tried to pull it on a lot of times and now the major step we've taken is to put a sewer system in. We have a state of the Art sewer system now and that's supposed to entice some businesses to come in here. A lot of our kids the ones that

don't come back as a school teacher, a lot of them just move on. In fact, my youngest is just recently moved to Iowa because her husband has a job with John Deere and he's got to be there in order to stay working. It's not a lot of employment here, nope.

RMM: And the quarry isn't, I mean they are using heavy equipment, so they don't need the personal?

NC: They don't have the personal they used to have.

RMM: Yea, yea.

NC: I mean everything is technology and bigger and it's just mushroomed like anything else. The technology has eliminated employees.

RMM: Okay, well that's kind of a good overview for us. We'll mention you at the-

NC: I have a ton of information and pictures if you ever wanted to-

RMM: At the conference.

NC: I'm glad to share it with anyone.

RMM: Yea, the school pictures?

NC: And I have a lot of Onaway history too and Onaway pictures of a lot of stuff.

RMM: Okay, thank you.