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Tardiff, Paul oral history interview

Mariah Pfeiffer

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Interview with Paul “Poof” Tardiff by Mariah Pfeiffer

Interviewee

Tardiff, Paul “Poof”

Interviewer

Pfeiffer, Mariah

Date

July 11, 2006

Place

Berlin, New Hampshire

ID Number

MC 101-12

Format

Audiocassette

Biographical Note

Paul “Poof” Tardiff is a school teacher in Berlin. He has researched and published books on the history and lore of Berlin and the Androscoggin.

Scope and Content Note

This interview covers the course of the Androscoggin river; its development as source of industrial power and transportation; logging processes and lore; Tardiff’s research about the Androscoggin and Berlin; Dan Bosse stories; pollution; the impact of Norwegian immigrants on Berlin; Tardiff’s public presence as a historian: special lectures for elementary school students, his writing, and boat tours; political issues: Tardiff’s deliberate public non-involvement, unemployment, and means of local revitalization; local industrial innovation; the impact of the decline of the mills; river restructuring; potential research contacts; and Macy island.

General Notes

The recording quality is good. The falls are audible in the background.

ANDROSCOGGIN RIVER ORAL HISTORY PROJECT

Paul Tardiff: ... start way up in Western Maine. There's a point, way up beyond what they call Kennebago Lake, that high land will go and the water that drains from that high land goes into the St. Lawrence. The water that comes the other way all comes to the Androscoggin River. Kennebago Lake, Aziscohos, Mooselookmeguntic, Richardson, Lower Richardson, Umbagog Lake, all those bodies of water trickle their way through and end up in the Umbagog Lake, and this empties Umbagog Lake, and that's the main course. Now, that's thirty miles up here. This point in the river, here, this is what's called The Head of the Falls. From here to Gorham, this river drops four hundred feet. It was considered probably the finest set of falls and most powerful river in New England, or is, when the water is dropping like that. So the pioneers, when they came here, they said, wow, look at this, look at this power, powerful water.

In its day, up to this time, the power of this water has never been utilized. The full power of the water has never been utilized. They got dams on it now, but it ran all the mills. The mills ran from here, starting at the saw mill, all the way to Gorham, to what they call the paper mill, and there were mills all along either side of the river, all the way, and the river ran them. Pulp and paper and wood products.

So, in 1852, this man by the name of Winslow came into this area of Portland, Maine, and he noticed that he could use the power of the river, and he also realized that he could get his product down to his mill by using the river. And he must've known that men work in the woods and cut wood and logged and everything, and men drove the logs down. So that was the start here, right here on this spot, the saw mill, this was the start.

But one hundred miles from here, like I said, one hundred miles from here, you can put a bottle, a cork on the bottle, and if you pushed it along, you could pick it up here. They did that with wood. You've been told the story that in the winter time, five thousand men would go upriver, and they had spots that they had to cut wood. They cut wood all winter long, and they piled it along little brooks, they piled it on streams that were frozen, they piled it on ponds. Every one of those tributaries came here, to this spot.

In 1852, it was the sixteen foot log, the long log, and that's where the river driver really got going, with the long logs. He would be the one that would ride those logs. I mean, it must've been amazing to watch in the river, jamming, unjamming. All winter long, they would get their wood together. Come the end of March, when the snow started to melt, their job was done. The next job was for the man to bring the wood to the mills, and that was called the river drive. They used all the means of water and dynamite and

whatever, they built little dams. Like on a little brook that would normally come in this river, it was swollen, and they'd build dams, and they'd load the wood into it and bring it to – a hundred miles away, they'd bring it to one lake. They'd ferry it across another lake. They used to have a tow boat. One of those tow boats is right there. Three thousand cords of wood, they'd wrap around and they'd pull them across the lake until they got to the end of it, and they'd empty it. And they'd pick that wood up on another lake. They did all that along, with all the streams, to get it into this river, in Errol, or, even the streams that came in above here, to bring the wood to Berlin.

Now, the sawmill was the first thing that started. Then paper was introduced and founded, invented, and so they figured, this is the place for paper, too, because we got the product. Then they started with the paper industry. Now they started having these mills along here. And I did as big a research as anybody can do on these boom piers. By about 1891, somewhere between 1891 and 1892, they decided that all this wood that's coming down here has to be sorted out, because by 1892 they built what they called the Burgess Sulfite Mill over on the other side of the river, and they were taking different wood so they had to find a way to sort that wood out.

So, in the winter time, because the kids always tell me (*unintelligible*), they didn't put those rocks in a boat? I say, you look at some of those rocks, you're not going to put them in a boat. Frozen solid. They would get all set up, and they brought all those stones out and dropped them in the river, and they built all these piers. They started right about here, these are the original piers, and they went almost sixteen miles upriver. At first they went about eight, and then they went another nine miles. By 1906, the piers were all built. The logs were coming down. There were drives, like if you and I owned a drive, let's say it was our men that cut that, and that's the wood that's going in, our drive was coming down, they could sort out our drive, put it somewhere, whatever. Because from each pier, like you see here, there was long logs. A long log was chained between each pier, each pier had a long log. That was called a boom. These are called piers, and, together with the boom, they were called boom piers.

Now, you just can't set a bunch of logs along the river and try to put something on the left and something on the right, they would just drift. So they built these boom piers and they were not in an 1888 map, but they were in an 1896 picture. I've got a picture. These boom piers were here in 1896. And I researched, and researched. Somebody got killed, let's say they're working on the piers, 1891, 1892. Nothing before that. So, they must've started building them, and I wrote the story up, by then, and they built all these piers so they could sort the wood down to the mills.

So this was a sawmill, and all that wood that was coming down in the springtime would be sorted out, brought here and set aside in this little spot for the sawmill. If there was other wood, it would bypass and send it down. They even sent wood to Rumford and Lewiston. There were drives that went that far. Yes, in the early 1900s, late 1800s, some of this wood went right through. I think there was a company called Bearce, B-E-

A-R-C-E, and they had a drive that went well beyond Rumford to someplace that I can't remember, but that's where they went. And the river took it down there. Those men followed it all that way down, those were river drivers.

And that's what made our Androscoggin so mighty. That, along with the wood with the log drives, went from 1852 to 1964. That was the last year. The last piece of pulp was pulled up by that bridge, put in a pile in 1964. I got the story on that in my book. I have a story of the last log drive, so there may be something, when you go back to the (*unintelligible*), just grab my book, and it's in one of my books, *The Last Log Drive*. It'll help you out, and you can take whatever you want out of it. You have my permission. It's my book, so you can have my permission to do it. Get yourself through college.

So, that is the part of the Androscoggin that's up here, from here, thirty miles away. There were sections along the Androscoggin where they would stretch long logs from end to another, chain them, and hold the wood three and four miles back. So you never could even see the water. It was all wood. You've probably seen pictures of that, and that's what it looked like here. They held that wood back. When they needed it, they used it. And like I said, the pioneers, when they got here they said, wow, this is powerful here. The water dropped four hundred feet. And when I tell the kids in schools, sometimes they come to the park, you see the huge stacks that stand there now? They're two hundred fifty feet tall. The water drops a hundred and fifty feet more than the height of those. And they go, really? When you (*unintelligible*) down, you'll see it. You're always going down. And I always tell the kids, when you go on your bicycle and you go to (*unintelligible*), is it a lot harder to come back? Yeah, Mr. Tardiff, it is. I say, because you're climbing, you're climbing.

Once the railroad came here in 1852 and this sawmill got going, we had a place to send our wood, our lumber, and it started growing. And then Mr. Brown, W. W. Brown, bought into this lumber company, and he made it the biggest sawmill this side of Michigan. But he said to himself, he said – he sent two or three men, either they were relatives or, he sent them upriver, go as far as you can upriver, and try to find how you get the wood in and where. They went one hundred miles up, and when they came back they said, you can go for a hundred miles and get wood, put it in, and it'll come to Berlin. So he said, oh yeah? So, he went out and he bought all that land, a dollar seventy-five an acre. He owned all that land, and he didn't have to pay for his lumber or his wood or anything, he didn't have to pay for it. So that's what he did. As these mills got bought off, later years, in the seventies and eighties, they sold land and made their money.

Q: And they're still in the process of doing that now?

PT: And they own no more land up there. But that is a short story of the river, of how it worked for Berlin. So now, you can shoot real questions at me. We can go sit down. You want to take some pictures? You are at The Head of the Falls here, this is called The Head of the Falls. This is where the river, the Androscoggin, drops four hundred

feet. This is the only place from here to Merrymeeting Bay that drops this much. And it starts right here at The Head of the Falls.

Q: Okay. Great. Would you like to go sit somewhere?

(Pause in taping)

Q: I guess I was wondering where your interest came from originally?

PT: My interest came from my days as a kid, and I used to go hunting with my dad. We hunted about fifteen miles upriver here, in a place called Thirteen Mile Woods. My father had a cabin there. As a matter of fact, I still own one there and that's where I go. So as a kid, my father would bring his brothers up there, and his brothers were quite some characters. They were well over a hundred years old, and they were born and raised in Berlin, and one of them was a professional boxer, besides working in the mills. He fought in Lewiston, in Rumford, they wanted him to go to Philadelphia. It never developed because his future wife said, if you're going to do that, I'm not going to marry you. This was in the twenties, and they were good, good.

But he was a character, and he met all of the characters that worked in the woods. So we'd be at the camp, and he'd have himself and couple of drinks and he'd start telling stories, and one of them is about those boots I got. He says, there was a man that worked this river, and his name was Dan Bosse, and my uncle says he was the greatest river man that you'd ever seen. And he used to tell me the stories about this Dan Bosse, how he used to watch him fight with the boots on. So, that's what I'm going to tell these people, then I'm going to bring the boots out and show them. And he was amazing. He could jump two stories, land on his feet, and he says, it was just like a cat. Well as a kid, listening to him in the hunting camp, and him having a couple of drinks, I says, you know, I can't believe that. You're drinking, and you're telling stories. He says, I saw Dan Bosse when I was eleven years old, do you think I drank? Well, no, I don't think so. So, that's what got my interest.

He used to tell the stories of gathering around This bridge was built in 1916; my uncle was thirteen years old then. And this is was all log piles, I got pictures of it. All along the river here, the long logs, and they were stacked along the river, and it would be jammed. You couldn't get up there and get them into the river. He says, this Dan Bosse was capable of doing that. What he would do, he would get a pole, a long pole, and he would get dynamite and he would put it at the end of the pole, and he used a short fuse. Not a long fuse, because if you get up there and you lit it and the long fuse went out, who's going to go up and check? Like, you light a firecracker, and no one's going to go check if it doesn't go off. Of course, I was telling my uncle, you're nuts, that never happened. He says it happened. Well, it did happen. He was telling the truth.

Three and four hundred people used to gather near that bridge and watch him, and he'd go up – I mean, some of those piles were at least, I want to say, eighty or ninety feet high – and he would go up and pick the key log. He'd have his boots on, he'd run up there, he'd light that piece of dynamite, put it in the right spot, and he would run down before it went off, without falling. And it would explode, and everything came into the river. And so they would all cheer, do another one, do another one, and he would. And he was the man that was capable of doing it. Now he is a legend, and his name is in some of the books. There are some books that have even pictures of him. One of the books is *Tall Trees, Tough Men*, and the other one is, oh, what's the other one. Anyway, *Tall Trees, Tough Men* has got more about him in it, and a picture of him. He was maybe only about five-foot-five. My uncle said he was unbelievable. And that's the way those men fought, they wore their boots. They didn't take them off, because it was rough, rough and tumble in those days.

And I said, you're kidding. He says, I want to tell you another story. You didn't know your grandfather. And I didn't know my grandfather, he had passed away. He said, well your grandfather, my father, and I used to walk downtown when I was just a little boy. In the streets of Berlin, the sidewalks were all wood. And he says that on the sidewalks, as you were walking down, during that transition period when the loggers were just coming out and the drivers were just going up, they'd be walking all over town, it sounded like girls had the high heels, clop-clop-clop-clop, on the sidewalk. And the sidewalk was all chewed up. So, that was another thing that got me going in the history of Berlin.

And also, when he told me about the fights, the fights, he says, there were men walking around town you thought had chicken pox in their early days, but they didn't. They were hit in the face with the spiked boots – I showed you the spiked boots – and they were hit in the face, and that remained as scars. I says, you're kidding. He says, well, why should I kid you? That is the truth. And it is. I researched it, and everything he said was true. And the thing is, he could tell a story so well, because he could hardly speak English and was half French and half English. And so I got interested in it and started researching it, and it was unbelievable. Those men were unbelievable. They were awesome. And that's why the rich history is here in Berlin. Being the first city to pollute the Androscoggin, you know what I mean. It was so polluted, you know. It's being cleaned up though.

Q: Why do you say it's the first city to pollute it?

PT: Because this is where the mills started. This is the first place that the river got polluted. You could fish this river up above here and catch fresh fish. I would never have fished it down below. Everything went in. They just dumped everything into the river. Chemicals. They might have a hard time with that mill, if they tear it down and stuff, there's so many chemicals in there it's going to be like a superfund to try to clean it up. But that's the way they did it back then. Nobody bothered them.

Q: Did you experience this pollution when you were a kid?

Pt: Of course, of course. The mill just closed May 6th. And the smell of paper mills, Rumford, Berlin, all along the line of the Androscoggin, and up in Maine on the Millinocket, they have that distinct smell, paper mill smell. And for years I grew up with it, and so did many people. But that's what this river brought, and along with that, it brought some of the best paying jobs in the state of New Hampshire, paper makers. They made great money, great, great money.

Q: You mentioned the fights that broke out among the millers?

PT: You see, when those men came back to town, after working all winter long, they brought with them a wad of money like this. And the first thing they did was take a shower, go to a bar, and even in those days, the women were waiting for their money. I mean, even in those days they had brothels here, you know what I'm saying? And they'd get to drinking, and they'd get to fighting.

My uncle told me the toughest of all of them was the river man, not the man who worked in the woods, it was the river man. He was by far the toughest. Now, you got to remember that a man that worked in the river, or on the log drives, worked when the ice was melting, the snows were melting. For fourteen hours a day they would either stand on a log or stand in the water, with ice going by, and in that water. That's what they did, that was their job. So, they were some tough hombres.

And when they came to town, they drank, too. The thing is, they didn't take their shoes off. They didn't fight with their hands, they fought with their feet. So they were tough men. They were probably the nicest men there were, but, like giving an Indian alcohol, or anybody alcohol, they used to fight, that's what they did. The bars were hopping, but from what I read, the police officers could take care of them (*unintelligible*). They had the force to handle them, and that's what they did.

The story that I wanted to, that you want to hear the story, is, when my uncle was eleven years old, he was staying with an aunt, didn't live, but his aunt was watching him, and it was on a street over here called School Street. And she had a two story building, and upstairs she rented it out to the river men when they'd come into town. And one of them that particularly stayed there most of the time was Dan Bosse, and he always kept his boots on.

One day, my uncle was sitting downstairs and he could hear this ruckus coming up the street, and it was three men. The language was all French, the language was all swearing and they were drunk, and they were looking for Dan Bosse. Now, they knew he roomed up there, and they were swearing, I'm going to get you, we're going to kick your ass, and all this stuff, all in French. They were looking for him. So my uncle says, when

they got to be like the distance from here to that pole, Dan Bosse came out on the porch. My uncle looked up, he was on the porch. And it was all in French, he says, you looking for Dan Bosse? I'll be right down.

My uncle says – and he told me this story – he says, I was sitting on the porch, and all of a sudden I looked up, and he put his hand on the railing, *whoosh*, down onto the lawn, landed on his feet. And he says, I'm right here boys, I'll be right there. He took about four or five steps, he guided himself right so he got the right distance, and when he got the right distance, he did a cartwheel. My uncle says he was great at that. He did a cartwheel, and then the man in the middle, with his boots, right in the face. All over, he said. That man dropped, was all full of blood, and they dragged him off and ran off with him. End of fight.

And he says it happened a lot. Now, you can see where the pock marks came from. He was sober, they were drunk, they were looking for him, they found him, and he took care of matters. But I said, no, there's no way. But you know, when I looked it up, he did those things, this Dan Bosse, and it must've happened. And my uncle says, I was eleven years old, I'll always remember that scene. Off the porch, lands just like a cat would land, on its feet, because he was so good with his legs. And that was it, he hit that man in the middle and it was all over. He says, the blood came out of his face just like that.

Now, you'll look at those boots a little more when you get back to my truck. When I tell that, I always start with the kids, and I do an encore with my kids, to get them interested in the history of Berlin, I tell them that story. That's what I'm going to tell these people tomorrow, and then, whatever they want to know about the river. They're going to go on a boat tour, I'm going to take them up the river a little bit and explain.

The sawmill, you might be interested, when the saw mill came, it brought jobs for people that wanted to immigrate to Berlin. And the people that liked working in the woods, the people that were good at working in the woods were Norwegians, Finland, Denmark, Sweden. So somehow, they got coming over here and got jobs in the saw mill, and they would write home. They'd write home and they'd look around and they'd say, its just like being in our home town, all these Norwegians, that's what they'd say, so come on over. So they did. And right in here, they created a village called the Norwegian Village. If you go up on these streets you'll see Norway Street, Denmark Street, Finland Street, Sweden Street. Those men developed their families and worked in this sawmill. And with them – and my research, there's nobody's research that's going to change this – they brought skiing to this country, to this country, they brought it to this country, right here. The very first set of skis that were made in this country, man made, were built right here in the village by a Norwegian.

I have a guy that's my age who's grandfather had come over, and he wasn't quite sure where ski jumping started. I said, Brent, ski jumping started here. Are you sure? He

says, you know, in Minnesota? I said, I want to show you something. So I found an article in the late 1800s, and it said, skee, S-K-E-E, jumping, and it started talking about the Norwegians, how they would go on the Height of Land right here, and they built brush piles, and they cleared an area. And when they did, when the winter came, they filled it with snow, and they'd come down the hill and jump off the brush pile. And the people would watch them. They would do this every Sunday afternoon, when they had the time off from the mill. And the people would come up here and start watching them. They would tell their friends. I says, where do you think ski jumping started? He says, you're right, it started in Berlin. And then, of course it went, you know, Lake Placid and places like that.

But, this is where it started. They brought it here the 1850's. And then it got so big, they built a ski jump on one of these mountains here and they started having – I don't know if you ever heard about the winter carnivals, the winter carnivals were big. And then, in 1938 they built what they called (*name*) Ski Jump, which is dilapidated now. It's about four miles up the road, and you might have a chance, it's dilapidated. But, in 1938 it was built, and all of eastern United States came here to practice for the Olympics and decide who's going to represent the east part of the United States for the Olympics right here at this ski jump. And that is fifty years after these Norwegians showed them what it was all about. Cross country skiing, downhill skiing, they brought with them their skis. Our hockey, our hockey fame came over from Quebec, Lewiston. Berlin. I mean, they were, Lewiston, you got a lot of French, too.

So, this area here is called Berlin Mills, or, the Norwegian Village. And you're going back in time when I see people that I see that died, I'll see their obituaries, when they died in the late 1800s, early 1900s, came here, and this Mr. Olson, or Nielsson or whatever, came here in 1851, worked at the mill, and his brother – you know, I read their obituaries, which tells me this is where they came. And when you start reading about the history of skiing, there's so many places that want to take that fame. It's right here. It's right here. This is where it developed. And it didn't take long to get going into the mountains. But, the very first set of homemade skis made in the United States were made right here, somebody's house here. Ski jumping started here. And so, skiing got its going in the United States from those Norwegians, that's what they brought with them.

And the other people that were starting to develop working in this town would come up and watch them, and couldn't believe it. Come and watch what we did in our old country, you know. And by the 1930s, people were born and raised in Berlin, Norwegians, and they developed the oldest ski club in the world, (*name*) Ski Club. That's the oldest ski club in the country, and it still exists here. And that's when they built the ski jump. Well, some of the ancestors said, well look, let's call up and get our jumpers from Norway and Finland and bring them here, so they can be the first jumpers to try the jump. They had a meeting, they said, no way. We built it, we'll jump off it. Don't import any of your grandfather's ancestors, or your uncles or your brother. It's going to be done, and the first six jumpers

that went off of there were from Berlin.

All from the river. All because of the sawmill. All because you can bring the logs down. I have a picture of some of those Norwegians out here, right in this spot here, right here, standing on the logs. Eighteen, I'm giving it 1890, 1891, all out here with the logs, getting the logs ready for the sawmill. All because of the river. They had men that drove the logs down. They also had men that worked constantly on the logs here. A

Another sad thing that used to happen with the river here was, the young kids used to watch these men work on the river. They would try to do what their older brothers or their fathers were doing, so they'd come out barefooted, down they'd go. The minute they'd go down, the logs covered them, it was all logs, and they lost a lot of young kids, girls and boys, wanting to do what their fathers did. They couldn't do it. They didn't have the equipment, they weren't trained at doing it, and so there were a lot of lives, young children's lives lost right here, because that's what they wanted to do.

Q: Sounds like the river drivers are kind of local heros.

PT: They were. They were. They're still heros, you know. But like the cowboy, they are history. There's no such thing as a real cowboy anymore, you know what I mean. There's no such thing as a real log driver anymore. They might have log rolling contests. These men would've put everybody to shame, that's what they did all day long.

Q: I like this.

PT: I can see you're getting into it. I should've started right at the beginning with that story, but I didn't know what you wanted.

Q: Oh, no, this is all good. Especially, it interests me that you're talking to young kids about this.

PT: I do, I do.

Q: Why? How did that start?

PT: Well, in the teaching, we got to teaming. We got teaming, and with teaming, four years ago, they said each of you teachers can offer something one of the periods, an encore, what they call an encore. Well, I've got four of them now, four encores. I've got history of Berlin as an encore, Vietnam War, I'm a Vietnam Veteran. I have some great footage of Vietnam War, so the kids want to learn it. I put the footage on and I explain how we got into the war, and how it looks so much like where we are today. You know, and I use that, so they choose that. And I also have small engines, I do small engines with them, a little taste of small engines.

Now they want me to do French, beginning French. Well, I took French I and French II in college and I think I can do that. So I'll have to practice a little bit. But that, along with Berlin history, I do that. And I show that King Spruce video, because that's the best. Last year I came here, and I started all by myself, I videoed the river, and I spent three days going back and forth with a logger and all of his crew, on modern logging up in a pond up in Maine, (*sounds like*) Sturtevant Pond, up in Maine which empties into the Magalloway, which Magalloway empties into the Androscoggin. All that water comes here. And once I got up there, I started talking about how the logs were brought to Berlin from the outlet of the river, I had that all done up. And then we went to all of his equipment, which is two, three million dollars worth of equipment, how they cut it down and bring it to Berlin. Then, I mean, they're not bringing it now, but they're bringing it in different places, Rumford or whatever.

And so I did that video, and I haven't completely edited it yet. But, you know, I think I said shit or hell in one of them, but you know, that's nothing. The kids don't even know what that is. It's over their heads, under their heads, or whatever. So, even to edit it. Anyway, I started here, went up there, and finished the whole thing up there, and I have it. So eventually, when it's complete, and it is complete, just fixed up a little bit, I'm going to donate it to the historical society. The way it was then, and the last way it was, anyway, and how we used the river to do it.

Q: What kinds of things interest the kids most out of all that?

PT: That story, that fighting story. They love that. And then, of course, I have old pictures of Berlin and I say to the kids, have you ever been here? Or, where is this? And I tell them where it is, and they go, no. I says, yeah, that's, you know where that is? And I give them today's version of where it is, and I'll say that was there a hundred years ago. No. I say, oh yeah, you know.

Q: I think that local history is really a important thing to be interested in.

PT: Oh yeah. As a matter of fact, we had a social studies teacher resign, so we must've have four or five meetings to hire a new social studies teacher. One of them was sitting next to me, it was so funny, with the principal and everything. She says, what I'd like to do with these kids is to give them some type of a history of their own home town. So, the principal looked at her, or was it – I can't remember – and said, no problem, buy his two books. And the person went, wow, really? I said, oh yeah, no problem, and I'll help you.

Q: What kind of interest do you get from these books from the community?

PT: They love them. Everybody that's bought one loves it. But they've got to be from Berlin. They don't really have to be, because my wife has told me that some of the people that bought the books have just come into town and just started reading them, and they

love the stories. And they're stories like I just told you, similar stories, you know, having to do with the river, having to do with the murder, or, whatever took place here. It's what it is, it's what it's all about, and they love it. And I'm working on three, number three. I don't become a millionaire out it but, you know, it's that type of a book where it's not, you just read a nice novel or a love story and put it away and that's it. It's the type of book, after you've read it and put it on the shelf and, hey, you know where I can find the answer to that, is back in this book. So it's like a history book. It is.

Q: Where do you get the information, from talking to people?

PT: I researched it, I researched it. Library, Moffett House. I've researched it, I've talked to people that are passed away today and told me about things. That's what I've done. And the boom piers, these piers, I've had so many people say, oh, I know, I know. They don't know. Nobody knows when they were built. I know between what years they were built, for sure between '91 and '92. I know for sure in 1896, they set right here, I got a picture, that I blew up. Some people go, oh, they were built in the 1920s. I don't even talk with them, because they don't know. But I wrote a story on the boom piers, and I've got it in my computer. And I went over to the bridge and took a picture upriver, and along with that picture is the story of the boom piers. I've got it in my living room. Anybody wants it, I'll give it to them, along with the picture. They've told me here that they'd like it. They haven't pursued me enough. You know, you want it, okay, but then nobody says anything. It'd be something great to have out here, with the picture and the story about the boom piers.

Q: So you find a lot of people are interested in the boom piers.

PT: Yeah, oh yeah, a lot of people. When we go on the boat tour there, they love it. Especially when we start getting beyond the bridge and I tell them, that's the Berlin Mills section, the Norwegian section of Berlin, where they came over. I says, this is where skiing started. And I've got the pictures, I've got some old pictures. I've got pictures of logs here, I got pictures of logs on the river, and logs on the bank of the river a hundred ten years ago, you know. And so, I can pass the pictures around. And they're only going to do a half an hour tour, so that's fine. I won't have to talk forever. The first tour I did was four hours. Four hours. I went all the way up to the ski jump, which is four and a half miles from here, and back. And by the time I got to the bridge I go, whew, you know, I'm done talking. You guys are going to have to ask some questions or something.

Q: You said that your interest is primarily in history?

PT: Of this area.

Q: How come you don't get involved in the political aspect of things?

PT: I don't get involved in politics. They have other columnists that write about, you know, politics. I just don't, because I'm not touching what I want to touch. And then, I'm not doing what I want to do, and I probably can't come back because I don't know enough about it. I could only say what happened back then, okay? I can tell people that we had a mayor, in the thirties and forties, who made the people that walked the streets and didn't do anything, work. They had to have a job, or they would not be able to collect welfare. Now, if I were to put that in the paper, I'd get repercussions from some homeless person – and that was another thing, homeless people. Well, you know, I see these homeless people around here, too. My kids always say, well, you know that man that walks from here to there, he's a millionaire. I go, you know guys, think about it, you have a million dollars. Are you going to walk with a suitcase a suitcase or a knapsack every day and to live under a bridge? Well. I said, well what? And give your million dollars to somebody else when you die? Well, right off all the hands go up, no way, I'm going to spend it. I go, so he's not a millionaire. And when the homeless, there's always these things, well, these people that are in town, they're homeless, we got to take care of them.

One of the guys walks every day from here to Gorham with a knapsack on his back. And you know, I have a lot of people come up to me and say, why don't you mention him? Mention what? If he can walk from here to Gorham, he can get a job. Every day, he's that physically inclined to walk, he can get a job. So I don't say anything, though, because there'd always be somebody that would come back on it, so I just stick with history.

Q: Have you followed any of the events around the river politically lately? The clean up, I guess.

PT: Oh yeah, I read about it and stuff like that, I do that, oh yeah. It's right across down here, in hat they call the cell house, where all the chemicals were used to produce the paper. You know, the Brown company had a research department – I'm going to show you, too – it's right down here, it's the first brick building as we go down here, that was second to none. This Mr. Brown brought in people from all over the world, top scientists, and they invented. And anything to do with the paper industry, they invented. But one man, on the side, just in town, invented something on his own, and it was called the (*name*) Rapid Roll. It was the forerunner to the Stanley Rule, invented and produced in Berlin. And he sold it to Stanley in the '30s, in New Britain, Connecticut, they bought it out and they've made the Stanley Rule out of it. But I've got the original, and I'm going to show them tomorrow. That was developed by scientist that came here, researchers that came here, worked in these mills. That's why these mills were tops in the world, because these men were tops.

Q: Really progressive inventors?

PT: Oh, they were unbelievable. And they came from – I wrote about a president of the company, when they reformed in 1943, that was a graduate of the U.S. Naval Academy, and in World War I, ran the production of all the major airplanes, that was his job. And then

he got into other big industries, the steel industry. They hired him to be the president of the company here. So, you know, you're talking about getting a top gun, when you get a man like that. And that's what they did, and that's what made these companies go, when you got the top men like that. So many things, so much history. It's unbelievable.

Q: How has the decline of the mills affected Berlin?

PT: Oh, suddenly we're losing our people. They're leaving, they can't live here. Our natural citizens that were here are leaving, and the housing is getting blighted. People are coming up from – you don't even recognize the names. I mean, in a town like this, everybody knows their names. You know, when you see that name, oh, I know that family. You don't know the family. The drug busts that they're having, it's awful. It's not good.

So, we need something to get going again. The young kids do not stay. My youngest son will not come back here. My oldest, luckily, he got a job not far from here, but my youngest won't come back. He says, I'm not coming back there. He says that. The gene pool is so bad in Berlin. That's what he says. Sometimes I have to agree with him. But there's nothing for him here., there's no good jobs. That's why we need to do it. Like, the state prison brought a lot of people, a lot of good people. You don't even know it exists. You don't even know it's there. Federal prison will do the same thing. But I don't say it. I only tell you, I don't put it in the paper and say, well, come on.

Years ago, they were open to getting anything in here to diversify the industry. Why not let a federal prison in? I would get bombarded with letters, if I said that. So, I don't say that. And it's true, because years ago they tried anything, any industry that wanted to come in, they let it, they'd try it. Somebody wrote a story in a paper, or a letter, why not try a meat canning factory? A meat canning factory? What do you think they are? Knocking on our door, busting the doors down to come to Berlin to put a meat canning factory here? First of all, the meat's out west, you're going to can it out there where it is, you're not going to send it here. The price of it would be nuts. So, just some of their ideas are off, but I don't say anything. Like I said, I'm saying it to you, but I don't say it in the paper. I just stick with the history of what I want to write.

Q: What do you see as the role of that history today?

PT: I'd say that it's going to preserve the history, because we're going to lose all of the wood. We're definitely losing all the history of what the city used to be like. My stories are preserving them, that's what's going on right there, so that somebody doesn't have to go and research it. They'll be able to pick a book up, and it's there.

Q: How do you see that influencing people today?

PT: As per what?

Q: I mean, I'm sure you've talked to people about what you've published. What are they saying about it?

PT: They love it. They love the stories. And they say, we wish that it could be like that again. They do say that. But, it's not going to be like that again. It's not going to be. You got to diversify. That's where I stop. I'll give you the history, and you do your thing. But, sit down one on one, I'll give you my opinion. Really, you know, because what else is going to come here? We got to start somewhere.

I've been to some of these meetings, and some of the people screaming and yelling, fix the roads for us. Well, you can't fix the roads if there's nothing here. You got to get something here, then fix the roads so you can get to these places. Not going to make an Interstate through Berlin for no reason, it ain't going to work. Now, if there was something here, a growing industry, then we'd do something. You get a bigger airport. I mean, those things come with the industry. Berlin grew because of the industry. That's what happened here. It wouldn't have grown if it was just water that flowed through here.

You know, the tourism, they think the tourism is going to produce big bucks for Berlin. It's beautiful here, and I agree with you, the mountains are great. But the tourists are not going to spend the bucks here. The tourists don't come with insurance to go to the hospitals. People that work in these federal prisons or state prisons, whatever you're going to get, they come with that, so they will open up more avenues for us. But some people don't see it that way. They're just bringing trash when they come here. No, they're not. You work for a federal prison, you're drug free, you're family is drug free, you're gone. And, you're educated.

Like my son said, geez, you know, a degree in psychology and drug and alcohol, I wish the prison would have been there, I would have got a job there. But that's not the way it worked. That'll bring younger people back, too. People who get out of college with a little training, we'll give them jobs. Oh, I say it's going to develop, it's going to come, and people are going to say, wow, that really helped. Downtown, the way it looks now, places are going to open up. But I don't write it down, because I'll just get flak from people, stick to your history, never mind being a politician. I mean, I've even had people say, well, why don't you run for mayor? I say, because that's not my thing.

End of Side A
Side B

Q: Do you see more and more people recreating on the river?

PT: No more than before, no more than before. There's a little place up in Milan that

opened up some type of recreation for canoeing, tubing. But people used to do that anyway, now they can go over there and rent and do it. They're not making a thriving business out of it, you know. The fishermen have always been there, the hunters have always been there. You're not going to touch this river, you're not going to do anything to this river to change it so that recreation can develop. Environmentalists will never let you. There's no way you're going to change.

Years ago, they changed the course of it. From here down through, and I'll take you and I'll show you where, what we call the Glen Paper Mill, the whole huge Glen Paper Mill, they dynamited, they changed the course of the river so they could put their dams to run the mills. They did that, they were able to do it. You put a piece of dynamite in this river today, bye, see you later. You will never be seen again.

Q: When was that they restructured?

PT: They did that in the 1880's. They were able to do that. The log drives that took place in the brooks, where the water would be high and they'd throw the logs in, and the logs would go around the corner and they'd always get caught up. Okay, you were making money when the logs were going down. You weren't making money working to try to get the logs free, you were losing money. So they took care of that. They dynamited that corner, and that corner was gone.

You go to a brook today and dynamite the corner out, you're gone again. So, those are the things they did back then that you can't do today. So that industry is gone. They can't do it. But they did it. They didn't harm anybody. I remember the brooks, some of the brooks, if you see that film, the water was up, the logs were coming down, they were thick, thick, thick in the water. Once the summer came, you could go fish that brook and catch beautiful trout. Where did those trout go to? They hid somewhere. Never hurt that brook at all. Never did it hurt it at all.

Q: What's the first thing you remember about the river?

PT: When I was a kid? The logs, the logs on the river from here up to Milan, the Thirteen Mile Woods area, just loaded with logs. You couldn't even throw a line in the water, at times. Then when they'd release them, then you could. That's something I always remember about the river.

Q: It seems like down in Lewiston, they don't talk about the logs.

PT: No, they don't talk about the logs. Because down in Lewiston you have that one drop there, between Lewiston and Auburn, and the Bates Manufacturing Company was driven by that mill, I believe, the old Bates Manufacturing, from Bates College. You know those buildings have all been preserved, or they've been taken down? They've been preserved.

That was driven by the river, the river operated those mills. So every town that this river went through got polluted, of course, you know it did. But it gave food and property and housing, it produced all that from the people that worked in those mills.

Q: And the pollution started up here, you said?

PT: And the pollution started right here, because this is where the mills started. And the water would come through and then dump back in, and the sewage, the early sewerage. I just wrote a story on the early sewage. All they did was, they'd connect the toilet, and put a culvert, and it would run into the river. That's how it was.

Q: Until When?

PT: Until, I want to say at least the '60s, 1960s.

Q: Do you remember some of that?

PT: I remember that well. I remember seeing some of that stuff come into the water. It was horrible, but that's the way it was. And when they first started doing it, they thought they were getting rid of a lot of diseases, and they did probably, but still, they were creating more by putting it into the water.

Q: So you've seen a lot of change go on?

PT: I've seen a lot of change in my lifetime, and there are others. I mean, I don't know what you have for time, but if you would go to either nursing home here, and they could tell you what people that are living there, that are ninety-five or ninety-six, have all their marbles, and if you could talk with them they could give you even more.

Q: I am planning on trying to do that.

PT: But, you know, some people don't like to be interviewed, but there are some that'll just give it like it is, when they were a kid. I wrote a story about – they used to skate on this, when there was no logs, this thing was frozen solid and they'd skate for miles up here. Okay, and I said, I was talking to this lady, whose name was mentioned in one of my stories, she was almost a hundred, and just up the river she had fallen in, and she was going down. Somebody got her, somehow her glove caught and they used a stick and they pulled her out. She was like eight years old. Well, she was in the nursing home, still alive. So I went and I talked with her, and she told me the whole story and she told me who saved her life. And I said, well, what were you doing skating on the river, and the water runs. And she says, young man, she says, in those days, it was cold, and in those days this river was frozen. And I researched. They had horse races, with the carts and everything right here on the river, up and down, races, with horses.

Q: It must have been really thick then?

PT: Yeah, it was frozen.

Q: But today, it doesn't do that.

PT: No, no way, I wouldn't even attempt it today.

Q: Just with climate change, you think?

PT: I think so. That's what she said, young man, it was a lot colder back then. That's what she said.

Q: Yeah, I'll have to look into the nursing home thing as well.

PT: I would go and see whoever you got to see, tell them what you're doing, and would there be anybody here that could talk to me, and they might know someone. You know, you might luck out just with one person, but that one person would be great. I know that if Mrs. Johnson, her name is Mrs. Johnson, and she's at the Coos County Nursing Home. Born and raised in Dummer and Milan, the next two towns above, and she used to tell me stories about the river. About how her brother's used to go out and pickerel fish with dynamite. I go, what? I know, she says, you wouldn't believe it. They'd throw the dynamite in, boom, and the pickerel would be dead, and they'd gather up the fish and we'd eat them. She's got stories like that. She lived along the river, further up, ten miles up. Her name is Mrs. Johnson.

Q: Okay, I will look into that.

PT: Alberta, her first name is Alberta, I just thought of that. And she is the most beautiful, pleasant lady. She's got to be going on ninety-six, close to that age today. Matter of fact, they had National Nursing Home Week, and they bought my second book and they wanted me there for the signing. And they gathered twenty-five elderly residents, and I read four stories at the most, because they can only take so much, and you should've seen some of the hands come up. You know, young man, that (*name*), I read the story about the (*name*), this lady says, when I was six or seven, in the '20s, she was passing pamphlets out for it. That was her job, helping her father or something. So they have those stories, and they love them.

Q: Seems like such a generational thing.

PT: Yeah, so Mrs. Johnson, Alberta Johnson. Mention my name, because she loves me, and if you can get to talk with her, and if you do, mention my name and tell her that I said that you should talk with her about the area of Milan and Dummer, and the Androscoggin along

there.

Q: Okay, that sounds great.

PT: So, that should be helpful. I certainly gave you more than my hour, didn't I? I don't care.

Q: No, this has been great, really great.

PT: That's me. I knew it, I knew it would happen. I should take you around and show you some of the other sections. I think you'll enjoy that.

Q: Before we do that, is there anything else you I should know about, that I didn't ask?

PT: I don't know, I probably told you quite a bit.

Q: No, just making sure there wasn't something you were burning to tell.

PT: As we go along for a little ride there, maybe something will come up.

Q: Sounds great, would you like to go do that?

PT: Yeah.

Pause in taping - resume outdoors.

PT: ... they put these little trees in, kids would come down and break them in half, little shit heads. When the water is really up, in May, you can see the power of this river. It's really powerful.

Q: With the runoff?

PT: That's why you know that they harnessed all that power. You can see parts of the old mill. They had dams in there they rerouted. You can tell, it wasn't the water that did all of this. When the water's running through here and the dams are going, that generates more power. Over there is where the other mill was, what they called Glen Paper Mill, all on that area, over there. Kids come here and swim now. Or hey tell me they do.

Q: So the river is swim-able, up here.

PT: Now it is, now it is. With the mills closed, it's a lot better.

Q: When did it become swim-able?

PT: Personally, once the mill closed, it's amazing to me, I would never swum in here as long as that mill was running. I wouldn't have. You can see what the water has done, but you know man did some of that. This is called the Great Pitch, where the water comes here. In the early 1800s, the Great Pitch was in there, and the way the water came and swung, it created so much energy that they used it, they used it for mills and stuff, you know. But this is a park in here now, and they're polluting it. That's where the old mill was. It had a clock tower and everything here. You could tell the time from either direction by looking at this clock tower. That was right in here, before my day, but I have pictures of it and stories of it and everything. And it was this huge paper mill, and the remnants are still in there, I mean, you saw that over there.

Q: Can you go walking around in there?

PT: You can go walking around in there, but there's not much to see in there. Just little old remnants of the mill that are just, you know, there's not much to see in there. You're looking at the river. That's an island. People don't know – the name of that island, it's called Macy Island – they don't know that. Nobody, there's probably four or five people that know that: me and public service, the guys that study the maps. Just like Macy's, from New York.

Q: Same people?

PT: No, just the same spelling. But I never came across that name until maybe a year ago. I came across a man by the name of Macy, he was involved with real estate and stuff. So it has to be named after him, back in the late 1800s. Oh, there's a bike, stolen, guaranteed.

Q: So, about how high does it come up during the spring? All the way up?

PT: Oh, in the spring, you should see it coming down here. It's so noisy, and I got video of it. It's so powerful. You see how much it drops in here. And you can see remnants of other manmade piers over there. Look at that, there's kids swimming there. You see the drop. So whatever they put in there, wheels or, you know, to operate things, that water was hitting that real hard.

Q: Looks like a popular swimming spot.

PT: Well, there's better spots than that. I bet you half of those kids are kids I had in class, guaranteed. They're waving.

Q: That's so funny.

PT: Hey, that's Mr. Tardiff.

Q: How many years have you been teaching?

PT: Well, I taught for eleven and then I got out of it, and then I started again back in the late 90s.

Q: You're back in it.

PT: My niece made me get back in it, so I did. So I went and tested and finally passed, and got into it. It was tough, that was tough taking the test, the practice test. I hadn't been in school in years. But, you know, as you can see, how much she drops, the river. And this is where the power of it is. This was a tourist attraction in the 1800s, 1850s, 1860s, they had a little bridge, people would come here with horse and buggy, and I got pictures of them standing on the bridge, somewhere in there, and watching the power of the water come down. It was a tourist attraction, because it was considered the most beautiful and powerful river in New England. At this point, the point that I'm telling you about.

Q: I haven't seen all of the Androscoggin. This is beautiful.

PT: So you can imagine, before the mills got here, before the mills were here, you can only imagine what it looked like. And I do have a picture of it. I've got that, and you know what go along great with your thesis? I got a picture of the falls here, with a poem that was written in 1870. That would go good in your thesis.

Q: That would be wonderful.

PT: I've got it in my computer. And when you open it up, you have to click on it and blow it up, so you can get the picture and the – you're around tomorrow, you say.

Q: Yeah, I'll be here.

PT: Well the number I called was, I don't know, I called a number that was on the (*unintelligible*) -

End of Interview
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