Chapter 7: Oral History and Narratives of Migration

by Deborah L. Rotman

While cultural anthropologists have long recognized the importance of living informants to understanding the human experience, archaeologists have only relatively recently become increasingly and consistently engaged with descent communities and other stakeholders in archaeological and historical investigations. Charles Orser (2004:171-172) reminds us that, as anthropological archaeologists, we "must work with those who are invested in the history we seek to understand."

Historical archaeologists working in the United States are often in conversation with local informants, as with African-American or Native American communities near to the site or sites of investigation. Curiously, however, few scholars examining immigrant experiences in the United States, such as the Irish diaspora, are in dialogue with contemporary residents of Europe and other constituencies who have unique knowledge of and are intimately connected to, yet geographically distant from, our field sites. Migrations of people affect not only those who physically leave their homeland, but also those who are left behind. This is especially true for the Irish as a consciously transnational community.

Engagement and archaeological practice

The practice of historical archaeology in the United States has been profoundly shaped by the Native American Grave Protection and Repatriation Act (NAGPRA) and the African Burial Ground Project in New York City of the early 1990s. Scholars have learned that we must work with those whose histories are the foci of our research, in order that they may have an opportunity to participate in the telling of their own stories (Orser 2004:171-172; GCC 2006). In addition, the richness and multidimensionality of scholarship is significantly enhanced through engagement with descent communities and other stakeholders who have unique knowledge of sites, events, and other aspects of our projects. Yet archaeologists (and notably historical archaeologists) in America have been slow to recognize the peoples in contemporary Europe, among other places, as communities often integrally linked to the histories of immigrants in the United States. (Notable exceptions of archaeologists using oral history include Beck and Somerville [2005] and Whiteley [2002].) While this paper specifically explores the role of oral history and personal narratives in understanding the Irish diaspora, it has relevance to all anthropological investigations that utilize written and oral accounts in seeking to elucidate movements and mobility of diasporic peoples.

Oral history is an important dimension of collaboration with descent communities. Little (2007:29) observed that "the poor, disenfranchised, or illiterate tend not to appear in documentation. Or, when they do, the available information is distorted and incomplete." Specifically, "oral history is the only way to flesh out the archaeological record, especially in the study of recent groups poorly represented in the documentary record" (Barber 1994:28). The colonial history of Ireland and the discrimination the Irish often experienced in the United States resulted in these immigrants being largely invisible in written records, aside from generic governmental documents like census enumerations. Oral history is "unique in that it gives us the perspectives from people of different backgrounds, cultures, and religions" (GCC 2006:iii). This data allows scholars to move beyond a single primary historical narrative as they investigate how the past was differentially experienced and understood. Through engagement with the Irish in Ireland and those of Irish descent in America, we have connected to the very personal and intimate narratives of national and global phenomena. Individualized accounts have added detail and texture to history that is often understood in anonymous terms.

Oral history as a critical data set

Scholars are often dismissive of oral accounts as irrelevant to studies of the past. With regard to the Great Famine, for example, oral history has often been "devalued as a worthy historical resource, despite its possible usefulness" (Quinn 2001:84). As a result, family narratives of the Famine, migration, and survival constitute an underutilized scholarly resource. Póirtéir (1995:221) noted that "Even in those cases where selective memory, the transmission process or artistic license may have confused chronology or other details,

we can still find insights into the attitudes, feelings, and psychology of the people which wouldn't be available from other sources."

Historical archaeologists and other investigators of the recent past tend to privilege written accounts as more authentic, more reliable or more truthful, while oral accounts are considered to be the opposite – illegitimate, unreliable, and false (Harris 1985; Grele 1985; Whiteley 2002). Lynch (2009:9) observed, however, that "History does not record the past, it provides commentary and analysis of it." Therefore, it is imperative to be mindful that both written documents *and* oral histories are incomplete, censored, and biased. "Historical study, whether based on written sources or derived from oral evidence, contributes by giving history a purpose through illuminating some aspect of the past as faithfully as it can. At one level the means to this end are the same: to gather, scrutinize, interpret, and array as many sources and arguments as possible" (Henige 1982:4). All lines of evidence used in anthropological inquiry must critically assess the context in which knowledge was created, preserved, and shared, regardless of whether it is textual or oral in nature.

Oral history represents not only a legitimate data set in historical archaeological investigations, but can be a particularly robust part of the cultural tradition of the group under study. For example, McDonald et al. (1991) utilized oral accounts in their investigation of the 1879 Northern Cheyenne "outbreak" from Fort Robinson, Nebraska. Despite the 112 years between the event and their publication, the research team demonstrated that oral history made a significant contribution to their project. The escape route that was allegedly taken was in dispute; that which was recorded in white, dominant, written history was very different from that preserved in the oral tradition of the Cheyenne people. Archaeological excavation of the two narratives supported the telling preserved in oral tradition and refuted the written military account. Consequently, in this important study, oral history proved "more reliable" than written history and provided data critical to the interpretation of the past.

Similarly, in his investigation of Ballymenone in Ulster, Glassie (1982:637) observed us that "The District's [oral] historians err in minor detail, but when their words are compared with those frozen in ink by other historians, they are simply right whenever it matters." The strength of oral tradition for the Irish lends additional credence to the potential utility of oral accounts in understanding immigrant experiences – particularly for "remote areas like Achill [Island, Co. Mayo, which] retain old traditions and beliefs because they were never entirely stamped out" (McDonald 2006:307). Lynch (2009:14) extends the argument by stressing the importance of autobiography and storytelling in Irish culture:

> In the wider context of Irish cultural production, the importance of life stories was established well in advance of formalized life-writings as we would now understand it. The prevalence of autobiography in Irish writing, both as a distinct genre and an element of other forms of literature, can be traced back to pre-print culture as it appeared in the guise of family legends and community mythology in which life stories formed an established part of the oral tradition. The distinct function of the *Seanachaí* maintained local and personal histories as well as folk mythology, and ensured that the art of biography was enshrined in Irish culture, particularly in rural communities, before it evolved into an established written form.

Therefore, to summarily dismiss oral history as being unable to make any meaningful contribution to understanding diasporic peoples, such as the Irish, is to throw the baby out with the bathwater. Rather, "the best ways to resolve [potential problems with oral histories] is to keep in mind that the study of the oral past must be conducted on the same lines as the study of any other past" (Henige 1982:128); that is, to critically assess oral data just as we do documentary and archaeological evidence.

Okihiro (1996:211) also reminds us that oral history plays a unique role in the study of the human past, particularly that of immigrant groups:

> Oral history offers an alternative way of conceptualizing history and a means by which to recover that past. And while oral history does not maintain that each individual's view of history is equally legitimate or that every voice must be heard, it does argue that by going

> directly to the people a more valid variety of history can be written. Oral history proposes that we rewrite our history to capture the human spirit of the people, to see how ethnic minorities solved or failed to solve particular problems, how they advanced or resisted change, and how they made or failed to make better lives for themselves and their children.

I advocate for the inclusion and critical assessment of oral histories as one of many lines of data in historical archaeological investigations of immigrant experiences. Oral history collected from peoples of Irish descent on both sides of the Atlantic can inform our understanding of the Irish diaspora in America in ways that other data sets cannot.

As part of the historical and archaeological exploration of Irish immigrants in the Midwest, we have been in dialogue with informants in Ireland (Cos. Cork, Donegal, Dublin, Galway, Mayo, Waterford, and Wexford) (Rotman et al. 2007, 2008; Rotman and Dilla 2009). Orser (2004:174) emphasized that "the historical reality of the diaspora means the linking of two disparate communities, composed of those who were born in and still live in Ireland, and those who were born in and still live outside Ireland, but who still self-identify in some fashion as Irish." From our conversations with Irish informants, we have gained important "new understanding of local and family histories as well as the impact emigration had and continues to have on the Irish people" (Rotman et al. 2007:10). As Murray (2006:15) asserted for the Irlandés in Argentina, "Even if it is not valid to extrapolate the values represented …to the universe of Irish emigrants to Argentina and their families, it is possible to imagine them behaving within the extensive array of intercultural relations of the community in which they lived." The same is likely true for the Irish-American families in the Midwestern United States.

Elucidating the Irish-American Experience through Engagement

Interaction with those of Irish ancestry in both Ireland and the United States has contributed to our research in Midwest in four important ways by (1) highlighting the transnational dimension of Irish-American experiences and identity; (2) explicating the ways in which the past is relevant to memory and identity in the present; (3) elucidating variation in the diaspora, often illuminating peoples and events not visible in the documentary record; and (4) connecting us to vital documentary, archival, and human resources in both Ireland and the United States relevant to our research project.

(1) Highlighting transnational dimensions of Irish-American experiences and identity: A transnational perspective is imperative for understanding Irish immigrant experiences. Mullins (2008:155) observed that "Processes of dispersion were historically and socially distinctive for captive Africans, Irish migrants, and the Overseas Chinese, but scholarship on all these diasporas centers around the articulate, constructed, and unrecognized connections displaced peoples have with their origins." In addition, "Irish migration and the substantial Irish diaspora in different parts of the globe meant that Irishness was in a very real sense a globalized identity" (Fagan 2002:141). Their "social networks consist of the local and Ireland …and their *Ireland* (not the geographical but the one in their minds) has been relocated to their new communities" (Murray 2006:16; emphasis in the original).

Current President of Ireland Mary McAleese (1997:1) further highlighted Irish identity as a transnational phenomenon:

> Among those who are also owed an enormous debt of thanks are the countless emigrants whose letters home with dollars and pound notes, earned in the grinding loneliness thousands of miles from home, bridged the gap between the Ireland they'd left and the Ireland which greets them when they return as tourists and return to stay. They are a crucial part of our global Irish family. In every continent they have put their ingenuity and hard work at the service of new homelands. They have kept their love of Ireland, its traditions and its culture deep in their hearts so that wherever we travel in the world there is always a part of Ireland of which we can be proud and which in turn takes pride in us.

Orser (2004:175) was even more explicit in stating that, "it is impossible to delink the Irish in Ireland from those individuals of Irish ancestry who live throughout the world." Ireland and the United States clearly share a common history; "US culture is itself in part an Irish invention [and] Irish culture is inconceivable without America" (O'Toole 2000:12).

Oral accounts have contributed to our understanding of cultural practices in both Ireland and the US Indeed, the strategy of out-migration and transatlantic familial bonds began in the nineteenth century and continued well into the twentieth century (and is on-going even today with the decline of the Celtic Tiger economy in Ireland). Edwards and Williams (1994:vii) observed that "the economic and social influences of the famine were considerable; many of the most persistent trends in modern Irish life emerge with the famine." Joan Johnson, Quaker historian and summer resident of Errislannan in Connemara, shared that when her own son went to America in the 1980s, they "waved him off from Shannon and thought we would never see him again" (J. Johnson, interview with the author, August 3, 2007); an experience not unlike that of her ancestors for many generations before.

In addition, for many families, sending adult children out of Ireland was not simply a function of the lack of employment for them, but rather represented a deliberate strategy of survival. Tom Joyce, a cattle farmer near Shanahever Lough in Co. Galway, remarked that "every day that a package came from America, it was Christmas" and that the parcel containing clothes, money, and white flour often "made all the difference" to the families back home in Ireland (T. Joyce, interview with the author, August 3, 2007).

The continued interconnectedness of Ireland and the United States was a common theme in personal and family stories. Stephanie Brooks, a resident of Errislannan, observed that on the peninsula "every family is half American" and maintains ties to kin in the US (S. Brooks, interview with the author, August 3, 2007). Anna Slevin, a resident of Dublin, related that one of her aunts often sent packages from America. A favorite aspect of childhood in the 1940s was getting a parcel from Aunt Mary; "She always sent Lipton Tea, since there wasn't any tea [in Ireland] during the war (World War II)" (A. Slevin, interview with the author, August 9, 2007).

While these strategies and transnational aspects of familial relationships are not completely unknown in the documentary record, oral histories and personal narratives humanized the effects of immigration on those who left Ireland as well as those who were left behind. Oral histories provided additional context for Irish immigration to the Midwest and provided us with new lenses through which to view the historical record of the region.

Personal narratives and oral histories also served as important reminders that emigration is a story of real people and their families. Furthermore, narratives of the past continue to have profound meaning in the present.

(2) Explicating the ways in which the past is relevant to memory and identity in the present:
Engagement with descent communities has been important for examining collective memory and collective identity. Quinn (2001:77) observed that many of Irish descent in both Ireland and the US "seek the 'Irish past' as a means of situating themselves in the present."

These transnational connections are not without their complexities. For those who remained in Ireland, the United States was a mythical place about which they learned through letters and the accounts of those who returned home. In many ways, the migrant had "already been to America before going there" (MacÉinrí 2009:3). For those who left Ireland, their homeland became equally mythical – "the place left behind acquired a petrified quality of a culture frozen in space and time, growing ever more distant and ever more precious" (MacÉinrí 2009:1). Or, as O'Connor (1993:6) observed, "being an emigrant isn't just an address. You realize that it's actually a way of thinking about Ireland."

Yet, the romanticized veneer that sometimes characterizes immigrant reminiscences does not detract from their potential usefulness as a data set. Historian Studs Terkel (1986:3) reminds us that "In their remembering are their truths. The precise fact or the precise date is of small consequence. This is not a lawyer's brief nor an annotated sociological treatise." Similarly, Henige (1982:5) asserts that, "oral materials share with written sources the quality of being prisms on the past rather than windows." Or as one informant stated, "It's not the songs, it was the singing" that was important (Grele 1985:81). So while fine-grained detail is arguably important in historical archaeology, in the tableau of human experience, the touchstones of

memory – the collective themes and understandings of a people's history – are equally important to elucidating the past. (See Beck and Somerville 2005 for more on meta-level themes.)

Oral accounts of individuals and families – whether experienced first-hand or part of family tradition –illustrate the key touchstones of memory that are integral to the collective identity of cultural groups. Mintz (1996:300) asserted that "Thus, while a life history might be elicited precisely because the informant was so far from the apparent 'norm' for his or her group in one or another regard, anthropology assumes that the individual, in some fundamental in inalterable ways, gives expression to, incarnates, the culture and cannot do otherwise." The identity of individuals is also the identity of a people. By extension, for example, "Without leaving the locality [of Ballymenone], the District's history brings home the major events of Irish history, providing a means for people to site themselves in their own place, while simultaneously feeling a connection to all of Ireland. All the District's events are local. None is only local. Ballymenone's history is the history of Ireland" (Glassie 1982:637). Consequently, the history of individuals is also the history of a people. History and identity are inextricably linked and both are relevant in the present.

Gibbons (1996:10) further argued that "Identity does not just involve consciousness, or even self-consciousness, but also the realm of representation, i.e., the capacity to be realized in material form." Collective memory and collective identity as conveyed through oral accounts is one element of this representation for peoples of Irish descent.

Shackel (2003:11) noted that "Public memory is more a reflection of present political and social relations than a true reconstruction of the past. As present conditions change socially, politically, and ideologically, the collective memory of the past will also change." The nineteenth century in Ireland was profoundly shaped by colonialism, the devastation of the Famine, and the decline of an agriculturally-based economic system, but these chapters in Irish history are not concluded. Famine cemeteries with their unmarked graves and abandoned stone cottages dot the cultural landscape and serve as present daily reminders of Ireland's difficult past. Consequently, historical analyses "can never be truly disengaged from the present" (Orser 2004:173). Knowing the ways in which material culture was used in daily life in the nineteenth century is as significant as asking why such a question matters in the twenty-first century. Oral history can be a tool for addressing both of them.

Both informal conversations and formal interviews with our informants has revealed disagreements about the importance of the past to the present. Reverend Anthony Previté, Archdeacon of Tuam Diocese and Rector of the Omey Union Parishes for the Church of Ireland (now retired) remarked that "people don't want to remember the past" (A. Previté, interview with the author, July 30, 2007); a sentiment that was echoed by many we interviewed. Tom Joyce concurred with Rev. Previté, but went on to express that the Famine was "miracle of survival" and that remembering was essential (T. Joyce, interview with the author, August 3, 2007). Such apparent contradictions underscore the complexity of Famine and migration experiences and the mixed emotions of remembrance (Quinn 2001:84).

For Irish immigrants to the Midwest, oral histories collected from those in Ireland have enhanced our understanding of emigration narratives and Irish identity in the present. Our informants have often expressed an affinity with the families in our study even though they were not directly related to them (Rotman et al. 2007; Rotman et al. 2008; Rotman and Dilla 2009), highlighting that the stories we are gleaning from the historical archaeological record of Beaver Island are not solely relevant to local history and that of the Midwest. Rather, those individuals and families who settled in the region a century or more ago remain intimately connected to Ireland and narratives of that nation still today. Their stories are not just about incorporation into a new community, but are part of a global phenomenon of adaptation of Irish peoples as they emigrated around the world. The insights we have gained through oral histories have significantly sensitized us to the scope and potential impacts of our storytelling. In addition, oral histories have provided texture to the many varied experiences of the individuals and families affected by emigration.

(3) Elucidating variation in the diaspora: In a fundamental and practical way, oral histories have helped to clarify and expand data available through written texts, such as government records. As Frielander (1996:154) noted, "'Irish' on a census enumeration conceals important distinctions such as Catholic or Protestant, or agnostic or Quaker." Significant aspects of identity and experience were concealed in the amalgamation of peoples into a single category. Personal narratives were essential to revealing critical detail that was otherwise obscured.

Oral accounts have also aided our understandings of Irish immigration at a broader scale, including specific details about the conditions under which individuals emigrated, patterns of movement and mobility as well as their long historical trajectories, and the ways in which emigrants and their families were affected by their leaving. Narrative accounts have illuminated variation which was often masked as Irish people were homogenized and dehumanized under colonialism in Ireland and the significant discrimination they encountered in the US.

Emigration was shaped by a multiplicity of political, social, economic, religious, and other factors, which varied both through time and across space. Voluntarily migrating from Dublin in the 1830s ultimately led to a different experience in America than did being forcibly removed from an estate in Connemara during the Famine (Kearns 1982; O'Neill 1995). The west of Ireland, including Connemara and other rural areas, was more profoundly affected by famine than urban areas in the east (Fitzpatrick 1995; Gallagher 1982; Eneclann 2006). Farmers with access to the sea had supplementary food resources on which to rely in lean economic times that their agricultural counterparts further inland did not have (O'Neill 1995). The presence or absence of relief efforts by the government or groups such as the Quakers were also significant and often meant the difference between survival and starvation (Johnson 2000; Moran 1996). Still different circumstances contributed to migration following the War of Independence and the Civil War of the early twentieth century.

This variation was significant in that it influenced the dispersal of Irish peoples around the globe. An individual or family's experience in Ireland significantly impacted the options available to them in the US. Long-standing enclaves with significant numbers of Irish had well-established infrastructures that could provide for immigrants more effectively than those communities with sparse populations and few institutional resources (Doyle 2006:227); while immigrants who settled in less urban and less industrial places – such as smaller towns in the Midwest – were afforded, for better or worse, different opportunities than their counterparts on the East Coast (Doyle 2006:230). Therefore, while the stereotype of the impoverished slum-dwelling immigrant tends to dominate understandings of Irish experiences in the US, the reality is that the lives of these immigrants was much more varied, diverse, and dynamic (Póirtéir 1995:231).

Interviews with the Irish in Ireland also helped us to fully appreciate the variation of immigrant experiences once they arrived in the United States. Micheál McDonagh, a resident of Errislannan, had ancestors who initially immigrated to sheep farms in Portland, Oregon, but eventually made their way to San Francisco to work for the railroad and telegraph companies (M. McDonagh, interview with the author, July 30, 2007). Peggy Gibbons from Clifden had family who went to Boston and New York as well as others who worked on cattle ranches in Texas (P. Gibbons, interview with the author, August 3, 2007). Catherine Jennings of Carna indicated that her father-in-law had worked on the docks in Boston unloading cargoes of wool from New Zealand (C. Jennings, interview with the author, July 31, 2007).

Each of the settings about which we heard stories represented a unique cultural environment and social circumstances from which Irish people emigrated and into which they built new lives in America. From these conversations, we often learned of additional resources relevant to our study of Irish-American experiences in the Midwest.

(4) Connecting to resources: Finally, through our interactions with the Irish in Ireland and the US, we have become aware of a plethora of archival, folklore, and human resources important to our research. Joan Johnson put us in touch with Quaker archives and historical resources both in Dublin and the United States. Michael Gibbons of Clifden has been a particularly gracious in introducing us to many of the informants we have interviewed; while Catherine Jennings has been a veritable fount of knowledge about documentary and other accounts in Connemara.

Although Irish immigration has been a global phenomenon, the documentary record has often been fragmentary. For our earlier study in South Bend, Indiana, for example, it was often impossible to trace an immigrant's history back to Ireland as the "paper trail" between South Bend and ports of call on the east coast and to points of debarkation in Ireland has often been impenetrable. A records search for James Murphy or Patrick O'Sullivan, for example, often yielded hundreds of "hits," but determining which of those records was relevant to our immigrant under study was a formidable task. Often it was a family story about paths of migration or the movements of people that provided enough additional context to make the documentary record useful or to at least narrow our search to a more manageable focus.

Our research might have eventually led us to many of the archival and human resources that have proven so important to our study. Through engagement with the Irish in Ireland and the US, however, the journey has been both greatly expedited and significantly enhanced by these personal interactions.

Summary and Conclusions

Engagement with and collecting oral histories from those of Irish descent has highlighted the transnational significance of Irish-American experiences, explicated the ways in which the past continues in memory and identity in the present, illuminated the variation of immigrant experiences in the diaspora, and connected us to important data sets relevant to our project. Furthermore, these interactions have helped to refine the research design for studying Irish immigrants in the Midwest and given us new lenses through which to view the archaeological and historical records of the city, creating a very dynamic and intellectually-satisfying engagement that has "promote[d] cooperation and mutual learning" (Orser 2004:172). Despite the potential richness of transnational interactions, however, historical archaeologists in America have not fully recognized contemporary Irish peoples as descent communities invested in the history of Irish immigrant experiences in the US. Nevertheless, our research project in the Midwest has greatly benefitted from such a transatlantic perspective, particularly with regard to oral histories.

We are only at the beginning of this journey. We still have much to learn about the experiences of those Irish who left their homeland as well as those who were left behind. There are still more stories to be heard, more cups of tea to be shared, more resources to be explored. This essay is not meant to be comprehensive or the definitive word on oral history and engagement with descent communities in Ireland. Rather, it is intended to advocate for the importance of these interactions on both sides of the Atlantic to tell the remarkable and varied stories of the Irish Diaspora – a model of potential utility for the study of other diasporic peoples as well.

Former President Mary Robinson (1995:2) emphasized that the past is "human and not historic." As we develop frameworks for understanding the movements of peoples around the globe, our intellectual enterprise will be significantly enhanced through collaboration and engagement with those whose pasts we seek to understand – individuals and families both near and distant from our field loci.

Oral Histories Collected on Beaver Island

by Deborah L. Rotman, Kasia Ahern, Rhiannon Duke, Bianca Fernandez, and Jackie Thomas

Our time spent interviewing the residents of Beaver Island provided us with new understanding of local and family histories. Questioning focused on several specific topics – Irish immigration to the island – as well as more general topics, including daily life, agricultural practices, and the like.

The interviews from 2010 are summarized below. Each informant was provided with a draft of the transcription on which they commented. Their suggested revisions have been incorporated into this document. The text for each interview includes a brief explanation of who each individual is and what unique knowledge they had to contribute to the respective projects.

Each informant has generously granted permission for us to reproduce our conversation here for limited distribution as part of internal discussion and grant funding. **Please note, however, they have not given permission for distribution of this document and their personal stories to the broader public and respect for their privacy is requested. Any use of the material included in this document requires express written permission of the senior author.**

Bill McDonough
Tuesday, July 13, 2010
9:15-10:15 am
His office at McDonough's Market

Conversation Summary: Rhiannon Duke and Bianca Fernandez joined Bill in his office upstairs at McDonough's Market. Bill shared in great detail about the Twinning process between Beaver Island and Árainn Mhór, for which he was largely responsible (Figure 7.1). He told us stories of his time spent in Ireland and the personal connection he feels between both the place and the people of Árainn Mhór. A transcription of our conversation is reproduced here with his permission.

RD: (00.00.05) Describe the twinning process. Where did the inspiration come from? When did you start thinking about it?

BM: "It started back in 1982 when I got married and wanted to take a honeymoon to Ireland. My parents had visited there in 1979. Through some mutual friends that are connected to Beaver Island. The husband was born and raised in Ireland so he made a map of things they should see and things they must see. So in 1982 when my wife and I went over there for our honeymoon, we pretty much followed that same map that this fellow had provided three years previous to that and my parents had a fabulous time. And of course, one of

Figure 7.1. Bill McDonough in his office above McDonough's Market on Beaver Island. Photograph taken by Rhiannon Duke. Used by permission.

the stops was Burtonport to go off by ferry and then out to Árainn Mhór. In '82 there wasn't even a ferry. It was a fish boat.

"So we were in Burtonport and this woman by the name of Mary Campbell that my dad had taken a picture of her with him. I went to her and she said 'Danny Boyle will be going over to Árainn Mhór today. Go ask

him for a ride.' So we walk down to the pier and we asked for Danny Boyle and he said 'There would be no sailings to Árainn Mhór today because of the weather. It is too windy.' So I went back to Mary's shop and told her that Danny said there would be no sailings to Árainn Mhór today. She grabs me by the arm and says 'Come on.' And she takes me down there. And she says 'Danny these people came all the way from Beaver Island to go Árainn Mhór and you are taking them.' And he said, 'Oh I didn't know they were from Beaver Island.' So he shakes our hands and all that. He was thinking that it was probably someone that wasn't familiar or comfortable with rougher waters and things like that and so didn't want to take just anybody. So he took us over.

"It was on a Sunday and we were walking down a path. In '82 it was still tractors that people used as a mode of transportation because it was difficult to get cars on the island. They actually put them on the side of these double-ended boats they used for fishing and things like that. Like I said there was no regular ferry service. Anyway, when we were walking down to what was called the Boyles, here comes a tractor with a dad, mom and six of their seven children riding to what we found out they were headed to mass. They were the only people who lived down this road, so they stopped and were dragging our suitcases and they can tell you are an American from a mile away, and they said 'Where are you headed?' and we said, 'We are headed to the Boyles Bed and Breakfast.' And they said, 'Oh we're the Boyles.' So they turned around and came back.

"They skipped mass and once we were inside their home they said, 'Where are you from?' and we said, 'A little place called Beaver Island.' And they said, 'Oh on lake Michigan." And I said, 'How did you know that?' And one of them who was probably seven or eight years old, maybe Danny the youngest one, ran out with an atlas and he is pointing to Beaver Island in this atlas and I said, 'How do you know about Beaver Island?' and he said, 'They teach it to us in school because of the number of people that emigrated from that island to Beaver Island in the 1800s.' So I thought "Wow!"

"I am fifth generation born and raised on Beaver Island and this is the only place I have ever had a problem leaving. When I went to college, and things like that, although I knew I would come back and live here. It was very difficult for me to leave here to go to college. And after two days on that island with that family that were pretty sleepless and all that because I just wandered and was thinking about the ancestors and everything that left from there and never were able to return home or to their families. There was something very, very strong about being there and when it came time to leave I didn't want to leave, so we vowed that we would return. Of course, we thought it would be 25 years before we would ever return there, but as it turns out now, we've probably been there close to thirty times."
(00.05.02)

"And my in-laws have gone and my mom has gone with us. A couple of my brothers have visited there now and they were always asking why Árainn Mhór. Why is that such a big thing? And it only took them one time to go there and meet the people and feel the love and accommodations and everything else for them to come back and say 'now we get it.' It is uncanny the similarities and the lifestyle and the family structure. Everything between Beaver Island and Árainn Mhór. So of course so after all these repeated visits there, we made some very good relations with people that lived there and thought you know what, this place needs to be the twin to Beaver Island. So one year on Beaver Island I went to a township meeting where it is open to the public to make resolutions and so forth. Cindy Gillespie went with me and I offered a resolution to the township at that meeting to officially begin the twinning ceremony or twinning structure for Beaver Island and Árainn Mhór. It was unanimously approved and we took it to the county level and the state level and the federal level. And with our friend Diarmuid Gallagher who is the consulate general to, at the time the Taoiseach was Bertie Ahern, to the highest levels of the Irish government and the Donegal county council. Everyone passed resolutions that officially twinned the two communities and then we had reciprocating trips between Beaver and Árainn Mhór. The people of Árainn Mhór came here first and then in 2007 probably 50 or 60 of us went to Árainn Mhór for a dedication for a grotto that they did to commemorate the connection or the official twinning between the two island communities which incidentally now has burned. There has been

a lot more correspondence and other relationships made. Just people that keep in touch and have made friendships and people now that travel to Ireland go there and make sure that is a stop and things like that."

RD: (00.07.56) Has this process inspired more people on the island to feel more of a connections to Ireland?

BM: "No. The way it really started was a woman by the name of Helen Coller who studied genealogy. Her son-in-law is David Broder who is the Washington Post columnist. I was asked by the Broder family [to speak at] the memorial service for Helen Coller. She had visited Beaver Island for the summer for probably 60 some years and she made repeated trips back to Ireland to trace back the genealogy of the Beaver Island families and for many of them it originated on Árainn Mhór and if it hadn't been for her, we perhaps would not have known the significance and the number of the people that were connected to Árainn Mhór. So at her memorial service, I thanked Helen Coller for really preserving our history and what it meant and what she gave to not only my family but to most of the original large island families that reside here, for what she shared with us and what she taught us. So Dave Broder quoted some of what I said in the Washington post and Diarmuid Gallagher wrote Dave Broder a note, 'wow, this Beaver Island sounds like quite the place.' Well Dave Broder is a very good friend of the family and has been for years and he told me, he said 'Bill, you should write him and invite him to Beaver Island' and he accepted."

(00.09.55) "I could go on for a whole day about coincidences and I tell my kids all the time, pay attention to what goes on around you all the time because there are all kinds of coincidental stuff. Even that first trip to Árainn Mhór where I took a picture from this boat because it was splashing and things like that. They had us at the bowel and I took a picture to the stern of the vessel. Several years later I was running the register down here and there was a man and woman and three children in here. It was around Easter time. And when the woman was paying for her stuff I could tell immediately that she was Irish because of her accent. So I looked at her and asked where she was from and she said, 'We're from Árainn Mhór.' And I thought "Oh my God." And so of course we invited them over for dinner after the Easter vigil and things like that. I kept looking at her husband thinking from that first time I saw him, 'Man, I know you or something'. It was eerie. And after we had them for dinner that night, I put slides into our projector and was projecting them onto our wall and I hit this slide and here in the center of the picture, big as life, is this guy. It looked like the picture was taken of him but it was really just to take it of the boat. But here's this guy at the center of this picture and that is just one of many, many things that I say, 'Wow, this is unbelievable.' "

(00.11.35) "So he was living in Chicago at the time and I went and saw his mother on Árainn Mhór and had a picture of him. And she hadn't seen him for a number of years and she just grabbed the picture from me and clutched it to her chest and said, 'Oh my Tony, my Tony' and started crying and had me in for tea and scones and all that. A nice visit. So I don't know. It is very significant to Tammy and I and a lot of people now from Beaver Island who make it over… my children have been over there, all of them, on multiple occasions and thoroughly enjoy it. I can probably say that after 150 years, Tammy and I are the first people from Beaver Island that actually own property now on Árainn Mhór and built a home over there. And it's high on our priority list to go back every year and visit with our friends that are like family."
The Hurleys have six children and they have all the wedding pictures of their kids and all their grandchildren. "Every time we go to the house, here is the photo of Tammy and I and our kids in with their kids. So they keep us connected. I talk to them …and keep in touch with them. (He mentions one of the family members, Phil, who lives here in the States).

RD: (00.13.25) Have you been to other parts of Ireland?

BM: Just yesterday he had people come in and ask him to help them plan out their Ireland trip. There are dozens of people who do that. Bill asks them where they are flying to and where they are going to stay. And if they have any connection to Beaver Island, he tries to get them out there. It is hard to get out there so it is more of a commitment. "I can actually give a hell of a tour of Ireland." He is happy that their economy has improved. The roads back in '82 were not very good and hard to find a place that served ice with your drink

and beer was usually served warm. It has become very Westernized since ‘82 because of the number of people. In ‘82 it was sad because most of the young people who lived there just wanted to go to America. Some even went to Australia thinking it would be easier to get to America that way. They didn’t realize what a beautiful country they had and what they had going for them.

“Immigration back to Ireland – It wasn’t the Irish moving back. It was other European countries, like Poland, Romania and the Czech Republic, that were moving there because of the social system. When the economy was going well, it was not a problem, but he told his buddy Jerry that it is going to peak and then tank and then there would be a whole series of social problems.

“We probably know (as insights, experiences) more about Ireland than most people that live there.” By helping people plan some of their vacations, he is able to live vicariously through them until they can head back again.

BF: (00.17.07) Concerning the Irish language, both in Ireland and on Beaver Island.

BM: When they were there in ‘82, Gaelic still spoken in the west. They have a lot of dialects. With subsequent visits they could see that they were trying to bring the language back because the children were learning English and not using Irish as much. There were times when they have to find a kid that spoke English and could translate the Gaelic of older generations, like a parent or grandparent. “It was quickly being lost but now it is very strong.”
There really isn’t anyone on Beaver Island who is trying to learn Gaelic here. It is a very difficult language. The people that came here in the mid 1800s definitely spoke it.

(19.00) “I didn’t realize until 1982 growing up here, mannerisms that I thought mannerisms I thought were Beaver Island mannerisms they weren’t from Beaver Island. They had come down through the generations including my own father and some uncles and others that would say things and do things that were being done over in Ireland. I thought, “Oh my God,” this is not something that started on Beaver Island. This came through generations of ancestors and this is where it came from.” These were people who had never been to Árainn Mhór or to Beaver Island respectively and it could only have been passed on through the generations.

RD: What is an example of one? (20.00)

BM: “When you are passing someone how you do a quick nod instead of maybe a wave. A nod of the head.” “When you are speaking, a lot of people over there, when they say yes (inhale). It’s a breath in to say yes. There’s quite a few, maybe not so many anymore, but my dad did it. My uncle Russell Green did it. Different people.”

The similarities and looks – that person looks like so and so. Talks about a woman who owns a B&B who looks just like his Aunt Rose and he calls her that. She now invites him into her kitchen when he goes to visit, while she is preparing breakfast. He would bring them maple syrup from the states because they can’t find it in Ireland. “That was a gift that was unique form Beaver Island” that they would pass around as they made return visits to B&Bs when in Ireland.

RD: Growing up here on the island, what kinds of traditions and practices did your family have that you felt were distinctly Irish or Irish-American? (21.45)

BM: “Beaver Island is a very isolated community and everyone looks after one another. Children are not shy and get involved with adult conversations. They have freedom to be kids but they also have responsibilities. It doesn’t matter who sees them, they will be corrected. It’s a community way of raising children in a fabulous environment that is without crime or drugs or things of that nature. Kids can be kids. I would say that is one of the most significant. That is true on Árainn Mhór as well. Everyone looks out for each other.

They can battle as families even battle, but when push comes to shove, everybody can pull together as a unit and make sure whoever needs help gets it. It is a unique characteristic of people who live on islands.

BF: Are there any traditions that are of Irish origin such as folktales, or songs? (23.40)

BM: Recommends a DVD – *Beaver Island House Party* (couple of years old)

"In Ireland, there are the pubs, the gathering places, where people would share the news and drinks and used to be the smoking. On Beaver Island, what would happen too is that there is a lot of talent with musicians. You go to these house parties and you typically end up in someone's kitchen and sing songs to the wee hours of the morning and the guitar might get passed around and if you can't play the guitar you are expected at some point to give a song, as they say 'Give it a go'. Probably things like that, just subtle things that are similar or special. "

BF: Have the Irish symbols been brought in organically or was it to lure tourists in? (25)

BM: Always have called Beaver Island the Emerald Isle. With this reconnection has really changed the way they think about themselves. They are more educated as to their origins. This is why they are the way they are. They want to keep that Irish influence. Now knows what the eternity knot is and the different meanings of Celtic symbols and designs. "Insignificant things that mean so much."

BF: Does a good percentage of the island know about these things?

BM: "The original island families most certainly." There are some people that have moved to the island and contribute to the island but may not be as interested in the older Irish history and ancestry. "As long as the core Beaver Island families are on the township boards and in charge of the church and the fire department and involved with the health center and the school and all that, that's going to be able to remain very, very strong. And the people that come here will have to accept that. That's part of the charm. If they came here because they love it, they better like that too." Some people feel there is too much emphasis placed on the Irish but he feels that Beaver Island was built around the concept of it being the American Emerald Isle. He has Norwegian and French and his children have some German, but his children have more Irish in them than he does. He calls himself a mutt.
RD: Do you know anything about when your first Irish ancestors came to Ireland? (27.40)

BM: In mid 1800s from Helen Coller's research. McDonough is a Galway name.

"Dr. John Duffy remembers talking to my grandfather where in particular the McDonoughs came from and this Sylvester McDonough met some people on one of the boats that was coming to the Americas." It was easier to get to the Americans through Canada than through Ellis Island. Lots of Beaver Island families would have come through Canada to Beaver Island. Boat travel was the mode of transportation at that time and Beaver Island had this natural deep water port. They probably thought that this place was like Ireland but there are soils here that we can grow vegetables and great fishing. He believes that it was some of those Irish who worked on those transportation boats that saw Beaver Island and decided to make home here. Homesteading – the government giving away property. The Bonners were some of the first to be here. They sent word and sent money about this place. "They were sailors, and fishermen and farmers. It was a paradise to them." The biggest change would have had to have been the winters because Ireland gets some of the gulf stream that runs up to them and that keeps them at a temperate temperature (usually doesn't get below 40 degrees F) but here it gets below 0 and with several feet of snow. "The winter adjustments had to be the most significant change for them to become accustomed to it, but on the other hand we have all this wood that they could use to heat up their home." There was no lack of fuel.

RD: Beaver Tales – Heard about Beaver Island ingenuity and resourcefulness (31.20)

BM: "By virtue of where we live – which I often say, we are the most remote inhabited community in the contiguous United States – when you came across by ferry, it's 32 miles. If you fly over here it is amazing for me, and I never take it for granted, the patch of dirt out of the middle of this sweet water, fresh water, and I say "Oh my God," my kids are now the sixth generation born there."

No repair services and comforts that are easily available on the mainland. When things break, you make do with what you have. You improvise, Apollo 13 style. Their kids just learn that from their parents and other kids. He feels they take it for granted. "It's something you just do."

RD: We are interested in the idea of identity. What do you think it means to be Irish American? (34.30)

BM: "Well, very proud, obviously." Also proud of other Norwegian, not so much French (says kiddingly and goes on to talk about the greatest dining experience ever in France).

"Lots of pride if you think about and read how the Irish race influenced the world. And more particularly, the United States, in politics they are largely responsible for a significant portion of the building of the infrastructure – the railroad systems, the canals, the seaways. They were very, very diligent workers, and did everything with passion, including drinking and playing music."

Recommends Thomas Cahill's book, *How the Irish Saved Civilization*

Amazing to look at the size of that country and the influence that it has had on the world. He has been flattered on different occasions to be invited by our US Congressman to Washington DC to one time meet the president of Ireland, Mary Robinson when she was coming to the US with her husband Nick. He was the very first person who was non-governmental related to meet her and her husband. At that time, it was Clinton as president. He met Hilary and Al Gore. A couple of years ago he was invited where Bertie Ahern was stepping down as the Taoiseach, the prime minister, and he was going to address a joint session of congress. He was invited for that ceremony. Invitation came Friday and the address was going to be Monday. He called Diarmuid and heard he was going, and so was Bill. He was given the information by the Irish Embassy as to where Diarmuid was staying and he got to meet the Taoiseach and get together with his friend Diarmuid. And he also met Ted Kennedy and other significant US-Irish connected people – private reception following that address to the joint-session of congress. It was an honor to meet one of the members of that family. He felt he was an icon and helped form the way the country is.

(40.30) BF mentions Kennedy and Clinton were important in her visit to Ireland. They were mentioned a great deal.

BM: Clinton did a great deal. Had a lot to do with George Mitchell and his diplomacy and his Irish ancestry and respect he had from both parties – [Gerry] Adams and Martin McGuinness and Paisley and he was able to bring them to the table and reach some compromises.

The Good Friday Agreement. Significant in Irish history. The week before it had been passed, Bill and family were staying with the Gallaghers and riding around with Diarmuid as he was taking a call from Tony Blair and Gerry Adams and Martin McGuinness. Putting the touches on the agreement. That good Friday it had only been a couple days since their return to the island. He saw Diarmuid at the signing of the agreement, but in the background. His friend helped in the process of putting all of that together.

Recommended Morgan Rollins, 1916, 1921(?), *The Last Princes of Ireland ?*

(43.00) Irish history is built around turmoil and injustices. Talking to friend Gerry (Irish) and told him that if the Irish had not been invaded by the English and forced to speak English, they would not have been that

successful or had the economic boom that they have had. Probably wouldn't be the world player that they are today. They were wronged big by Britain though.

He mentions that they were unnecessarily starved, they were just shipping it [food] all out of the country.

RD: Any sort of family stories… (44.40)

BM: Not really, not too many stories because so many generations ago. Until he went to Árainn Mhór he had no idea how deep that connection was. He got goose bumps with that encounter with the child who showed him Beaver Island on the atlas.

"This was very difficult for me to ever leave. I have a house on Beaver Island but I consider Beaver Island my home. I could live anywhere. This is my home. And I didn't want to leave it. But when I was over there after less than 48 hours, Philly Boyle, God rest him, he looked at me and he could see the tears in my eyes, and said, "you don't want to leave here" and I can't believe how I feel about this place in this short of a period of time. It went right to the soul that there was a connection and this sadness about the ancestors that left there never to return."

He sends tons of people to Cobh because of their museum, the Molly Brown, the music they play with a video that shows how their children were sent to the United States and they knew that they would never see them again.
47.00 RD mentions American Wakes

BM: says it must have really broken their hearts to never see their loved ones again.

47.40 BF mentions how they deal with their suffering in unique ways, such as with their sean-nós.

BM: "It's how the Irish can find humor in the most god-awful incidences and things that have been dealt. They somehow just rise above it. They persevere and are tenacious. Honestly that passion that they have about everything that they do shines through. People that visit that country…Ireland and Hawaii are the two most repeated destinations.

His brother has been to Hawaii and told Bill he would love it but there is just something that pulls him to Ireland. There is something about the way you are treated. "It's a tragedy for me to be sitting there in a pub next to some old guy from the area who you just warm up to, and are genuinely interested in his history and his take on what is going in Ireland and the US, and in a lot of cases they are more educated about what is going on here politically than 90+% of the people that live in this country. But anyway to see another American walk in that is, feels that they are superior to the Irish race and to see them get totally cut off at the knees from really getting to meet some of the finest people they would ever have the opportunity to meet is embarrassing. What an asshole. You have no idea what you just did and what you cut yourself from."

"You should go there and treat them with respect. You can buy them beer but you have to do it in a very subtle manner. You cannot appear there and look like a rich American and expect them to share. They can tell when you are genuinely interested or when you are just a phony.

They can tell you are American from two miles away from the way you dress. And also based on your teeth. "You Americans just have such beautiful teeth." (50.35) They can tell you are American by your teeth.

Final thoughts (50.10)

He was glad to visit with us. Has huge passion for the place. Goes fishing with his buddies with lobster pots. They do it the way they have done it there for hundreds of years.

Crab cooked over a turf fire with a Guinness and winkles (really small snails, cook them and take them out with a pin)

He feels a huge connection to being in the same place that Irish people have been, walking over, thinking, and picking winkles and fishing hundreds of years ago. (He attaches memories and emotions to the places, it seems, as well as trying to imagine what their lives would have been like.)

RD: (52.40) Something special about Árainn Mhór more than any other part or Ireland right?

BM: I love visiting Ireland but it would be like coming to Beaver Island for the first time and hitting and missing certain places but after a couple trips, you start to know which places are really worth visiting. He feels the same about Ireland. He would NEVER go there and not go to Árainn Mhór. Usually go for a 2-3 week period.

"I pride myself in saying that we only have to spend one night on the mainland and that's the night we have to fly back home. I'm an islander. I want to be on that island. When it's lashing rain and it's blowing and you are looking out onto the mainland, with my buddy Jerry. We will sit there, visiting, and I'll say, 'You know what, those people over there are looking this way and saying, 'Aww those poor people on Árainn Mhór, they are stranded. They're getting all this horrible weather and are stuck.' We're sitting there and I'm saying, 'Those people can't get here today. I don't want to go there. I am where I want to be. They can't get here.' So just totally the reverse of what they would think."

When they go there for 2-3 weeks, can say "It only rained twice, once for eight days and once for 12 days." (laugh) The people of Árainn Mhór have a hard time believing that Bill and his family choose to return to Árainn Mhór time and time again for every vacation when they could go see other things around Ireland or the world. "But when they see me leave there, you just leave me alone. Because I want to sit at the back of that boat, just cherish it and take it all in until the return. It's a magical place."

55.00 "It is only with that island."

He mentions how the Cliffs of Moher have really changed since he was there more than 20 years ago. All the souvenir shops and fences put up have taken some of the charm but it's reality. It stimulates the economy. It is a mixed blessing. It is bittersweet.

BF: (55.55) Do other Irish American families here on Beaver Island make that trip over to Árainn Mhór?

BM: Not as often or as much as him and Tammy. There are a few people that go there when they get a chance and many more would do it if they had the financial resources to go. It's important to them. They want to go back and get to know the place.

"When we get on the ferry, there is an islander rate, when we have to pay at all. Because if the owner of the boat is there, he will leave his car on the mainland so that we can get our car on. He's done that. Just take us on. My buddy Jerry says, 'You son of a bitch.' 'What?' 'He's not even going to charge you. I do this all the time and I have to pay.' …They just think that they are so, I don't know if grateful is the word. They are just so proud that we have this passion for their home, that they like it so much that they love to see us come and every time we go to mass, the priest says 'oh Bill and Tammy are back.' It's embarrassing but we know a lot of people. Since we have gone there in '82, there have been a lot of very dear friends that have died over there too. That goes with getting older."

(57.45) BF: … and getting close to people. You make those connections.

Maeve (Jerry's wife's (Pat) youngest sister) of the Boyle family was killed in a car accident. The driver was the oldest son of Phil and Kathleen which was the family who first met them back in '82 on the tractor). He is bed-ridden. Requires 24 hour care. Says that is something worse than dying. It was a good thing Maeve died and did not have to experience that. She was the life of the party. "She was great craic."

It occurred 5-6 months before the Beaver Island crowd went over to Árainn Mhór for the twinning ceremony. Had already been planned so they couldn't change it.
(59.40) "All those months, up until the time we arrived, there wasn't a musical instrument played, there wasn't anything going on at the pubs. And Tammy and I were asked to go with the group. I told Tammy, 'We can't go and show up on Árainn Mhór with a group.' I said, 'You and I have to go first and see Gerald and Mage and Jerry and Pat. Have our time with them so we can express our sympathies and all that before we show up for a party.' And so we did. We had a good few days with them before the rest of the crowd showed up. When the rest of the crowd showed up, it was a huge part of the healing process of Maeve's death. Jerry hadn't played the guitar. He plays the guitar. He hadn't played it ever since. He picked it up, and it was just. It was one of those coincidental things that when you say, 'things happen for a reason.' The 60 people that showed up there from Beaver Island, it was perfect timing. Enough time had gone by that the island was dealing with the grief of the loss of one of their treasures."

BF: (1.01.10) How long did the Twinning ceremony last?
BM: "Yeah [it was a weekend]. And it poured and it rained and it brewed everything. It was typical Irish weather. And like I said, Tammy and I were there before the rest of them and it just lashed rain and everything else. When the ferry was leaving with all of them, because we were staying a couple extra days and most of them had never been to Ireland before so they wanted to tour it up, which that's great. We had already done all that, and I had no desire to go and do it some more. So our plans 'we are staying on Árainn Mhór for a couple more days.' When the ferry backed out from the pier on Árainn Mhór it's like that. The sky opened up and the sun came out. And you know how when you plan an event and you are just concerned and you want everything to go right and flawless and make sure that everybody has a good time and all that. Well, my God, the party that happened the night that they left, when we walked back in, they said, 'Oh the main Beavers are still here.' They called us the 'main Beavers.' The party that night was incredible because everything had gone so well and that the love and the appreciation and the connection, it was rock solid. There was no denying it. And so the party was on that night and it's like, holy shit. It went on all night. And we were part of that. It was not much better when they were all there but it was totally the people of Árainn Mhór celebrating the fact that 'okay, we pulled this off and they all had a great time and they consider us a part of them now.' We were just included in all of this and it was cool as hell."

Extra information that did not make it on recording:

Bill told the story of how when he went to Árainn Mhór with his wife one time, there had been such a horrible storm with very large waves that smashed the windows of the lighthouse. As they were walking one day, they found a piece of the glass brought it with them. It was included in the grotto memorial of the twinning right next to the Holy Cross Cemetery.

Bill also mentioned a poem that encapsulates what it means to be Irish. He apparently got it written by a friend who does calligraphy and gave it to one of his friends in Árainn Mhór who owns a bar and it has hung there ever since. The poem is called 'What Shall I Say about the Irish?"

What Shall I Say About the Irish?

The utterly impractical, never predictable,
Sometimes irascible, quite inexplicable, Irish.
Strange blend of shyness, pride and conceit,
And stubborn refusal to bow in defeat.

He's spoiling and ready to argue and fight,

Yet the smile of a child fills his soul with delight.
His eyes are the quickest to well up with tears,
Yet his strength is the strongest to banish your fears.

His hate is as fierce as his devotion is grand,
And there is no middle ground on which he will stand.
He's wild and he's gentle, he's good and he's bad.
He's proud and he's humble, he's happy and sad.

He's in love with the ocean, the earth and the skies,
He's enamoured with beauty wherever it lies.
He's victor and victim, a star and a clod,
But mostly he's Irish—
in love with his God.

~Anonymous

Figure 7.2. Robert Cole in the Holy Cross Parish. Photograph taken by Kasia Ahern. Used by permission.

Robert Cole

Thursday, July 15, 2010
11:30am-12:30pm
Holy Cross Catholic Church

Conversation Summary: Robert is a native islander and has done his own extensive research on Beaver Island history in addition to collecting many oral histories from island elders (Figure 7.2). He shared many stories with Rhiannon Duke and Kasia Ahern as well as pointed out where certain families lived on a map of

the island. After the interview, we went back to the old Mormon Print Shop Museum and he told us he would compile a list of good resources and archival material to look at. Robert certainly has a wealth of knowledge and we will hopefully be in touch with him many more times in the future. A transcription of our conversation is reproduced here with his permission.

Refer to map for corresponding labels during this first section (Figure 7.3):

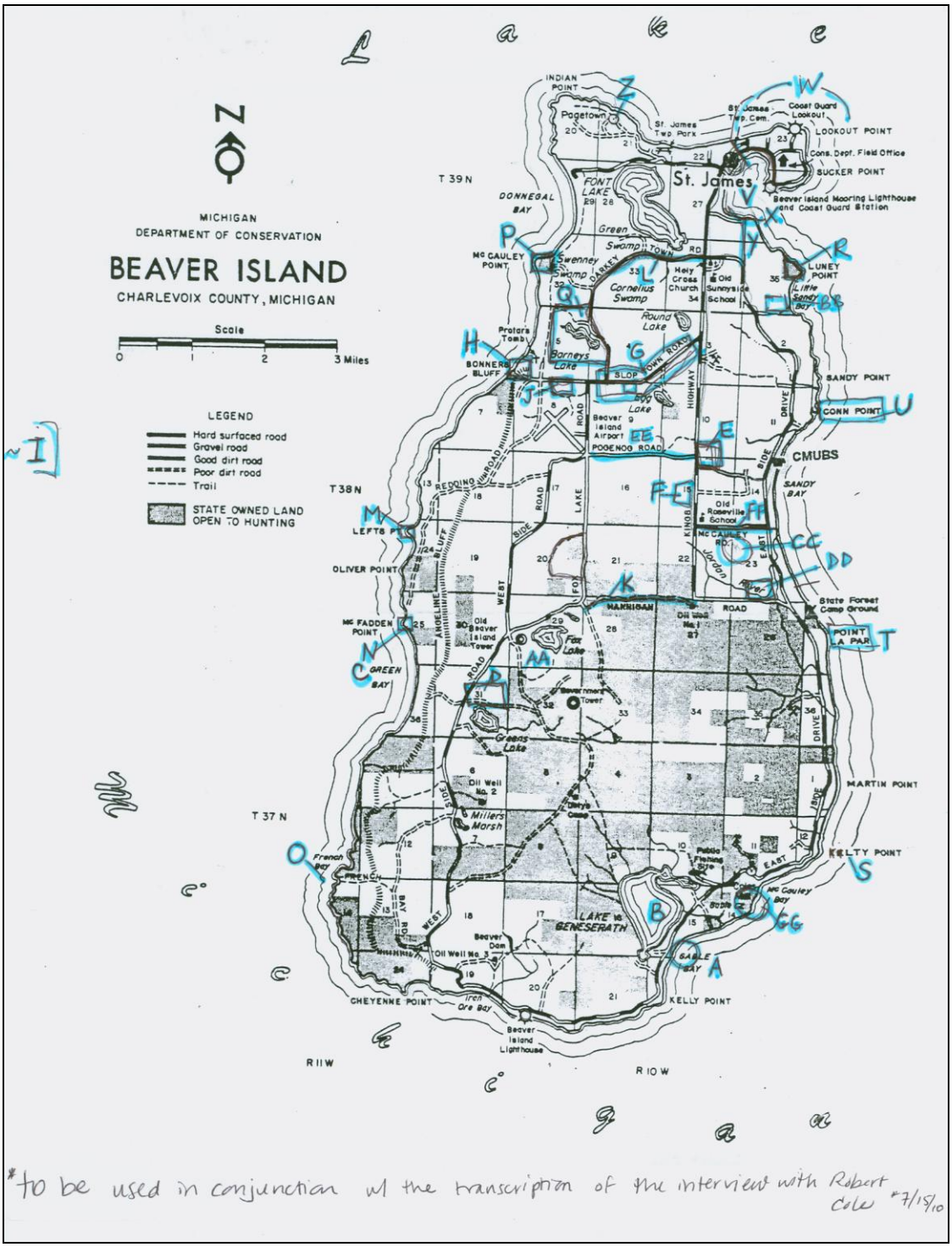

Figure 7.3. Map to accompany Robert Coles' interview transcription.

(00:54)
KA: "Would you be able to show us where particular families settled?"

RC: "In the pre-Mormon era, which would be before 1847, there was a settlement of migrant fishermen down in Cable's Bay, which is in the southeast quadrant of the island [A]; east of Iron Ore Bay; east of the Beaver Island lighthouse. We don't know a lot about them. We believe there was a sawmill there and they would've been living in pretty rudimentary housing—shacks, basically, tar paper shacks. And slab wood shacks on Cable's Bay. They would've fished out of there. And we think there was a road that went along that bay, right on the beach, that was some kind of a gravel road that we found remnants of.

"One of my interview subjects in the early 1990s, who grew up in a little village called 'Nomad' just north of Cable's Bay, she reported having come across a small cemetery near Cable's Bay in the sand dune area with little white wooden crosses on it that have long since disappeared. And we have no official record of that but it indicates—her anecdotal information indicates—that there was a village sufficient enough, large enough, to have required a cemetery. We don't know if that came from the migrant Irish fishermen or the later Mormon settlement because the Mormons also had a small settlement down here called 'Galilee.' And in fact, they attempted to dig a canal between Lake Geneserath [B] and Lake Michigan perhaps with the idea of allowing larger boats into Lake Geneserath and making an artificial harbor out of it.

"Later on, when the Mormons had left, the Irish came in and some of the Irish settled down here in Green's Bay [C]. The Green family and I think a couple others settled here on the central-western portion of the island. And they had a farmstead here [D] near Greene's Lake. So they were probably fishing out of here and I think what they did was they set up an establishment here, on the bay, and then they moved further inland to the southeast, about two miles, to Greene's Lake where they cleared land."

RD: "Were they one of the first Irish families to come after the Strang assassination?"

RC: "Yeah, they were an early family. I'm not sure what year they came but they would've been, I think, from 1856 to 1865, somewhere in there. So, we'll have to clarify this later too, but I think they started out here in the bay and then moved inland to Greene's Lake and then later on, in the late 1800s, moved up here to King's Highway, roughly right around here [E]. And this was called 'Greene Town.' So there were two brothers, two kind of patriarchs of the family, and they both had large families, large numbers of children. And one lived on this side of King's Highway [E] and one lived over here [F].

"So you know, the Irish had a tradition of what they would call 'townlands,' in Ireland. And they might be just very small villages that were clustered around, that were based on familial ties. So it might be like a large extended family. It might be the Greenes and the people, the women, that married into the family, the men that married into the family. So a handful of families that might be in this area. So to call it a town by today's standards wouldn't be, you know, it wouldn't really be that large of an area.

(5:20) RC: "And, in this area here, Slop Town Road [G], which is in the northern third quadrant of the island, were a number of farms and farmsteads. And some of my ancestors, the Boyles, and the O'Donnells, and so forth. And because most of them came from one island in Ireland and were interrelated, you had a lot of common names, so there might have been, you know, five O'Donnell families, eight Gallagher families, and, you know, seven Boyle families, and they would've been related. And some of them might not have been that closely related because some of the families came from mainland Ireland, not Árainn Mhór, but, we think that the people, the immigrants on Sloptown road, came earlier from Canada, came to Beaver Island through Canada, whereas some of the immigration streams came through New York and Pennsylvania.

"The others came through Canada…This has yet to be established, but there's some evidence to indicate that some of these people worked to create a large cathedral in a town called St. Catherine's. St. Catherine's later became Toronto. So, in those days, Irish immigrant labor was used to build a lot of large structures, and

canals, and roadways, and so forth. And because they were Catholic they were willing and able to construct Catholic churches. And, my own research has shown that there was a small shantytown, kind of like an Irish slum, near St. Catherine's in Toronto, that was called "Slabtown". And they would've called it "Slabtown" because they built their houses or their shacks out of throwaway lumber from sawmills and slabs from sawmills. So, my speculation is that this has not been established either, just strictly my speculation, that Sloptown is kind of a derivation of the village, Slabtown, of the name Slabtown. But, because the Donegal Irish, you know, would've pronounced vowels differently, it could have gone from "Slabtown" to "Slob," you know they would've said "Slobtown"

RD: "Is there any sort of other hypothesis as to where that name came from?"

RC: "Yeah there is. There's one idea that it was because the road was, all the roads were dirt in those days, and it was a particularly muddy road, that is was just really sloppy. But, or that because there were a lot of farms, there were a lot of pigs there, so they you know. Those are possibilities, but I just kind of think, given the traditions of the Irish to take names with them, it's, perhaps, more likely that they moved here and called themselves the "Slabtown" people because they all hailed, they all spent several years in that part of Canada. So, there might have been a little more French influence, French-Canadian influence among these families.

(8:34) RC: "To the west of SlopTown Road, on Lake Michigan, is an area called Bonner's Bluff [H] and that was another family. John Bonner, well actually his name was pronounced Bonár(?) in Gaelic, he was here. He was a migrant fisherman in the 1840s so he was here before Strang. And he was one of the people that were forced out by the Mormon settlement. And he hung out on an island west of here called Gull Island [I] and he kind of waited it out. He waited it out and he carried information back and forth between Mackinaw and other people around the archipelago who were conspiring and waiting for Strang to leave.

"So after Strang was killed, he immediately moved back to this west side of the island and set up a homestead there on the Bluff. And he fished out of there and he built a home right around here [J]. And he had two or three sons. One built a hotel downtown and one was the last surviving Irish fiddler that I knew in my lifetime. So, you might call that, I don't know if they call that 'Bonner Town' or anything like that. But again, it was an area where there were two or three families settled with the same familial connection.

"Down here on Hannigan Road [K], which is a pretty narrow one-track road essentially in the center of the island. It's an east-west road. It goes from the end of King's Highway to Fox Lake Road. It's called Hannigan Road. And there were two brothers: one was Tommy Boyle and I forget his brother's name. But 'Hannigan' I think was their nickname. Again, we'll want to confirm that on a historic map to make sure I'm correct about that.

(10:31)
RC: "So the Irish were really fond of nicknames because they all had such similar names. Because there were five O'Donnell families there could be five Mike O'Donnells. So they would give each other nicknames, like maybe, depending on the hair color. For instance, this road [L], which is now commonly called Barney's Lake Road, was in earlier years, not that long ago, called Darkey Town Road. It was called Darkey Town Road after Mike O'Donnell, 'Darkey Mike.' But they called him 'Darkey Mike' not because he was dark like an African-American person, but because he had dark hair. And some of the Irish who moved here, from western Ireland, had Spanish blood so they actually looked darker. They would've been called 'Black Irish.' They had jet black hair and dark skin so that may have also been why he was called 'Darkey Mike.' That was one of the many nicknames you would find here. Again, 'Hannigan' I think was a nickname for this family. Their mother may have been Hannigan, but I'm pretty sure their last name was Boyle.

"These other points you see named here, Left's Point [M], this was a German-American fisherman who settled in there in early, the turn of the century. McFadden Point [N] I think was also an individual. I don't think it was a family there. French Bay [O], we speculate, that French voyageurs had explored this area and

mapped it out a little bit and had dug some primitive caves in the side of the bluff here to store sailing equipment and food stores and so forth. But we're not sure about that but it's been called French Bay for a long, long time.

"The McCauley's were another Irish immigrant family from Co. Donegal and there were several of them, several families. And they also had a little fishing establishment set up here [P] but they later moved inland. Um, the O'Donnell family, Barney O'Donnell lived here and farmed the land around Barney's Lake [Q]. And he had quite a large family too. He's the ancestor to quite a few people still living on the island.

"Luney [R] was a, Patrick Luney was a surveyor in 1845 when they first surveyed the island for the federal government. And I don't think he was from Donegal, he might have been from mainland Donegal, but I don't think he was from Árainn Mhór. And he had a nephew, Patrick Kilty—this is spelled wrong on the map—Patrick Kilty, Peter Kilty, who helped him survey the island in1845. Again, before Strang came.

"Point La Par [T], again, I think has some French influence there. We'd have to look that up. Conn's Point [U] might refer to Cornelius Gallagher. I don't think it was a proper last name but they would have called Cornelius 'Conn' as a nickname. So, you know, in the 1850s…and again there were some Irish immigrants who settled here around Lake Geneserath as well, including those on my mother's side.

"Some of the place names I think have been lost to time. If they were ever there at all. But what you had earlier on, for reasons I'm not quite sure of, possibly because they wanted a lot of space around themselves, they didn't all cluster in the harbor when they settled. Many did, but you find Greenes down here and Boyles down here. I'm curious about that. I'd still like to know myself why they kept so much space around them. Because it wasn't easy. There were no roads. There were very few roads even, you know, after the Mormon era there were some rudimentary roads. But it was not easy to get around. So it would take you a long time to get up here [St. James] by land, or they would take their little sailboats up here to get provisions and so forth.

"And they seemed to want to be kind of separated from each other in that way. So we're not really sure how much they intermingled in the first, you know, generation. It may be that they brought with them certain family rivalries or it may be that they, um, they simply, during the Homestead Act era when the government was giving away land to people just for farming it, that they saw certain land they liked and said, 'we're gonna settle in here.' So some of them had fairly large tracts of land and the law was, because the government was trying to develop and settle these wilderness areas of which was then the frontier, you could lay claim to it and own it simply if you could proved that you were using it, farming it. Perhaps the Greenes just saw this land they thought was fertile over here [D] and took it. And same thing for Lake Geneserath for the Boyles over there. Not exactly sure.

(16:17) RC: "But there were a good number of Irish families that were settling here in the harbor [V] because it was a great natural harbor. And they had been fishermen in Ireland but fishing on the ocean is a different situation than fishing on the Great Lakes. They learned a lot about fishing from the Native American tribes that were still living on the island at that time and many of the third generation of the Irish on the island credit the Native Americans with really helping them to survive.
"And the soil was sandy, it wasn't the best soil, but they learned how to work with it because they didn't have the best soil in Ireland either. So there was a significant settlement in the harbor and in the harbor, too, there was kind of a division. There was, this area here [W], closer to the Coast Guard station and the lighthouse, would've been fairly well-packed with fish docks and sheds. It was a little deeper water over there. It was shallower over here [clarify!]. Easier to get boats in. But there would've been little saloons and what they would call 'shebeens,' which is a Gaelic word for kind of a pub that was in somebody's house, basically somebody's kitchen.

"So there was a lot more business going on here [where exactly?]. From what I heard this was a rougher part of town. This would've been late 1800s, 1880s and 90s. And a lot of business going on there, a lot of

schooners would come in there. This was a little bit more the merchant area. You would've had some general stores there where the boat dock is now [a little unclear about exact location]. And down on this south side of the harbor [X] there was a Mormon settlement called Troy with it's own road that was built right along this flat line [Y]. They built the road here right down to the harbor. It was later connected with East Side Drive, which was only a road that was built in the 1930s. Before that it was a trail. So there were some Irish families, second generation, that built boats down here [X?]. John Runberg, who's president of the Historical Society, his ancestors were boat builders down here in around the turn of the century, the early 1900s.

(18:56) RC: "Pagetown [Z] was a little store, a small, not really a village, but there was a store there where fishermen who wanted to get provisions either from this part of the island or from the northern islands, because there were settlements on the other islands too. It would save them the time of having to go all the way around the point and into the harbor. They could just stop here and get what they needed.

"There was an area down by Fox Lake [AA], called the Black Hills, that was a clearing, it's kind of growing in now but it's still kind of visible. And we think that was named—there are two possibilities. It might've been named after an area in Ireland called the Black Hills on the west side of the nation or it may have been named for an area in North Dakota called the Black Hills. And we think there was a family who moved here from North Dakota in the early 1900s and named the area the Black Hills. But there were at least two families down there and there's some information on that settlement in the Helen Collar files, which is a resource that I'll connect you to. The Helen Collar archives, the original materials are now at Central Michigan University at the Clark Historical Library, and they have a website with some of that data posted but not much. But it's there and it's accessible. We also have a full set of copies of those archives here and I can show you some books with her material in it.

"The *Journal of Beaver Island History*, ideally you'd want to get the whole set, but volumes one and two contain articles on place names. [Volume Two] is very helpful. It has several pages of diagramed maps in smaller sections that'll take you to all the places I mentioned, and more, with a paragraph describing you lived there and who they were.

"And I'm also transcribing a 1976 interview with some of our elders that Bill Cashman conducted, where he just took some people around the island and they talked for hours about who lived where and that's very helpful. So there's a lot more to it. There's a lot more detail. And there's a map that Bill Cashman produced in 2003 that is just names of families and where they lived and what the farms and towns were. So that copy alone will tell you just as much as I did, if not more. And we'll try to get copies of those for you. That was a really great map that he produced. He produced it in conjunction with what we call the 'Twinning' between Árainn Mhór and Beaver Island, which took place between 2000 and 2003. So Bill's done a lot of research and he interviewed a lot of elders back in the [19]70s when he first moved here.

(22:11) RC: "We have a fair amount of information on who lived where. We have land records, so those are very handy. Before Strang, things are fuzzy because land records weren't kept. The island hadn't even been surveyed that long. Surveyed in 1845 and then Strang arrived in 1847. And Strang had a habit of what he called, 'consecrating' property where he would make it holy by taking it away from other people and dedicating it to the Lord. But it was really just kind of a land grab. But, you know, the Irish, I think the cultural traditions they had defined where they lived and why they lived where they did and why they chose to remain…they're insular people generally—the fact that they moved here is proof of that—but even amongst themselves. You know, they're more defined—they *were* more defined—by family connection than even ethnic identity to some extent. So, and in those days, the ability to build a town was a really amazing, you know, it was quite an opportunity. So they established their own…they were tribal. They were very tribal people and tribes are based on family affiliation first and then they grow from there. So, I think that's one of the reasons that they built these little townlands in different places. Then again, it must have been a very difficult life because conditions were harsh.

"They spread out in later years. They grew in population. Around 1900 I think there were 2000 people living on Beaver Island, probably 70 to 80 percent of them were Irish descendants. And they began to congregate a little more toward the harbor. But there were still a lot of farms down here and by World War II, right after World War II, that all faded away. The fishing industry had collapsed, due to over-fishing, the lamphrey eel and perhaps some environmental degradation. And when the sons came back from World War II, they just kinda looked around and said, 'there's nothing really here for us.' So they moved to cities like Chicago and Detroit to work in auto plants and industry. And that was kind of the end of…I would say from like 1856 to 1945 would've been the height of Irish residency and commerce and industry here, and after that, it really kinda became a ghost town.

(24:42) RC: "I was born in 1965 and I think there were around 200 people living here year round at that time. There weren't that many. And a lot of the farms had just been abandoned. And the land had, a lot of the families had just ceased paying taxes on them because they moved off, so a lot of the land had just gone back to the state. And the population slowly crept up from 1950 onward, 1960 onward, but very slowly. And it really, probably is at around 400 right now, 450 year-round residents. Summer residents are much higher in number.

"So there are many places to dig at. As I was telling Deb last night, the backyard of my family home, which is right across the street [from Holy Cross Church], where I grew up…we found a lot of stuff there digging up ditches and water lines and the 1970s clay pipes and other artifacts that are probably still there under the soil. So there's a lot more to be discovered here. But in terms of data and outlines and overall patterns, there's a lot of information that we have that would help you with constructing the picture you're trying to put together here.

"And, let's see, Little Sand Bay where you guys are digging right now, right around here [BB], this would have been pretty well fished. Sand Bay, there were a lot of fishermen down there. The McDonough family had a little farmstead. That's another one I should mention too. Right around here [CC], was the 'Vesty' McDonough family. His name was Sylvester and he built a farm there [CC] and he had a little fishing operation out here [DD]. And he had a large family. So, in later years, you might be called by your ancestor's nickname like, 'he's a Vesty' or 'she's a Vesty.'

"Or 'Paideen Og' was an ancestor. He had built a farm here, actually he built a farm on Slop Town Road, although the name the road south of him [EE] 'Paideen Og'. His name was Patrick Boyle. 'Paideen Og' is a Gaelic term for, I think it's 'young Patrick.' And he was very prolific. He was an Árainn Mhór immigrant who lost two sons and a wife in a very short time on Árainn Mhór to accident, drowning and suicide. So he left there and he moved over here and started over again. And he had, I don't remember the exact number of his kids, but he had a large family and they had large families and they had large families. So a lot of Beaver Island descendants are what they call 'Paideen Ogs.' You don't hear that too much anymore but once in a while. I can remember people saying, 'oh, that's how Paideen Og' would do it or, 'typical Paideen Og.' Or 'paideen' they'd say, 'you paideens.' And they would've been, you know, people living in this are of the island [G?] and later spread out. He was kind of a legendary figure. He died, I think, in 1894, but they celebrated his birthday until the 1950s. So he was that kind of a, a trunk of a very large family tree."
(28:40) RD: "What do you know about the first generation's chain migration, were there a lot of letters sent back? Like did the people on the island have a lot to do with more people coming?"

RC: "Yes, they did. And, it seems there's a misconception, I think, that communication was really slow and laborious. And, it was slower, but what you need to remember is that the Great Lakes were like a 'super highway', so there was a lot of marine traffic going from Chicago through the Straits of Mackinaw to Buffalo, Niagara Falls, all the St. Lawrence Seaway, and, you know, by Buffalo through a series of canals to New York State. So, there was constant traffic going back and forth with trade and commerce. So it wasn't that difficult to get, uh, letters sent back and forth. It might've taken weeks, or months, but it was going on,

there was transit all the time. There was, I'm pretty convinced that there was a fairly well-developed communication channel between Beaver Island and New York and some points in between.

"So, after the first wave arrived here, they began sending back word along that route that communication route, travel route, to New York State where other Árainn Mhór people had settled. And, they, you know, the place they settled in New York City was pretty rough—some of it was around the place that they call the Five Points area, where a lot of gang activity was going on. They were treated pretty badly. There was a lot of anti-Catholic and Irish prejudice going on in New York City. So the first families did in fact send back word that there was land here, there was an entire town. There was a settlement really here for the taking. Because the Mormons had cleared a lot of land, they had built roads, they had dug canals, they had created an infrastructure on the island, built homes, built log cabins like the one you're working on. And it was just there for the taking with plates on the table. Because the Mormons were evicted very quickly. In a matter of seven days they were driven out. So all their possessions were still there. So yeah, they sent word back.

"There were three major waves of migration, which you can find information about in the Helen Collar archives, but the first one would've been from 1856 to 1858, '59, '60. One in the 1860s and I think one in 1883, roughly. And one of the first generation of immigrants was a captain, sailboat captain, and he actually chartered a vessel to go back to Donegal and pick up a bunch of people, years after he had been established. And then later on a local merchant named James Dormer, who was a wealthy businessman who handled fishing. He sold fish to the major markets in Chicago and elsewhere. He arranged to have a vessel take more immigrants over. So in three large groups they came.

"And they trickled in between those three points too. I think the last immigrant was around 1900, 1910. She was Mary Duffy. Might've been 1890. Right around the turn of the century. She would've been the last immigrant, to my knowledge. And the last one who spoke Gaelic. There was a woman named Mary Early, who lived until 1977, and I think she spoke Gaelic too. She came to the Island in 1884 at the age of four and she died in 1977. I remember her. But I think she moved off the island before she died. So either Mary Duffy or Mary Early were the last Gaelic-speaking people. And by the time they died, hardly anyone knew the language."

(32:33) RD: "I know Dr. Rotman told, she's mentioned before a story about whatever priest was here before was complaining about no one going to mass, so they brought in an Irish-speaking one. Do you know anything about that?"

RC: "Yep, this church that we're in now was outside of town, where the Catholic cemetery is now. It was built in 1860 and, so four years after Strang was killed. And they had an interim, I think it was Father Murray, who was the first Catholic priest here. And I don't think he was Irish. I may be wrong about that, but I think it was Fr. Murray. And at any rate, he wasn't that well-liked by the Irish people. So Father Peter Gallaghar came in 1866, and he's quite a character. He was not what you would call the most likely person to become a priest. But he became a very powerful figure. He became, perhaps, the most powerful figure on Beaver Island for thirty-two years. So he was head of the church and he was a business man. He had a small schooner in the harbor here, which he used for commerce and trade and selling things. He liked to drink. He liked to eat well. He had a little farm, I think, down by the church. And, he was a power-broker. He really amassed power over the years. He spoke fluent Gaelic.

"He wasn't from Árainn Mhór. He was from County Tyrone. And, anyone outside of Donegal, in that part of Donegal, would've had a little better education than people in Donegal could have because Donegal was a little bit like Appalachia. It's geographically isolated, so there wasn't a lot of, you know, flow of people through there, kind of insulated. But, he was from Tyrone, I believe, and so he had a decent education. Although, he did not, you know, graduate from a seminary at the top of his class by any means. I think he was a guy who was kind of just looking for a niche. And he was a very large man, and he had a group of loyal followers, "henchmen", who were called "Gallagher's boys". And, they were kind of his muscle. So, he

had conflicts with some of the islanders because he was really kind of a, you know, a strong armed guy. But they had a hard time dislodging him or replacing him because he is really firmly entrenched here. And, you know, the story is that he was pretty good at intimidating those who were his critics. So there were two instances where Diocese of Grand Rapids sent up another priest to replace him, but they were eventually told to go. You know, the priests were not allowed to take position here. You can read more about him in a book that I cited to Deb last night, Paul Conner's thesis. There's an entire chapter on Father Gallagher.

(35:52) RC: "So he would've been, you know, one of the early priests in this church. It was much smaller at the time. But he held his weight here from 1866 to 1898, when he died of food poisoning and that sent the community into a panic because he had been there for thirty two years, you know, which in a community whose people's average lifespan was 50 or 60, it was a long, long time. So, they didn't know what to do and eventually, they sent a new priest in, Father Alexander Zugelder, who came in 1898, or 1899, I think. He came from lower Michigan and he was what you would call a "builder priest". He was an engineer and he knew how to build things, and he developed and expanded the size of this church. And, he built a fieldstone rectory out by the cemetery, and a building for the nuns. He came up from Grand Rapids and began teaching school. So, he created quite a compound. And he stayed 'til 1905. But, when Father Gallagher died, that occurred at the end of the height of the Irish hegemony on Beaver Island. You know, he spoke Gaelic and he said mass in Gaelic and he married people, he brokered business deals, and he really just kind of ran the town, from what we can tell…"

(37:20) RD: Do you know if there's, since he was so powerful, was there any sort of spirit of independence here, or rebellion, just since it was an isolated place? Do you think people liked to do things their own way?"

RC: "Well, they did do things their own way. You know, the Irish that came here distrustful of government authority. They'd been abused by British colonization for seven hundred years. They'd been abused by the government on mainland Ireland. They were very mistrustful of any kind of outside authority. They were very tribal people. Very insulated, tribal people, so that's why they came here. Because, they wanted to recreate their environment here in the United States and I think they considered themselves as loyal Americans but I don't think that their primary identity was in America. Irish comes first. They had huge celebrations on the fourth of July but, I think they were celebrating more their independence from everything, rather than England. Although, yeah, they were happy to be free from England. But they were part of the state government and they were part of the county but we, they got very little support or funds from either level of government and they didn't really want it.

"So they have two townships here. They still do. And they ran those townships. They built their own schools. And, certain families would rise to prominence and power and hold its weight for a certain number of years, and subside and others would take their place. But, it really was very much an independent place. And, you know, newcomers were sometimes viewed with suspicion. And if you weren't Irish Catholic and you attempted to move here, it was difficult. It wasn't easy for the French Canadians at first. They had to fight to assimilate here. But, sometimes, you know, the other immigrants that came from other areas, other than Ireland, had a little better education so they rose into the merchant class more quickly and had an advantage that way. Some of them were educators.

"But very much, an insulated, self-sufficient community. They did, you know, need and took advantage of supplies that would come from the mainland and had to be part of that system. But, they grew their own food. They made a lot of their own clothes. They made their own alcohol, in large quantities. And they had their own music. So, it was essentially, usually, farmland. And the thing that makes Beaver Island unique is that it is a unique subset of the larger Irish immigrant story, which the commonly understood themes are 'well, they went to the east coast and they settled Boston and took power there. And the Kennedys came from there and…' All that's true, but it's pretty unusual for one island to transplant itself to another island. And whole families were split in half. Some, half the families might have stayed in Árainn Mhór and half might have come here. So, it was a long lasting time and held its weight for a long time, largely because it

was geographic isolation, because there wasn't a lot of influx of other people. It wasn't on the mainland. It wasn't…It didn't have a railway running through it. It didn't have ships coming and going, but the Irish really kind of kept it to themselves for a hundred thirty/hundred-forty years. And even in my childhood it was still a largely Irish Catholic community, which it still is, but you know, my demographic is fading now. It's becoming more diverse and homogenized….

(41:00) RC: "But I occasionally come across bits of information that reveal a lot to me. Like a few years ago, somebody came across the name of a hill.. this is MacCauley Road [FF], near the end of King's Highway which goes to the east out to the lakeshore. And, apparently, I can't recall the name of this hill, it's in our archives somewhere, but it was kind of something like "Lookout Hill". Only it was named after another hill in the United States that was used as a lookout point for military maneuvers. So, I found that curious and I researched it and I found that this had been a place where the Irish, I think, fought for the colonists against the British on the east coast. So, that suggested to me that in the first generation, they were still really wary. This was the mid-19th century when all sorts of rebellions were going on across the country and people were still trying to take each other's lands. So, this may have been an area where they had a lookout post. And there wasn't as much forest on the bluff in those days and they could see all the ships coming up and down, and they keep an eye on everything that's going on. So, they were insulated and they were kind of wary and they were protective of the island.

"And, yeah, they ran their own little 'kingdom.' I wouldn't call it, they wouldn't have called it 'kingdom,' but they ran their own little universe here. And they were really, that was it. There was the Irish Catholic community. There were, of course, Native Americans here too, but that's another layer of history. You know, there was certainly isolation and prejudice and segregation that went on there. And there's not…those things we know, but I'm curious about the nuances of how a multicultural society exists here on Beaver Island in the mid-19th century 'cause their were Native Americans. There were Irish. There were French Canadians. There were Germans, you know. And, they apparently got along well enough to all survive. And, as I said, the Indians taught the Irish what they needed to know to survive: fishing, and even the farming and what plants grew here that were medicinal, and so forth.

"So, it was kind of an experiment. You know, a lot of things in the United States were an experiment in the nineteen and the eighteen hundreds. Everybody was trying to figure out how to design this country and create a country. And, its ironic that Strang came here to, because it was isolated, to form his own kingdom, which was a religious colony. And the Irish, you know, despised that. They really resented him for what they considered him to be a cult leader in a religion they did not understand, which was really very recent. It was only ten or twenty years old; a uniquely American religion. And they, he was a polygamist. They didn't like that. But, after he was, got killed, and the Mormons were run out, they set up their own kind of kingdom, in a way. Only there wasn't one figure over it; there were several in succession. But, everybody wants to rule the world. And this was their world. And they, you know, they did it. They did it O.K. They succeeded fairly well.

"And this place existed in kind of mythic terms for the Árainn Mhór Irish for a long time, until the mid-20th century when more travel was surmountable. But, if you said the word 'Beaver Island' on Árainn Mhór, it would be immediately, everybody would be, you know, interested in you and want to talk to you and ask you who your ancestors were."

(44:43) KA: "So, would you mind talking a little bit more about your personal ancestors and their experience on the island?"

RC: "Three of my four grandparents are from Árainn Mhór. Or, three of those lines, lineages are from Árainn Mhór. And…my dad's grandfather, Garret Cole, settled this, created a small village down here [GG] in 1912. Saw mill. And he named the town "Nomad". But the other three…my dad's mother was a Gillespie. And my mother's, both my mother's parents were Connaghan and Malloy so they were all from Árainn Mhór. Most

of my lineage is from Árainn Mhór. And, I remember both my grandmothers, they're both gone now. But, my mother's mother was a Malloy and she married a Connaghan and she was, she remembers, she was born in 1891, so she kind of remembers parts of that era; the fishing era, the schooners…

"And I grew up hearing a lot stories from my family and from other families on the island. And, you know, pretty deep sense of heritage, of American-Irishness, which is different than Irishness. You know, I always take pains to say that I'm an American-Irish person. But, I grew up hearing a lot of those old songs that they would've sung in Ireland in the cause of Irish nationalism. It was still strong here. The jukebox in the tavern had a lot of Irish rebel songs on it. So that ethos, that mentality, was still really strong here when I was growing up. And, some of the cultural traditions were still in tact, because it was a small town, but also because it was an Irish small town. You could walk down the street and stop in anybody's home without calling ahead or announcing yourself and you'd be welcome there.

"And, the church was still pretty much the center of the Catholic community in my childhood. They would have dances down here at the hall. They would have weddings here, wedding receptions. A lot of social activity happened around the church. And my family had a commercial fishing business, which it was another tradition that went back on both sides of my family, so I worked on the lakes growing up. And, I grew up kind of, you know, in a time in America that had vanished in most other places. And, when I say 'it was behind the times' I don't mean that derogatorily. I mean that a lot of traditions, that disappeared in most other communities, were still extant here, were still thriving here; again, because of our isolation and our tight-knit nature.

"Homogenization and assimilation occurred more quickly for other immigrant groups in mainland areas of the nation, but it occurred much more slowly here. So, I, you know, I often look back and say, the older I get, the luckier I was. Here I was, it wasn't all great, it wasn't all roses, but it was a unique cultural experience within the larger body of the United States that I think very few people got to have, in my lifetime, in my time period. In my mother's time, you know, she grew up during the Depression. There were still lots of farm towns all across the country, where you'd be riding around on horses. But, by the 1970s that was pretty unusual. But, I can remember, you know, I grew up across the street, and going down to school here, and going to church here, and being born in the little, tiny medical center right over there. So, talk about a very small area. And ringing the bell for recess, doing things like that, that were just totally 'old school.' So, I felt like I grew up in the United States of, maybe, the 1930s or 40s, although I was growing up in the 1970s and I'm grateful for that. I have a lot to be thankful for.

"It's a tribal culture. Still, you know, the clans are still here, and I don't live here anymore, but I try to maintain connections with them as best I can and my brothers are very good about fostering, maintaining tradition and trying to hold on to what can be held on to. And, they played a major role in the Twinning that went on over the early part of this decade between Árainn Mhór and Beaver. So, we all recognize that the demographic is changing and that we're kind of dying out, but all you can do is really celebrate what you have while you have it. And, my way of trying to honor it, was through historical research and trying to save the, save stories through oral history, and also through collecting data, and ultimately, maybe, synthesizing it more, because there's a lot of material that just hasn't been connected, or put into book form, or narrative form for the general public, which I think is really important. So, that's my way of trying to respect it.

"And, it's fascinating for me to be able to look at someone who is fifteen years old, who's from an Ireland family. And because I've gone through hundreds, if not thousands, of photographs of their ancestors, I can see Vesty McDonough in their face. They may not even see it. They wouldn't know. But I can see that and I can see combinations of people in their faces from Boyle, O'Donnell, Gallagher clans. And that's fascinating to me, you know, in an organic sense, to see that… our ancestors don't really die, they just keep popping up in our faces, and, sometimes, in our temperaments and personalities. And, I've grown up in a tribal culture. I wouldn't have considered, or called it, a 'tribal culture' when I was growing up. I don't think I understood that very well. But, now, I understand that, you know, Native Americans had tribal culture, we had a tribal

culture here, familial relations. I'm related to a lot of people that live here, you know. It's a large extended family is what it is.

"So, it was unique and by the time I grew up it was almost, like I said, it was almost kind of an abandoned town. So, it was kind of spooky, you know. It was a little eerie going downtown and seeing buildings boarded up and all these old farms on the countryside just fading away and crumbling into dirt. And, that's another thing. We used to call all this, everything south of St. James was 'the country'. We called it the 'countryside.' Even though it was just an island, we called it, that's 'out in the country.' That's a phrase I don't hear anymore, but we always used it, 'We're going out to the country.' So, my dad would take us down here to Nomad where he kind of grew up as a kid, which was banished by my lifetime, but one had a sense of visiting these old, almost series of tiny, little ghost towns, and little cabins that were just crumbling, and old Mormon homes that were fading away. And it's one of the few places in America where a thriving culture existed and cleared the land, and then Nature came and took it back. So, it's of great interest to biologists for that reason.

"So, now it is part of history and it's interesting for me to be able to take people here. I have a friend here from Ann Arbor this week and I've been showing her the museum and she said 'This is so weird seeing your…As you show me the museums, you're talking about your own history.' Like the school desk upstairs in the museum. I sat at a desk like that. I used some of the tools that were in that museum, for fishing and other things. So, it's literally living history to me. And, in the process of spending years collecting history, I realized that I was rebuilding the town in my mind, and kind of a holographic image in my mind of where everything was, who was where, and so those people kind of came to life for me. And, you know, you can get too deep into the history, actually, because it's a lonely endeavor. It's a, there aren't a lot of people around you who have your knowledge base, so you can't necessarily converse with people about it. Or they are just not interested. History is just not of interest to them.

"But, to me it's still alive. And, there was a great folk storyteller and singer named Utah Philips who wrote a great essay called 'The Past Didn't Go Anywhere' and that's how I feel about it. The past didn't really go anywhere. It's still here. As you find, as you are doing your dig out there at that farmhouse, it's still there. It's just underneath your feet. And, maybe you're not finding a ton of material, maybe you'll find more somewhere else later. But, every time you pick up a bead, or find a coin, or a piece of chert from the Native Americans, I realize that human hands held that and so it brings it to life for me.

"And we've been fortunate in that we've had a very dedicated group of people who've collected history here over the years, other small towns don't have what we have. They don't have the buildings. They don't have the huge genealogy database, but because it was so unique and interesting and multilevel, you know, the Native American, Mormon, Irish, it brought people here who became dedicated to saving it and I think that's a real blessing. And there's always more. There's always more to discover because there hasn't been a huge amount of development. It hasn't been paved over like Dr. Brighton's situation…Even when they repaved the roads here in the harbor. In 2000/2001 they dug really deep to build these roads. And we've found things down there that we didn't expect to see, like weight scales, old wooden weight scales in front of the boat dock where they would drive their wagons into town with produce and they would weigh them, and put them on the boat or sell them. We never knew they were there. There was no record of it. We just figured out by looking at it and Google-imaging it that that is probably what it was. So, it's all still down there."

Helen Pike

Helen (LaFreniere) Pike
Wednesday, July 14, 2010
10:30-11:30 am
Her home on Old Brother's Road

Conversation Summary: Helen Pike welcomed Rhiannon Duke and Jackie Thomas into her lovely home and shared many stories about her family's history on Beaver Island, what it was like growing up there, and how the island has changed (Figure 7.4). A transcription of our conversation is reproduced here with her permission.

Figure 7.4. Helen Pike in her home on Beaver Island. Photograph taken by Rhiannon Duke. Used by permission.

(0:00) RD: "When did your ancestors first come to the island?"

HP: "My mother's people came in the 1850s after the Mormons had been expelled from the island. My mother's people were from Co. Donegal, Ireland, Arranmore Island. In fact, we've had a Twinning of the two islands, Beaver Island and Arranmore because so many of the Irish came from Arranmore. It's a big rock off the coast of Northern Ireland and I can see why they left there because not much grows there.
"And it was at the time of the Potato Famine when so many of them left and they came in through Canada. And because there were a lot of boats sailing on the Great Lakes to Chicago and places like that, they were on those boats. Queen Victoria sent them over in what they called the 'coffin ships' because so many of them died. This was a refueling station, Beaver Island. They used wood in the boilers, to activate the boilers in the sailing ships. And they stopped here and to them it looked so much like Ireland, it was so green and primitive and some vacant houses because the Mormons had been driven off, that a lot of them decided to stay here. Some went on to Chicago but a great number of them stayed right here."

RD: "And do you know if those first people who came, if they kept in touch with people in Ireland?"

HP: "Oh yes, and in fact, even today, a number of people on the island keep in touch with those back in Ireland. A number of years ago when we had the Twinning of the two islands, I had two Irish couples staying here with me. And, you know, they told me the modern history of Arranmore Island and they were impressed

with Beaver Island. We had a big party for them and the Irish love parties. If you're Irish at all, you know that. A lot of people go back and forth. I've gone there too. And they keep in touch with people over there."

RD: "What was the experience like for you on Arranmore when you went for…"

HP: "Well, I'll tell you what happened. I was in Ireland for one month, my cousin and I, and we went up to Burtonport. That's where you would have to leave from the mainland to get to Arranmore. And at that time, that was back in '68, the first time I went, and there were no ferries, just salmon fishing boats. And there was a big, big storm on the North Atlantic and they wouldn't take us. Two women they thought would be too dangerous and so on, because you had to go out from Burtonport, go around Arranmore and come in the harbor side. That was right on the North Atlantic and it was very stormy. And so we had been in Ireland almost a month and we had to get back to Shannon to get our flight back to New York, so we couldn't stay any longer. But we could see it. We could see people moving around and we could see all the houses over there. But a lot of my relatives have been there since. I did not go back."

Helen said that she did not know how Arranmore residents make a living except from tourism. She told us that it has become "a bit of a resort area" in the summers. Without much industry on the island and with poor soil for crops, Helen imagined that it must be hard for residents to get by.

(4:15) RD: "So I would imagine it was a very big change for your ancestors and other Irish who came here [Beaver Island] in the 19th century since the soil was a lot better and they had a lot of open land to work. Do you know, do you have any stories from the first generations that were here?"

HP: "The first generations here? Well, the Irish had been dispossessed of all their lands by the English. They wanted land, and many of them homesteaded here. But the land on Beaver Island is very sandy and there are very few places where the soil is really productive. They grew a lot of apples and the apples were really highly prized because we have a growing season that is unusual. We have very late springs, but we have long, beautiful falls. October is a gorgeous month here. That allowed the apples to ripen and they shipped them to Chicago mainly. They were highly prized in the fruit markets of Chicago.

"And they grew potatoes because that was a staple that they were used to and didn't have during the Famine. But they were not good potatoes. My dad had a store and I remember he sometimes take potatoes in exchange for coffee, you know, how they bartered back in those days. And the potatoes very often had a very dark spot right in the middle of them. I remember that.

"But they had little vegetable patches and so on. And fishing was the main industry here on the island for years until the lamprey eel destroyed them. And then they changed the rights of the Indians to fish with nets and the white people not to fish. So that destroyed the fishing industry for the white people here. A lot of people left the island at that time. That was during the years of the Depression too. By 1940, fishing was absolutely finished and this was one of the great fishing areas of the Great Lakes at one time."

(6:26) RD: "What did your father do for a living?"

HP: "When he first came here, he worked for the Beaver Island Lumber Company. And my mother had a millinery store; she made beautiful hats. In those days they had great big hats and so on. And in the summertime she had an ice cream parlor. And then they married and they stocked all kinds of canned foods and goods by the yard, everything. In fact, there was a slogan they had, 'If we don't have it, you don't need it.' They had everything from baby clothes to coffins, all in one store."

RD: "Wow. Some store, yeah."

HP: "The coffins they kept in the back, however."

(7:14) JT: "What was life like for you on the island, as a child? Were there any traditions or practices that your family maintained that can be attributed to the Irish identity?"

HP: "Well, of course, I wasn't here in those early days. I'm not quite that old. But when I was a child, in the wintertime we were really cut off from the mainland. The Coast Guard Station had a telephone. And there was one place in town where you could go to call long distance to the mainland. Just one place. And our family had a series of telephones; I've got one in my kitchen yet. One big long ring, everybody get on the line. That was an emergency or something very important. Another might be two long rings, one short. Another might be one long, one short, or like that. And there were quite a few of our family. There were eight of us children and that's the way we communicated.

"But the boat used to carry the mail and when the lake froze up—in those days Lake Michigan froze practically solid because there was no pollution in the lake. Now there's so much pollution, it seldom ever freezes like it used to. And actually, they carried the mail across the ice with a horse and sleigh. So we would get mail during the winter months about twice a week. But then, in the fall, until it froze up, there were weeks that we didn't get any mail. And in the spring, when the ice broke up, there were weeks we didn't get any mail. So, we were quite isolated.

(8:56) HP: "We had nuns for teachers because nobody else would come teach as cheaply as the nuns did. But they were very, very good teachers. And we had very good results with our schools here. The superintendent of schools from Charlevoix County, of which we are a part, would come over in the spring and give us our examinations. In the eighth grade we had to take a very comprehensive examination to go on to high school. And they didn't trust the nuns to not coach us. They thought they were coaching us all the time, so the nuns weren't even allowed in the room when we took our exams because we always came first in the entire County. And, they didn't like that because we were an isolated community and they thought we should be, I don't know, maybe they thought we should be aborigines or something.

"But, in the wintertime, we did lots of skating, tobogganing, and *a lot* of homemade fun. I remember when I was in high school the young men would go hunting every Saturday. And they would kill rabbits and squirrels and whatever, you know. And on Sunday afternoons, we girls would get together and we would've made something. We'd have a dinner and play cards. Really very simple things that we did, but we had a lot of fun. And the hills around here, of course there weren't a lot of houses right on the water, we could go way out into the harbor on our sleds. Of course, you had to walk back up and go up the hill. And where our church is, have you seen our old church?"

HP: "That was where we used to gather at night. Everyone would bring a few sticks of wood from home; we'd always have a bonfire there, to keep warm because the winters were pretty chilly here. No roads were plowed or anything of that sort. And we'd gather around the fire and slide down the hill, walk back up, get warm and slide back down again. And just a lot of simple things but we really enjoyed our winters. We made ourselves enjoy them. What else was there to do, you know?"

(11:27) RD: So there's definitely a very tight-knit community here on the island, especially when you were growing up?"

HP: "Yes, yes, it is. The worst month on the island was always March. It would thaw and it would look like spring, and then we'd get a big snowstorm and it'd be back to winter again. By that time we were very sick of winter. And that's when everybody would get at one another. We'd quarrel easily. And it's still that way even today even though now we have two airplane companies coming in here. It always seems like March is the month of being grumpy. And it was, it was at that time.

"And of course in the summertime the beaches; I remember we kids used to make little rafts and be along the beach and we'd pull them along. And our parents never seemed to be afraid of us getting drowned. But when

any kids came from the mainland, that was the first thing they were warned about—that they were not to go too far out into the water if they couldn't swim. Most of us learned to swim of course."

RD: "Well, this island seems like a very unique place."

HP: "I think it is. We're very close here. We have three churches here. And this is a place that is truly ecumenical. They help us; we help them. We are in the majority, the Catholic Church is in the majority. But we had an Episcopal bishop who had his summer home out at Sand Bay and he decided they needed a little Episcopal church although there was only a handful of people here in the summertime and none in the winter. And so, all the Catholic men…it's a pretty little church. Have you seen it?"

RD: "Holy Cross?..."

HP: "No, the Episcopal church."

HP: "It's just up from…well you go down the back road and you'd almost run into it. It's a very tiny little church, much smaller than Holy Cross. And it's only open in the summertime and there are usually visiting Episcopal priests that come for it. And, a couple of years ago, they needed a new roof and they had the materials for it but they didn't have enough people to help put it on. And Father Pat announced in church that the Episcopal church needed a new roof. And the next day, 24 Catholic men were there at eight o'clock in the morning and they had a new roof on by noon. And it's things like that.

"And the community church, the Christian church—and that's supposed to be for all denominations that are not Catholic or Episcopal. And they have quite a variety. We do things back and forth. And if we didn't have a priest here, like on Thanksgiving, which is not a holy day and so therefore very often go to be with their families on days like that, a man from that community church…his name was…Phil Gregg. And he would come and give the homily at our church for Thanksgiving and all the people from that church would come to ours too at the same time. So there's always been a very good feeling between them—between the three churches. And that's something that is quite unusual in a lot of places, you know. You are, everybody's in their own little niche of a church and so on.

"And if anybody's…the Irish can fight like crazy. I don't mean physical but disagree on things. But if anybody is sick or they need some help with their house or putting up a building, people are very quick to help. I think we are a very special place, I really do."
(16:19) RD: "I was wondering about, do you know anything about the Irish language? If it was spoken here when the people first came?"

HP: "I do not know. I know certain terms that the Irish use and all of that, but the Irish language is very difficult to learn. Very difficult. And the English had discouraged that for so many years. They had no education. But there are places here, there's one road that's called 'Paideen Og' and that was my great-grandfather. And that, I'm trying to think what that means, 'Paideen Og.' And they call of us descendants of him 'Paideens.' One man says, 'it's the greatest organization in the United States except CIO-AFL.'

"But a number of places have Irish names and some had been named by the Mormons like Lake Geneserath and Font Lake, which is out back here. That's where the Mormons were baptized, in that lake. And then there's a Fox Lake and different places like that. But in my day, none of the Irish spoke Irish. Now my father and grandfather spoke French all the time. I could kick myself that I didn't talk with them because when I went to college, I took French. I can read it but I don't have the accent that they had. You know how kids are, 'that's not important.' In later years I was really disgusted with myself that I didn't pay more attention."

(18:14) JT: "Did your mom and dad meet when your mom went into Canada? How did your mom and dad meet?"

HP: "Well, he came here to work for the Beaver Island Lumber Company and she had the shop. And in the summertime it was an ice cream parlor also, and I suppose that's how they met. My French ancestors, their coming was much more dramatic. My grandmother was from a very wealthy family and my grandfather was a postal clerk for the Canadian government. And he went up to Quebec and she was home from the Ursuline school for girls. Her dad owned a number of hotels in Quebec and also in Montreal. And her father had already arranged a marriage for her, as the French sometimes do even to this day, they arrange marriages. Papers signed and so on. And she met grandpa and they fell in love. And she wanted her dad to allow her to marry him and he wouldn't give his consent.

"So they went over to Maine and they were married there and went back to Canada. And her dad had grandpa fired from his job. He was very wealthy, very influential. And he [grandpa] couldn't get a job anywhere in Canada. He was what they call 'blackballed.' So they went back to Maine and the lumbering industry was just starting up in America at that time and they came westward as the lumber companies moved westward. And when the Beaver Island Lumber Company was formed—we even had a train that went all the way around the island, believe it or not, carrying logs and so on.

"On Saint Patrick's Day, my dad and his father and a son-in-law, my dad's brother-in-law, they walked across the ice from Charlevoix to Beaver Island. They walked all day. That's 22 miles the way that they came. And they got into the harbor downtown here at ten o'clock at night and the only light they saw was in a saloon. Well, on Saint Patrick's Day, the Irish celebrate. I'm sure you know that. And when they walked into the saloon there were about 40 Irishmen well into their cups and grandpa and my dad and his brother-in-law, they asked for a drink of whiskey. They spoke in French—that was an error. They should've spoken in English because they could speak in English too. And the bartender, and everybody, of course, was alert. They were foreigners to them, you know. And he poured a drink for my grandfather out of the spittoon, where the men would chew their tobacco and spit into it. And my grandpa threw it in his face. Well it was a brouha, a big one. And I'm sure that the three French were beaten up by the 40 Irish. But they prevailed; they stayed on. And my dad became one of the important businessmen of Beaver Island.

(21:40) HP: "But my mother died very early; she was only 38 when she died. And there eight of us children: four boys and four girls. But he raised us and did a good job—we think he did a good job—with all of us. And he did. But their coming here to the island, when you think of what some of the pioneers went through, you can't help but admire them very much because they endured a great deal to be in a free country and to do things as they wanted to.

"But before my grandmother's father died, he sent for her and my dad and a friend of his took her back to Quebec. And in those days, it was the 1920s, the only mile of paved road in the United States or Canada was West Jefferson Avenue in Detroit, where the rich with their practically handmade cars would drive out to one end of it, turn around and drive back on Sunday afternoons. One mile of paved road. And the roads around Canada were like the dirt roads around Beaver Island today. And it took them some time to get there. But she and her father were reconciled and after that she was given a pension from their company. Actually, her people were from the Renault Motor Company, and they made engines before they started making cars. And so she had a pension for the rest of her life from…we didn't get it, unfortunately. But she had it the rest of her life and she was a very proud old lady. She always dressed like she was an aristocrat too."

(23:27) RD: "Do you feel like you identify with your Irish roots? Growing up was there anything that your family did that tried to maintain that identity?"

HP: "Well my mother was from a large family, a large Irish family, and we've always been very close. And we did things together. Weddings, wakes, the whole bit, you know."

RD: "I spoke to Bill McDonough yesterday and he mentioned something about house parties here on the island. Like people would come and play music and just have a good time. Tell stories maybe. Anything like that ring a bell?"

HP: "I think what you're talking about is that every family had what they would call a *boudler* (sp?), did he mention that?"

RD: "No."
HP: "And I can remember practically every family would have somebody living with them. It was sort of a lonely person that happened to come to Beaver Island and because he didn't have a place to stay, one family would take him in. He sort of worked for his living. They would clothe him and feed him and so on and so forth. But he would live with them for years and years and years. And I remember the one that we had at our house too. His name was Shorty Ross and where he came from I don't know. And he even had some children that came to visit him when he lived at our place. But one time a group of us got together and started writing down the names of all the families who had *boudlers*. I really don't know why they got that name but that's what they called them.

"Now, many families had people that they paid to work for them. And after my mother died we had what they called *hired girls*. You didn't call them maids in those days. They were *hired girls*. And they were paid. They worked both in the store and they worked in our house because the youngest was only 14 months old and the oldest was 15 and a half when our mother died. So we had to have help, and they were not *boudlers*. And usually the hired help were relatives who were paid for their services. But the *boudlers* did all kinds of odd jobs around the house. They helped with cutting the wood and raking the leaves. Almost any job that you wanted them to do they would do. They had their own little cubby hole of a room."

(26:31) JT: "How many times have you been to Co. Donegal, Arranmore, the island? Did you go on a frequent basis or…how many times?"

HP: "I just was to Burtonport; we couldn't get over. But other people here go back and forth often. And people from Ireland come over here too, quite often. I was in Ireland, well I was on a tour for two weeks and the rest of the time we rented a car. And I'll tell you, my cousin was a good driver but she wouldn't drive over there because you're on the opposite side of the road. I never drove much at all because my husband did all of the driving. So I was driving the car and after three or four days I remember going out to the Cliffs of Moher and looking down and thinking, 'what if I back up or accelerate too much? I don't want to be here.' So I took the car back and turned it in and we took trains and buses. The trains in Ireland were very good, very accommodating, you know those kind that you get in from either side, you know. And we got in with a couple of women that were touring the world from Australia. One was very wealthy and the other was her traveling companion.

"But the local buses, you would not believe them over in Ireland. Somebody would come up, hold up their hand and the bus would stop. There was always a driver and what they call a 'courier,' one that talked to the people that were on. 'Hold up, would ya take this dozen of eggs to my sister?' and so on. And they'd take it to the next town where her sister might be and stop at her house and give her the dozen of eggs."

Helen told another brief, similar story about local people using the buses as a delivery service. She also mentioned the 'Tinkers' [Travellers] and how Irish people fear that they will put curses on them. A few small groups of 'Tinkers' came on to the buses with her and her cousin during their trip.

(29:42) HP: "They were very interesting. It really gave you a very good idea of what the life of the ordinary Irish were before they had this revolution—and the revolution of industry had started by that time, in Ireland. And today they're very prosperous. In fact, a lot of people wish their countries were as prosperous as the

Irish are because a lot of people…they're cheap labor, you know. The Germans went in there. Americans had companies there. And I think the Irish today are in very good shape over there. Financially and all."

RD: "Do you feel proud to have Irish heritage?"

HP: "Oh yes, yes I do. They love music and many of them are quite poetic. And they're good-hearted. But I'm just as proud of my French heritage too. And of course I had more influence with the French side because my dad raised us and he raised us as he would've been raised in his mother's family."

RD: "I see. And do you think just overall on the island there's a strong sense of Irish identity?"

HP: "Oh yes. For a long time we were the only French family on the island. In fact, I remember getting into a fight with a girl in school because she called me a 'frog.' And they had a little ditty that they used to say to us: 'Pea soup and Johnny cake make a Frenchman's belly ache.' And when somebody would get mad they would stick out their tongue and say that at us. One girl, I took down. I was pounding the devil out of her and the nuns pulled me off of her because she kept saying that to me.
"Yes, I think the people on the island have a very proud sense of their Irish heritage. God knows they had a tough time before they came to America though. The English really considered them as sub-human. They really did. They didn't allow them to be educated. And, in fact, as recently as World War II, in some areas in the east, they had signs there—I know because my sister was in one of those towns during the war—'Irish and dogs keep off the grass.' That was the attitude they had towards the Irish in the east. So that told you what they thought of the Irish there.

"But I think here, they had land, and when the fishing went on they became very prosperous fishermen, some of them. Very prosperous. And they had pride in their identity here."

RD: "So did your siblings move off the island at all?"

HP: "Oh yes. Well my sister, she went off to college also. She and her husband, he was a Coast Guard that moved here during—we had a full complemented Coast Guard station before and during World War II. And she married one and they lived in Ludington. She had a very good job. And I taught school off-island for 39 years. I didn't move back here until my husband died. He loved it here and he was not from the island. He was from Grand Rapids, Michigan. And he always wanted us to have a place here. And the last thing he said to me before he died was, 'Be sure you build a cottage on Beaver Island because the kids all love it there.' We used to come in the summertime and the kids, they loved it.

"And their kids love it too and now their grandchildren. I have five great-grandchildren that come here every summer. And they love it here. There's a freedom here you don't have other places. If some adult sees a child where they think they should not be, like down on the dock or something, they'll tell them to 'get up off the dock—you're not supposed to be there without an adult,' you know. And if they don't move fast enough they might give them a swat on the behind. And where else could you do that today without being put in jail for cruelty to children?

(34:46) RD: "How do you think the island has changed?"

HP: "Oh it's changed tremendously. It has changed a great deal. We have more amenities now then even when I was a child. Electricity came in in 1935 and some people just had one single light bulb in their house but it was far different than kerosene lamps and gas lamps and things of that sort. And people didn't have running water. They didn't have bathrooms—they had outhouses and so on. The roads are taken care of a little bit by the county but not enough for the taxes that we pay. And I think, well my dad always used to tell us children, 'there's a good living to be made on Beaver Island. But farming was never good and fishing is

finished because of the lamprey.' And he said, 'tourism is the future of Beaver Island. He was far ahead of his time because he saw the possibilities of tourism here on the island."

RD: "Well it's a great place. We really have enjoyed being here."

HP: " It has changed a great deal. And people come and go, you know, now all the time. A trip to the…we used to call the mainland 'the USA.' We weren't in the USA. 'I'm going to the USA,' they'd say if they were going over to Charlevoix. And everybody has telephones; everybody has electricity; everybody has cars. And they did not have that for years and years.

"But I don't think anyone on the island ever starved like they did in Ireland. The fishermen would always give away their fish to people that weren't fishing before they would pack them in ice and ship them to Charlevoix where they were put on a train and be in Chicago the next morning. They were caught in Lake Michigan one day and they'd be in Chicago the next morning. And the fish from here were highly valued. But no one ever, that I ever heard of, went hungry on Beaver Island, even during the Depression days. And that was pretty drastic on the mainland—the breadlines and the soup kitchens and all of that. I often wonder what my great-grandchildren or my grandchildren would do if we had a depression like we had in those years. Because no one had any money.
"And I can remember when there were only five cottages on the island—summer people. And now, there are hundreds and hundreds of them. You don't even see them because so many of them are in the woods. Like you would never see this one unless you came down this road."

(38:05) Helen mentioned that she and a few others go spend the winter months in Florida. She would stay on the island but her children are afraid that she might slip and hurt herself and not be able to get help. Helen told us that her daughter stays on the island all year long and that she loves the beautiful winters.

Johnny Runberg

Tuesday, July 20, 2010
1:30-3:00 pm
His home on King's Highway

Conversation Summary: Johnny Runberg, the president of the Beaver Island Historical Society and a native of the island, welcomed Rhiannon Duke and Kasia Ahern into the McCann House, his home on the King's Highway (Figure 7.5). The sound recording is not great quality due to passing cars and other disturbances. Nevertheless, Johnny shared many wonderful stories with us. A transcription of our conversation is reproduced here with his permission.

(0:00) RD: "Something that came up today, we were wondering about electricity on the island, when that first came and even how it works now. Where does it come from?"

JR: "Well initially, it came to the island in the form of a stationary generator down in the harbor. And that was 1939. And if you, have you observed, you probably wouldn't have because it's not very long. St. James Marine is down on the harbor, you'll see barges, tugs, different vessels, at a dock. And then just beyond them, toward that end of the harbor, they're starting to work the ground up on what used to be the site of the old generator plant. And Great Lakes Energy, the electric company that has a cable over here now, has had for many years, are going to allow us to turn that into a Veterans memorial park. And so the guys have started on that. I don't know how far along it is. So that's where the generator was. It was two diesel,

Figure 7.5. Johnny Runberg in his home on Beaver Island. Photograph taken by Rhiannon Duke. Used by permission.

Caterpillar diesels, of fair size. And a local man, Jewell Gillespie, started, or he was the first island-based man that maintained the system—kept the generator running.

"Then some year, I can't tell you when the first cable was brought across, but periodically that cable would get damaged or break and that have to grapple and find a diver to go down and find it. And they would pull it up to the surface and they'd do a watertight splice with the power turned off on the mainland. And after that was done, we'd have power again. So that went on for some time.

"Finally, they could, in the case of the cable breaking, run that old generator and they updated it a couple of times. So now, if you go to the Four corners—where the gas station is—to your left there's a generator. It's a 2000 kilowatts I think. That doesn't sound right, but, it's at least 2000 kilowatts per hour. And they run that occasionally to make sure it works. But the big cable coming across now […] is advanced, three-phase 440 voltage and it supplies the entire island easily. Unless the cable blows, in which case they can run the generator full time. Because that old one couldn't handle the summer influx of people who have cottages. "We go from 550 [year round] to somewhere between two and three thousand [in the summer] on a given weekend with all the cottages that ring the island. The old generator couldn't begin to handle that need for electricity, but this new one can.

(3:50) JR: "Back when there was no electricity, battery-powered tools weren't invented or available, so anybody that had the old-fashioned bit and brace, that you turned the handle with the drill on the other end, would come and drill holes all in your walls and run the wires and farmers became electricians. And I know the man who wired this house; he's about 90 years old now. He was a boat captain. Lawrence McDonough is his name."

Johnny then told us how his wife, Joyce, had started the Hospice on Beaver Island about 15 years ago. It is called Beaver Island Hospice and Helping Hands and it is in affiliation with the Munson Hospice in Traverse City. He explained that it addresses a great need in such an isolated community. Johnny then segued into a discussion of the health care on the island and told us a story of the medical center's once
(6:05) JR: "Crude means of dealing with people's medical needs. We saw a young man, broke his leg and he was laying in a patch of poison ivy down here [on King's highway?] a few hundred feet. We'd come up from the beach from a family gathering and anyway, Danny McCafferty broke his leg and he was lying in a patch of poison ivy […] that was very deep. Of course we all got poison ivy from it. They put him in a station wagon and they had an interior door, a wooden door, and they put him on the wooden door, carried it like a stretcher, put him in the station wagon, took him to the old medical center where they had a retired doctor, who was now our medical care, care for him. And it was not his bag to take care of emergencies. No one had paramedics or EMTs. Joyce and I became EMTs back in '85 but we resigned after about a dozen years.

"But we have about four paramedics now so when you see the ambulance, that one SUV emergency vehicle, they're well-trained. Far more than we were. We were basic EMTs".

(7:49) RD: "We were also wondering about, do you know…What kind of knowledge do you have about the house that we're excavating?"

JR: "Well I only knew the most recent resident, Peter 'Doney,' but his father and mother and siblings, his brother, I knew Peter and Lester. Let's see, who was the third one? Patsy, yeah, they called him Patsy. Patrick was his name. So there were three sons. And they did sustenance farming, I don't know to what extent. I lived among the fishermen down here [by the Harbor] with my grandfather and a couple of uncles. And south of town, you know, where the farms started, you could see the old farm fields, and there was logging going on simultaneously. So there was a three-fold economy and during the Depression years, they said the money just went around and around. But that's all I knew. Lester moved off the island. Patsy did. But they'd all come back for the summer. And the most recent one who lived there, Peter, he lived in around Lapeer, Michigan, which is near Flint—east of Flint as if you're going to Port Huron.

"They told a funny story. Well, Patsy, in the Depression years, the emergency aid was called 'relief.' And they would count heads and depending on how many people were there in the family that needed help, they would give the emergency aid, primarily food. And the father died and in the wintertime, they didn't have the heavy equipment to dig a grave, so they put him, the story goes, in the root cellar, which is where they kept their perishables. And they must have dug a deeper hole to put him in, you can only imagine. But Patsy, Patrick, had kind of a battered face […] so they put him in bed and pretended he was his father to count him. So that's a Beaver Island story.

(10:56) JR: "When Beaver Islanders get in a group and they get recalling old stories, things like that come up. I've heard many tales from my mother, who had a marvelous memory. She would even do the old dialect as if she were there even though she wasn't.

"But the farm sat there. And Peter, in retirement, was the last one who would come up here. I knew him fairly well […] Then he died and his widow continued to come up here and I know they have children, but if I met them it was 30 years ago. You know, they made a deal with the Traverse Conservancy to acquire the property, and they could have the home 'til they both were deceased…

Johnny then discussed how the Historical Society has acquired the house and is in the process of deciding whether or not to move it to the Heritage Park across from the Community Library. Since the siding has been confirmed to be asphalt and not asbestos, Johnny said that the Historical Society will most likely undertake the project. Of course, as he mentioned, it all depends on the resources and funds available. They may be applying for grants.

(18:38) KA: "We have another question, out of curiosity. Do you know when that Transfer Station came in on the island?"

JR: "Probably in the early (19)90s. But if you want a precise answer, the man, Doug Bugai, who's the head of it now, is on duty there six days a week. He could give you a precise answer.

Johnny told us that a woman named E.B. (Ethel B.) Lang would be another good person to speak with about the transfer station if we were interested. She played a large role in its establishment on the island and she also managed it during its first years.

(20:24) RD: "You mentioned earlier that your mother had, she told lots of stories. Do you, do any pop to mind, that you could tell us? Any good stories from the island?"

JR: "Well she told stories about the family and some families would be offended but I wrote an essay in Volume 3 of the Beaver Island Journals about one of my uncles. And his friend, who passed away last year, said 'I wish you hadn't told that story about Emmett.' But she would tell tales that she recollected. For example, she knew where our great-grandparents on the Martin side…she and my grandfather who lived here was a McCann and his wife was Grace Martin. And her [Grace's] parents were buried in the Catholic cemetery with a flat stone that just said 'Father and Mother.' And the Martins up here didn't know where their grandparents were buried, but she [Johnny's mother] remembered.

"She could tell about this house. It was built in [19]'02 but I don't think they occupied it until the next year. And the family lived around the harbor. A fire occurred so they moved into it [the McCann house] very quickly. And the woodwork wasn't up and many things weren't finished. And so, let's see, James was probably three. There were eight children in the family here. But there were four bedrooms. So by the time the youngest ones were born, I believe the older ones were off on their careers and lifestyle.
"So she would tell, and told me, many stories and the great-grandfather, James, who had the general store where the Community Center is today. I just learned down at the Museum by microfilm copy that Joyce Bartel made […] and it named my great-grandfather, James. And I never knew his middle initial. It's 'C.' So I just learned that last week."

RD: "And what's his last name, sorry?"

JR: "McCann. In the 1860 census that she had, that's where I got this information, he and his family were living on Whiskey Island. Now that's very remote. But there was no electricity on any of the islands so you could live on anywhere that you had a big enough spot to have a house and a dock. But it was surprising that there were five or six members of that family living there. I had pictured that he and one of his brothers lived and fished from there but it was not so. The whole six or eight people were living there […] But he came here. He had a trading post around the harbor that he bough from a man named James Dormer who was from Buffalo, New York, and had vessels and trading posts all up the Great Lakes. And the vessels would go from Buffalo to the various—Cleveland, Detroit, maybe Alpena, around the Straits. They would stop at Beaver Island and other places and ultimately go to Chicago. And passengers, freight, products to be sold in the stores, traveled back and forth. And it was quite a lifeline for people on these islands. And as well as the smaller cities around the Great Lakes. But that was, 1800s."

(27:30) JR: "But, in a community like this, which was largely Irish Catholic in my mother's time and even my great-grandfather's. The Catholic priest had a moderate amount of control, unlike today. We now have three churches. But when reckoning time came in the spring, the pastor would read off the names of the people and how much they contributed for the year, that was crunch time. And according to a tale she told, Father Zugelder it might have been, he was reading it off, and the grandfather's name was read. They had moved here from Mackinaw Island, the whole family, and I just told you they had lived on Whiskey Island, but they came from Mackinaw, where they had settled when they came from Ireland. And he read off, 'James

McCann," and his contributions must not have been up to standard, 'the Mackinaw Jew.' And my mother told me this. I didn't put that in the essays. That's pretty blunt.

"And I think the Irish who came here, many came through Montreal. They came here and found these great fishing waters as they came in from, not just from Mackinaw but from other places. And they'd write back to Ireland and say, 'there's wonderful fishing and there's farmland. You can get land.' So they came in great numbers. According to history, it's not legend, it's basically truth from a lady named Helen Collar […] She told that there were 17 families with the Gallagher surname that could not trace common ancestry. So they came from all parts of Ireland and all parts of Canada, the US, and maybe some of the generations that came over didn't have any information on their own ancestors more than one or two generations back, so they couldn't make those common thread connections.

"And they got nicknames […] The Gallagher family, the patriarch, the father or grandfather who had sailed on the ocean, they'd call them the 'Salties.' And in a fallen down cottage on the King's Highway was where the 'Salties' lived. It's down by, just before Sloptown Road on your left is this cottage in terrible disrepair. That's where they lived. I think there was someone who sailed in the far Pacific and I know they were called the 'Philippines'—the 'Philippine' Gallaghers. Oh and a man who came here from New York—his home was down the street, the third house this way from the school—the 'Bowerys.' (sp?) They called the whole family the 'Bowries.' And everybody knew the 'Bowry' Gallaghers. So that's the kinda way that you could keep people sorted out. There was a Phil Green. He was a big tall man and they named his son Phil and he was just a little guy. Eventually the son grew bigger than the man. First it was 'Big Phil' and 'Little Phil' and when the son grew bigger than the dad it was "Big Little Phil' and 'Little Big Phil.' That's how silly it got. But you still knew who they meant. So that's how you sorted them out. They didn't all come from the same place."

(33:00) KA: "Were there a lot of different McCann families?"

JR: "Well in the Catholic cemetery, there's a young boy of, between 10 and 11, whose tombstone is there, and he's not related to my family. But they moved away later and he married a Rose Connaghan, who probably wasn't related to these [Beaver Island] Connaghans. The people who knew, who are long since dead, told me who they were, where they moved. But the ones who came here would be my great-grandfather and he had two sons, John and Michael. John lived here and Michael ran the general store where the Community Center is. And he passed away around 1939. I've got reams of genealogy of the McCanns and my own family, the Runbergs. And the Martins. The next Beaver Island Journal is on those early families that were here. And a cousin, on the Martin side, who was gonna write the Martin essay, he passed away. So I've got two to write. […]

"But if they were on Whiskey Island in the 1860 census, I know that by 1897 my great-grandfather had built the store where the Community Center stands. Two-story building like it is now. He lived upstairs and his son, Mike, lived next door here [McCann House]. And when my great-grandmother died, he [great-grandfather] would not move up here with them. They moved down there with him, up over the store. By then, some of those children were grown up and gone. Lightning struck the house next door and burned it. If there was a Fire Department, it would've had to have been pretty inept. So, but my grandparents lived here. First he died and then she died in 1946.

"Then the house here was pretty much unoccupied, except when we came up on summer vacations. My uncle, who was a DNR officer here on the island, his name was James, named for my great-grandfather, he lived here most of the time. And he started the Beachcomber tavern. And they drafted him, I think 1942. I have a picture of that […] so anyway, James, 38 years old with a wife and child, was drafted. By mistake. He was James E. McCann. Many of the people up here called the children by their middle names. He had a first cousin, James O. 'Omer' was what we called him. And that was the family that lived next door and his father ran the general store. He lived in Petoskey at the time. So they meant to get Omer. By the time James had

been through basic training, he was out on the east coast—Florida, Texas, finally California. And he said that the desert maneuvers out there in southern California nearly killed him. Wasn't used to the heat and humidity. And they found the mistake and they let him off. But they had given his job to a handicapped man who had his arm off at the elbow, Keebler, for whom that Keebler Trail on the west side is named. It goes from Protar's Tomb all the way to Donegal Bay. They said, 'no, you have take your job back.' So he worked in a factory and a furniture plant in Kenosha, Wisconsin. And he came up here and he bought the old building next to the Community Center. It was up on big pine posts and he put a foundation under it. It took five years for the floor that was rippled to settle reasonably straight and he built the bar himself and opened a tavern. And he ran that 'til he passed away. And he wasn't a drinker. Cigarettes and coffee and conversation was his forte. He was like a second father to me when my dad was sailing on the Great Lakes […]

"But of the six boys that my grandparents had, some were sailors, two were boat builders—they never fished, they always built boats. The girls, there were only two. There was Catherine, and after her husband passed, she lived in the house across the street and my mother lived here. Diverse personalities. One was a night owl and one was early to bed. They couldn't exist under the same roof but they got together every day for lunch and dinner.

(40:00) RD: "What were women's lives like on the island? Your mother and her sister…"

JR: "Well, my aunt left at an early age and ended up working in Lansing for the State government. My mother left, despite the opposition of her father—the father ruled the family—and he was going to go to Charlevoix where she was working as a dental assistant. And she had message sent back to him that if he came over, he was wasting the fuel. She was not gonna come back. And she did not.

"But the women worked extremely hard. They had big families—big, Irish families. The uncle that ran the general store, Mike McCann, his wife was Annie. She would get her laundry out early on the line and my grandmother who lived there they were both trying to see who could get it out first. So, as the story goes—many things I say I have to appendage with 'as the story goes'—my grandmother put her laundry out wet Sunday night so she'd have it out before Aunt Annie Monday morning.

"The medical care was pretty scarce. A lot of gals in labor, they died, due to lack of medical care. There were midwives. There were doctors periodically. There was a doctor, he was Canadian, Dr. Palmer, Russell Palmer. He lived next to the little branch bank that we have in town […] His wife Sue, she was a nurse. And she would have recitals, teach the young women manners, graces, things like that. But the one that was not drafted, when my uncle was, James Omer McCann, had appendicitis. And Dr. Palmer operated on him on a kitchen table. And you can imagine the lack of sterile technique. And he survived to live a good long life. Omer was later the President of the Henry Ford Community College in Dearborn. He was an accountant by his education. And he would come up here every summer and stay at one of those places down below the hill.

Johnny then described James Omer's brother, John Giles (?) and his military career in the Air Force throughout WWII. He remained in the service up through Vietnam. He served in three wars by the time he retired.

Johnny also mentioned how many young men from the island enlisted during World War II. A man on the board of the Historical Society has committed to memory the names of every person to serve in the military from the Civil War up through Vietnam.

(45:59) Johnny explained how the current priest at Holy Cross, Father Cauley, went to seminary at Notre Dame. Before he became a priest, however, he was a businessman and as such, according to Johnny, he has a different outlook from most other priests. He calls the bishops 'the red hats' because he does not like how

they run things. Beaver Island is in the Diocese of Gaylord. Johnny told us that he has "gained a great deal of respect for the clergy through him, because of him."

(48:08) KA: "You mentioned that your grandparents were boat builders. Do you know anything about what their lives were like?"

JR: "Yes, they built boats here […] One of those pictures shows Ulysses, the designer of the boats in a Ford (?) inward motorboat. Looks like it was about 24 feet long. He was racing across the harbor at an incredible speed. That was Ulysses—he was in boats from the time that he was a kid. So one day my grandfather was standing on McCann dock downtown […] and he had his fish tug there. When I say 'tug,' they were coal burners. They had steam engines. They didn't have gasoline engines. My grandfather saw a boat racing across the harbor. It wasn't the one I have a picture of, it was one they built. And he said, 'Whose boat is that? Who's in that boat?' And they said, 'Well, that's your son.' Around the harbor, as far as you can go to what we call 'Kate's (?) Point,' is where they built the boat—Emmett and Ulysses. Never knew they got the lumber, screws, everything they needed to build it. And they put an engine in it. And that's the first [their father] knew of it. They were already off on their career. I think Ulysses was 18 when he started and he was only 47 when he died. But he was the designer.

"And I have an old lesson in marine math that he took from ITT correspondence courses. And that's where he learned his marine math used in designing boats. It shows you the score and the grade you got, so I treasure all that stuff.

"Then, later on, he built a couple of cargo boats. They were both about 64 feet long. The first one was called *The Idler* (?). It was a cargo boat but the design…It had a small cabin aft, a lower, forward deck that was quite long and a boom, just forward of the cabin, to raise, offload or load cargo. And they would haul anything you wanted hauled. When they built that first boat, they would put it down in Benton Harbor, St. Joe, and they would haul produce up to the north end of the lake. And it would be there…It was grown in the Benton Harbor area or at one end, say Illinois, Indiana, where the crops are harvested much sooner. *The Idler* (?) was on a trip from Charlevoix…They had a hired hand so it was a crew of three. And the boiler safety stuck in the _____ and the boat burned. And my grandfather, he was a very wise man, and he figured that by nine o'clock they weren't in port, something was wrong. No radios. No radar. No communications. Absolutely had no way of getting in touch with them. The course from Charlevoix to Beaver Island is a well-traveled course […] In the summertime it doesn't get dark until ten o'clock and even then it's not total blackness. And [my grandfather] found them, clinging to the burnt pieces of the boat, unhurt, and he brought them home.

"So the next boat he built was called *The Seahawk* (?). Same sized boat and from my drawings that I have of his original sketches […] the only difference is that *The Idler* had a curved stern and *The Seahawk* had a squared-off stern. Other than that the boats were identical. And it must've had a good safety in the boiler because they never blew that one up."

Johnny spoke for a moment about sailing vessels on the Great Lakes and how so many have been lost in storms. Those that could not get to islands like Beaver were torn apart and lost due to the lack in communication capability. He mentioned that there are many books on the subject at the Beaver Island Marine Museum. These books document larger boats, like freighters, that went down.

(55:40) JR: "The big storms tend to come in April and November. Those are the worst months. There was a big storm in 1940 that hit Lake Michigan. The _____ was called *The Mary Margaret* and it was short, top-heavy and underpowered, but it had a full load of fuel. And it went around the harbor all night, which was a short trip. They couldn't tie it up at the pier because it would smash against it and would've torn the pier up. My uncle R_____ did the same thing with his fish tug and in the morning, Art Larsen, a Scandinavian fisherman, his boat was high and dry in my uncle's backyard. And it took two or three boats to pull it out.

"The life of commercial fishing on the Great Lakes is pretty hazardous. Even some of the big freighters […] the famous one in your lifetime, *The Fitzgerald*, that went down in Superior. She was probably 700 feet long. It's pretty impressive.

"But Ulysses and Emmett probably built between 25 and 35 boats […] If you were in Charlevoix and you wanted a boat built, they would build it there so you could watch the day-to-day progress. Prod them along.

"There was a Cross Fishery in Charlevoix and there used to be a boat tied up at the dock there, long after Johnny Cross could no longer sail or fish. But he had a fish market and it was his boat that was the last boat that my uncles built and I think that was 1937. They built one for one brother, who was older. And they built him a huge speedboat, which he sold. So we called him the 'boat broker' because he bought the boat his brothers built and sold it for a profit.

"Wooden boats have a life of 35 to 40 years at most. A lot of boat builders who built their own. My uncles were just two who built boats. There was Smokey (?) down at the lumber mill. In my lifetime there might have been half a dozen boats that were Indian, part-Indian fishermen/boat builders on Garden Island who later moved to the Upper Peninsula. They built many boats. So if you were a decent carpenter and could build something that wouldn't sink, you were a boat builder.

(59:34) RD: "This isn't related to boat building necessarily but what do you know about different traditions on the island that were maintained that were distinctly Irish. Like any sort of folklore or music or anything like that?"

JR: "Well you'll hear this tale if you talk to enough people. They would have house parties. And in the museum we had a book and CD called *The House Party*. And there was a gal […], she had a grant and she did this project. And it described how people would go to a house that had enough room, they'd roll up the rug, shove it to the wall and the local musicians would come in and they would have a dance. Shove all the furniture wherever they could and dance 'til dawn."

Johnny spoke of a famous violinist on the island and how they have remastered copies of his work with much better sound quality than the originals.

JR: "His father I knew well […] and he sent me three copies of, the violinist that I speak of, of his music. And they were just fantastic because they were cleaned up so much and the sound was much better. And Pat [Bonner?], who died at quite an advanced age, he lived down at the extension of SlopTown Road, just before […] the Protar House. A hundred feet before you get to the Protar House there's a white house on the left. There's someone living there, it's a wreck now, but that was Patrick's house. And he was friends with Protar. And Pat played all these old fiddle tunes that are legendary for people that like fiddle music. Sometimes there's, in recent years since the Community Center was built, they've had programs there with five different fiddlers from off-island and on-island.

Our conversation was interrupted by the phone ring, which led Johnny to speak for a while about cell phone service on the island. By way of various discussions we got on the subject of manufacturing and inventions. (1:11:22) RD: "Are there any sort of Beaver Island inventions that you know of?"

JR: "Moonshine. My mother told me that as a girl, walking up through between the road and the water, taking a short cut, and they came upon a still. And the guys were pretty rough characters and she and her friends just kind of skirted around them and the men made believe they didn't see them. And I knew sons of one of those men.

"But the boat building itself was not an invention because boats were built thousands of years ago. There's a story of a vessel made for the King of Sweden, in his honor. And it was huge, decorative, great

craftsmanship. And they launched it. And the boat builders were not engineer-minded people so the boat went out into the water and sunk. So they raised it within the last 20 years, I saw it on National Geographic I think, and as soon as you bring a vessel up like that that's been down there for hundreds of years, the wood starts to deteriorate immediately. So they soaked it in an enormous, maybe they had a way to bring it into a dry dock and then flood it, and they put […] some liquid, like an alcohol or whatever, and that stops the deterioration…"

Johnny mentioned a professor of agriculture at OSU, John Garish, who has a cabin on Beaver Island. Johnny was impressed by a horse-drawn wheat-cutting implement that the professor outlined in his book. The time and location of said invention was not discussed in our conversation.

(1:15:38) JR: "The men up here, the commercial fishermen, with the gill nets, used lead weights […] with a slit in them. Heavy twine fit down in the groove and you had to pinch them shut. And they had another tool that split them apart when they wanted to get them apart. So they handmade a lot of tools and gadgets to work with…"

(1:19:09) RD: "We have just one more question. How do you feel that your generation or your parents' generation or their parent's generation has felt that sense of Irish identity? Do you feel like it's gotten weaker as the generations have gone on?"

JR: "Oh sure, because it was an almost 100% Irish community. But the children would move away, marry different races. I always say my Irish mother met a Swede from Minnesota and Florida. So we're half Swedish. I have two adopted children. They identify […] with our identity but truly they're not. Only our oldest daughter who was here for the weekend is our natural child.

"Yeah, it certainly weakens. It weeds (?) the gene pool and that's a good thing. You wouldn't want, not so much intermarrying but it would be such a closed society not marrying people not from here. It would be an unhealthy situation. It'd be one of those goofy movies you see with some sect that controls people.

"Bless those nuns that came and taught us. You know that the public school here was taught by Catholic nuns. That would be a 'no-no' on the mainland but they were here for 92 years. And the community could not afford lay teachers and the bishop at that time sent the Dominican sisters up here. And one family had four siblings become Dominican sisters. I had a first cousin who became a Dominican father. So I'm proud of that, that the sisters had the influence. And they were tough. The old McKinley school, at the site of the first school, it was two stories, just a big box school, nothing complicated about the design. And one of the coastguard families, we had a coastguard station, seven or eight men, one of the families, one the siblings, the oldest one probably, no, *two* of those girls were Dominican sisters. One of them taught here when I was in the fourth, probably fifth grade. And the blackboard was behind her, kids would be talking and not paying attention, and she would reach towards the board to get an eraser. And she was a tall, fairly solid gal, not stout but just muscular, and she would let fly. She wouldn't necessarily hit the offender but she'd get somebody. She'd surely get their attention.
"So, yeah, I think the identities change but you know, in the summertime particularly, well we're here, at least once a month someone is buried here who was raised here. Now that's a strong testimony to the feelings they have. And when a tragedy strikes […] we all feel it, we all empathize.

Johnny mentioned that all three churches on the island have pitched in to help support the family of a girl who began treatment for a brain tumor about a year ago.

JR: "So the feeling of community is very strong here. It's a good feeling. And even though I didn't live here all my life, to me, this is home. Always will be. But I know there are lots of people who do not have such good memories. [They] do not come back here, did not. One of the neighbor boys, about three houses down from here, moved away and did not come back. So he must've had some bad experiences.

"The economy here during the Depression was probably not as bad here as it was on the mainland because of the commercial fishing and the farming. I think I said to you before that the same money went around the community. Around and around from the lumberers to the farmers to the fishermen and back again…"

(1:26:30) JR: "There was a gal who was born and raised here who married a man who later became a Great Lakes captain. And education didn't really take here, it should've. She refers to people who have had a cottage here for maybe 10 or 20 or 30 years, she says 'them others.' And that's her feeling. But she raised her family in Bay City, like I did.

Johnny explained that he has made some great friends here on the island. He talked about one good friend who recently passed away at the age of 101. This friend played tennis and golf even at an advanced age.

The conversation concluded with a brief discussion of our plans for the rest of the summer and Johnny's explanation of how important it is for the young adults of Beaver Island to get off the island and start their careers. He told us that he encouraged all of his children and grandchildren to get an education and "make the break." He also explained that at one time, many of the "youngsters" would go away to school off-island, only to come back after one semester. There are now $500 scholarships that are awarded to students only after they've completed one year. Johnny said that most kids come back because they were homesick and could not cope with the tremendous change.

(1:33:12) Johnny then told one final story of an island man who "was off the island with his dad and when he came back he said, 'I don't like that other island.' He was talking about just being over to Charlevoix. 'I don't like that other island.'"