"We always loved the woods and worked in them." Art Maijala

By Stephen Harrington and Debbie Girton

Art Maijala's parents were born in Finland, They immigrated to the United States in 1899 on a steamship, full of Finnish people. When they arrived at Ellis Island, all the Finnish people were sorted out into groups to go to different areas of the United States so as not to form a large foreign group in one place. His parents, not yet acquainted with one another, were sent to Minnesota. Art grew up in Tamarak, Minnesota and after the 8th grade, he worked for his father's sawmill. Later he started his own branch of sawmills in Minnesota. After he ran out of trees, he was in search of a new beginning.

"My folks came here as immigrants in 1899. They came on a steamship and it took them 30 days to get to the United States. That's the only way they could get across at that time with those kind of boats. They would just take the regular pipe-haulers and convert them just to haul passengers to bring people into this country. The boat that brought my dad here was mostly Finnish people. There were almost 400 on the boat."

"There was a community started of Finnish people, and they tried to sort them out and send them to the places where they would be grouped. So they shipped a bunch in the direction of Duluth, Minnesota. But then they started in Duluth and tried to get them to separate in certain areas. It took my folks 3 days by train to get to Duluth. They just loaded a full train load of cattle and immigrants on the same train. From Duluth they moved to Tamarak, which is where my parents met and got married in 1900. My folks did not know English when they arrived at Ellis Island. Mother never did learn to talk good English. She could get along."

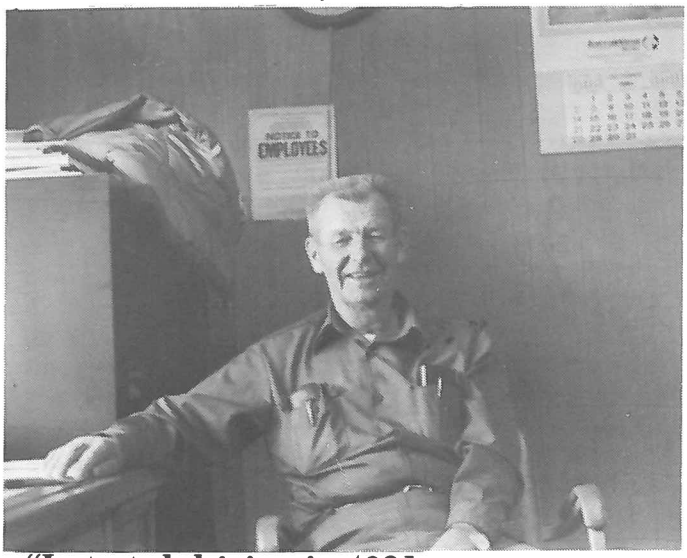
"I was born in 1912 in Tamarak, Minnesota. In my family there were 11 boys and 2 girls, but now there are only 6 boys and 1 girl living. Our family grew up on a dairy farm, and we had 25-30 milk cows every morning to milk. We had a lot of farm chores to do."

"The first memory that I really remember was when I was six years old in the 1918 fire in Minnesota. It was a big forest fire. 800 people got killed in that fire. It was called the Moose Lake Fire in Minnesota. Everyone had to evacuate their homes. Hundreds of them burned. Our house was the only one that was left because it

was clear all around. At that time, Northern Minnesota was heavily covered with timber. The fire started from the Soo Line Train, from sparks. A high wind came along and swept through all of northern Minnesota. My brothers and I weren't afraid because our dad came, and we had a big rye field and he moved us out there. We had all the horses, water, blankets, and stuff with us. The ground burned around us so we had to keep moving all the time; even the topsoil burned. But my brothers and I stayed mostly with the horses, and my father wouldn't move us; he just let us stay there. He kept putting wet blankets on the horses to keep them from burning all the time. It was a terrible night. I will always remember that."

"I went to a country school in Tamarak. There were two classrooms, each one with students up to the eighth grade. We had 35 students in each classroom. It was a good school. I enjoyed school. Since my parents were from Finland, they emphasized learning, especially English. In my last year of school, which was the eighth grade, I did my work at home because my mother was sick. I stayed home most of the time making bread, taking care of my older brother, Ernest, and my baby brother. It wasn't easy. After my eighth grade year, they started hauling the children to McGregor High School. As students, we mostly played baseball and cricket. Cricket is a game played with a little piece of wood that's tapered at both ends. Then you lay another stick on the ground and you hit the end of it to see who can hit it the farthest. We played baseball; we only played against town and country teams. There were about six teams in the area. I played pitcher and first base."

"After the eighth grade, there was the McGregor High School to go to, but my brothers and I had no way of getting back and forth so that winter I cooked for my brother. He was running a logging camp, and I also hewed railroad ties by hand."



"I started driving in 1924 when I was 12 years old."

"I started driving in 1924 when I was 12 years old. That's when the first Model T came out. In 1928 I got a Model A. Back then you didn't need a license to drive. After I worked for my brother that year, I worked for my father's sawmill. By the time I was eighteen, I had already traded 2 Model A's."

"We sold railroad ties to the railroad. We delivered them in our Model T truck. It would only hold 15 ties in a load. That's not very much. But first we had to haul them out of the woods with the horses. The horses would haul them 7 or 8 miles. We had to use the horses because there were not many roads back into where we got the logs. All this time, my brothers have been working on their own farm."

"In 1931, two of my older brothers and I were cutting a lot of mining timber for iron-ore mines in Minnesota. We got stuck with the Depression, and we had to lay all the men off. We had 70,000 feet of mining timber left on our hands. And my older brothers decided that was enough logging for them; they went and started farming again. I said, 'You can have that farming,' and I kept on sawing. From 1931 through 1933 I was mostly just a watchman. In '34 the first mining timbers sold because the mining business got started back again. Then I started sawing again. And I moved to Bena, Minnesota; that's where I set up the mill. We had a good-sized mill out there; that's where we had a lot of employees. We even sawed night and day in Bena." Besides the Bena mill there were also more sawmills in Cook, Minnesota.

"I told my brothers, 'You can have that farming', and I kept on sawing."

I had a big order to the Swift Company for boxed lumber which was for packing meat."

We asked Art what kinds of power he used to

run his mills. "There were three different powers that we used to run our sawmills. We started with steam. The steam engine was the first in Minnesota. When we used steam, we had to have a fireman 24 hours a day. We had two shifts in Minnesota, 16 hours each, and that way we only had to have one extra man in the morning hours to look after the boiler, because you can't let the steam go down.

You have to keep the pressure up. The flow of the fire and the heat of the water must stay consistent the whole time. After steam, we used diesel. We got diesel a little before we moved from Bena to Yampa. But right before we moved, we went to electric. Diesel was better than steam, and electric was better than diesel. When we switched to electricity, we had to get rid of generators and equipment that electricity couldn't use."

When World War II got started there was an increased demand for lumber. Art started to have trouble getting timber because of bigger companies buying up all the timber sales. "After a while us smaller mills got squeezed out all together." This is when Art started to think about moving out of Minnesota. Soon after, Art even found out that it was hard to find timber at all.

"It was in Bena that I first met my wife, Lorraine. We met at a dance and got married in 1943. We were married in Bena, Minnesota. For our honeymoon, you could say that we moved to Colorado! Actually we came to Colorado to look for timber, and it looked good. So, we then moved to Yampa in 1944. When we moved, we shipped all of our equipment by railroad, and we drove our trucks and cars. "Back then, we used the railroad 100% for the first 20 years in the sawmill business. But in the sixties, the freight rate was just too high and we quit that all together. Trucking was much cheaper. I shipped many car loads to Denver and Chicago and St. Paul.

For years we sold lumber which was used to build meat boxes, until they didn't need them for shipping meat. When they shipped across the country, they had to put meat in wooden boxes because of the way they handled them. They broke the paper cartons. Aspen is what we cut it out of because that didn't get into the meat. If you put pine wood with it the pitch would smell in the meat.

"In 1948, the beetles came in and killed all the spruce on the Flat Tops. We're still using that wood from up there. Then in 1944, we built another sawmill. We set it up in the forest, and it burned up on us. It burned in the night. We were lucky it didn't start a forest fire. We don't know what started it because we hadn't even stopped for two weeks, so there wasn't any fire in the burner. It was located 17 miles up in the Dome Peak area. It was quite a loss. I couldn't get any

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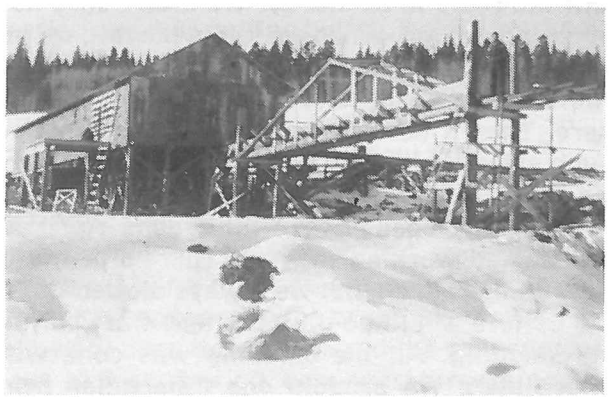
insurance on it. They wouldn't insure it unless you had a sprinkling system, and then it was so expensive we couldn't afford it. It was a two-story building, and the fire started underneath. The camp was full. My brother and I were here. I went throught the mill and didn't see anything wrong. I checked it at 11:00 p.m. But there is no way to stop a fire once it starts. We just got out of there. We lost everything: the sawmill, the lumber and the machinery. We were very fortunate that the wind didn't turn, or all of our homes would have been destroyed. But the fire just stayed around the mill. It took a long time for the fire to die out. There was no way the forestry department could come with their fire fighting equipment in time. It was burning so hard by that time, they couldn't help.

It was kind of fruitless to start throwing water from the pond. We had running water, but what could you do when a big mill like that was burning and you were getting water from a ¾ inch line? All the houses had running water. We



opened a spring and pumped the water from above the mill. The fire got started at 2:00 in the morning. The burner hadn't had a fire for two weeks. All the lumber piles, near where our trucks would back into the ramps to load the lumber, were on fire. When we woke up they were just burning all even, like someone had started them.

We never had any problems with people breaking into our camp and stealing stuff. You really couldn't see much more than the roof during the winter. Once when I left from here, I had to go in from the attic door to get into our

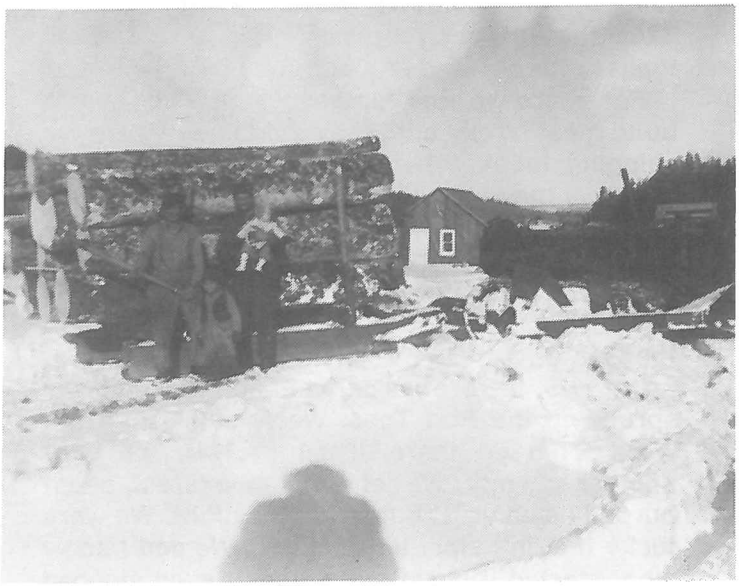
"I went through the mill and didn't see anything wrong when I checked it at 11:00 p.m. It burned in the night."

house. It took me two hours to shovel that door open. You couldn't see the door at all, so I just went in from the attic door, went in the house, lit a lantern, and made a fire in the stove, I made sure the stove pipe was open before I went in, though. I stayed overnight and came back the next day. I put a marker there in the aspen when I was coming out of the snow, and there was six feet where I whittled in the timber. That was in March and then we had four big snow storms. That's quite a bit. But I don't know how deep. That sawmill was two stories high and was built on a hillside, and it had drifted so, it'd go right over it! That's how much snow there was. We built the roofs to be sturdy. We didn't care how much snow came. When we left in the fall, we put a beam in every room; we had a special beam right through all the houses. We just put big posts there. Then it doesn't make any difference how much snow we got. And the mill was built the same way.

We usually opened the mill around April 1st and started working in May. There's plenty of snow up there then, but we always plowed it out. The cutters would go up there and start cutting and skidding. All the skidding was done with horses then. We brought one Caterpillar from Minnesota. We used to pull logs on sleds behind the Cats. The first four years, from '44 to '48, before the mill burned, we put logs on sleds with six cats and hauled them; then we wouldn't have to load the trucks. After that horrible fire in '48, I borrowed some money too, but I had to borrow money all the time to get the operation going again. Then in '56 we went in big, logging bulk wood out of the back woods to Wisconsin. We shipped thousands of cars of bulk wood to Wisconsin for six years. We have a crane that's behind our planer back there that we loaded steadily and got a good return. They used the pulp in the paper mills. It was mostly spruce for the paper mills, all spruce. We didn't want no pine at all. It had to be all spruce. Spruce has a longer fiber than pine for making paper. Then the freight rate got so high, the freight was more than we got for the wood. So, then we started looking around again and we started sawing more, and we got a contract with the military in '69. We sold a lot of 7" x 7" and 6" by 8" for the mine construction. We were sending about two million feet a year for underground mines. We did that for ten years. We started four years ago sawing these square house logs for a fellow in Missouri. We haven't even seen the man for three years. He was sending his truck once a week here, and we'd load it up. He is still doing it."

Art then explained why the lumber prices are always changing and fluctuating.

"It's an open market. That often cuts the price down. Sometimes the sawing and shipping costs are high and the sale price is low, so profits are poor. The prices of lumber fluctuate so that it is hard to tell where your costs will be. We hope that it has settled down. Course, you never know with lumber. They're starting so many mills down South where the timber grows fast. When



"There was six feet of snow where he had marked the timber that March."

demand gets good for lumber they open the big mills out there full flush, and they put too much lumber on the market and down goes the price. Course, Canada has been competing the last ten years. With all the lumber coming from Canada, and they have been cutting the prices, too. Right now the lumber market is way down again. A lot of mills are shutting down on the West Coast; then, when the price comes up, they all start up again. But a lot of the big mills on the West Coast control it. They own the biggest part of timber. They don't rely on the forest, though, because they have all the timber they need. So that's why they keep the prices pretty much controllable."

"You have to figure right away, 1/3 waste."

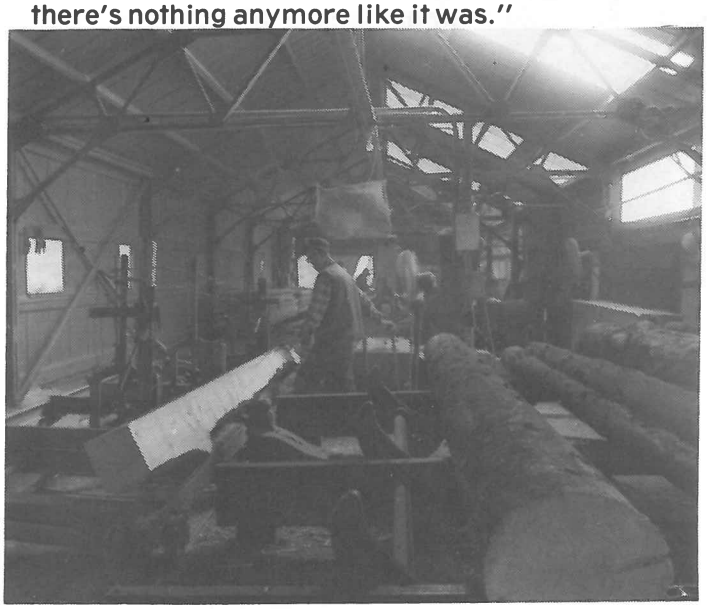
Art then talked about the difficulty of keeping the business going. "Everyday it's getting harder to get forest permits, especially now they get this dead timber just a while way up in high price, and it's not worth that. That's why so many young people start an operation and go broke in the sawmill business, because you can't pay that kind of prices. The last sale we went to, wood went for $25-$27 a cord, only if you figure it on a thousand basis, that's $54 a thousand, which is just too high. We're not going to buy it. Last sale we bought was ten dollars and that's high enough, because you have to figure right away ⅓ waste. We have to. You can see our yard, how much lumber we've accumulated. It's getting harder, of course, to buy timber. You have to hold out the labor and other income tax money, and you have to send it twice a month in advance, and that's no easy job to guess how much everyone is going to make, but now they've changed, and then your unemployment taxes, your insurance and your field taxes and everything has to be made. It's a lot of bookwork. We have a regular accountant to keep our main books in Denver, but we still have plenty here to do, and then your sales taxes, so just a lot of work nowadays to run a business. When I first started, all you had to do was take the check and take it to the bank, and you done what you wanted to with it. Not no more. Our house log business future looks good. You have to saw good, you have to watch how you saw. Your sawing has got to be true, so it won't be 6" on one end and 7" on the other end, and that's what's wrong with a lot of these mills; the small mills they don't watch their sawing."

"The kind of hours we work at the sawmill is eight hours, 8 A.M. to 5 P.M. We have a pretty short season. Some years we can go until December; a lot of years we just have to the last of October in the woods. It's a short season up here. The only thing you have to watch for is you have to get your logs out in the summertime, and when it snows in the winter you're just about out of luck. When you get into the woods and get the timber out that's what I like best. Of course, I like to be around the mill, too, when it's operating the right way. We always loved the woods and working in them."

Art Maijala proudly discussed his fun times riding the old passenger train to Denver. "It's great! You'd really like it. About 25 tunnels. There's a lot of small tunnels all along the road. It was a very interesting trip and pretty. Like the scenery on winter days. They thought once that they were going to start running it to Steamboat in the winter time for skiing. I wish they would have run it; that would have been nice. They always ran specials from Denver to Steamboat during Winter Carnival time when skiing first started in Steamboat. We went pretty often on the train to Denver, because the roads were so bad for driving. I can't remember, but I think a ticket was about $7.00 It was quite a train ride, like those old steam locomotives when they went through a tunnel, sometimes it happened to be smoking badly. It was just black when you got through the tunnel. Especially that long one, that six mile tunnel. Our oldest son was just a baby. He was born in 1945. I can remember going through the tunnel, and that the smoke was so bad in the car that I was fanning him with a diaper, thinking I was keeping the smoke away from me. And that diaper was actually black! Just black! Oh yeah, those old coal fired engines, they didn't care. The more smoke they could make the better they like it. I think they shoveled coal on purpose when they hit the tunnel. It turned everybody black by the time you got through. Yes, a lot of times when I come on that train you didn't get black like that. You know,

"I think they shoveled coal on purpose when they hit the tunnel. It turned everybody black."

they'd watch their fire so they'd have plenty of steam to go that six miles through the tunnel. And you don't have to smoke it up like that. I think some of them firemen, they just done it on purpose! Very poor air in there. Of course, now I probably would never have noticed that it was that bad had I not been using the diaper to fan me. You could smell it as soon as you got in a few hundred feet. I couldn't believe that that diaper was that black. Sometimes the smoke got so bad that ceiling lights you could barely see. It was quite a trip. I'll tell you that! When we went to Denver we'd have to leave here at 9:00 in the morning and it would be 3:00 in the afternoon before we'd get there, six hours I think. We stopped, yes, picked up every cream can along the road! At that time all the little farmers took their cream to Denver. And it was all shipped in cans, 5 and 10 gallon cans. All the ranchers shipped their cream. They'd have them sitting out on the platforms at each depot. The train would stop, and they'd have to load 'em on. We'd have a whole bunch here, 10-15 cans, and 10 gallon cans everyday when the train ran. There was a lot of things that was different then. That they had, like they hauled the mail and all the passengers who always rode the train. Now there's nothing anymore like it was."



"Our house-log future looks good."

Art enjoyed hunting in Minnesota and Colorado. Debbie and I asked what he liked to hunt. "Up in Minnesota, I used to hunt partridges, ducks, geese, pheasants, and deer. For many years we had pheasants in Minnesota in the mountains. When we moved to Yampa we started elk hunting. We would close the sawmill down for a week and then go hunting, the first week. We've closed every year since we came here. When I was young, my father didn't teach us to enjoy hunting. He didn't care too much about hunting. The reason for that was when he was a young man, he got shot. A hunter shot him for a deer. After that he did not care for hunting. When somebody in our group would shoot one we'd carry it out. Then I'd find out that I had to cut the meat. My job is cutting. We hunt up here on Green Ridge and then towards the Dome area. The last three years we've hunted back on the Hinman up there towards the Flat Tops. I've gone on the Green Ridge a couple of times and that can be hard hunting up there. But I always like it. I would mostly sneak hunt. I would always catch my animal though. The biggest bull elk I have ever shot was a 5 pointer. But I haven't shot an elk for five years now."

After the sawmill season is over sometime between October and December each year, Art and his wife pack up and travel to their vacation home in Nevada. "We always look forward to our trip to Nevada. We like to talk to our neighbor lady. Our home is 50 miles northeast of Las Vegas on Lake Mead. Once in a while we try our luck on the slot machines in Las Vegas. I don't play cards. But since we live on the lake, we fish a lot. Everyday that the wind won't keep us off the lake, we're out there. We go fishing all the time. Some days the wind is too bad. Lake Mead is a very treacherous lake. We're going to take a 12-gauge shotgun this year, and we're going to go goose hunting. Canadian geese and ducks migrate down here. We will spend a lot of our time fishing for crappie and big mouth bass."

That is where Art and Lorraine will be until early April when they come back to open the sawmill for yet another year! The next time you are driving south through Yampa, Colorado, look to your left as you leave town. If you smell the fragrance of burning pine and see smoke rising from the cone-shaped burnier, you will know that the Maijala's family sawmill, The Colorado Spruce Company, is still in operation.