

<u>Page 3 - From Conversations with Steelworkers: How Mike Oleschuk got his Farm</u>

ISSUE: <u>Issue 27</u>

Published by Ronald Caplan on 1980/12/1

"Yeah, I could take you both." We've got a job. I don't ask him how much he pays be? cause I am glad to have someplace to sleep and something to eat. Well, he paid us 25 cents a day, and board. And we slept in the barn. That was summer. That was okay. And I was a good worker. And every Satur? day he goes with the eggs and everything to town--and every Saturday he bought me tobacco, half a pound--but none for my buddy. I think that's because he'd go away and his wife would watch what I do. And when I work, I work. If I want to smoke, that's the only time I stop. We worked there for pretty near four months. 25 cents a day. And it was in Sep? tember, a hot day, and my buddy sat down by a tree and took a snooze. And the farm? er's wife watched. He came home in the evening and his wife told him--says Mike is working, and that fellow sat down and was asleep. He told my buddy to go. "If you want to stay, Mike, you can stay. And I'll give you 50 cents a day." I worked one more week. Then one day my buddy walked out to Blackett's Lake, eight miles. He said, "Mike, a boat came to load pulp. I put your name there. Thirty dollars a month and board." I had just got 50 cents a'day. By gosh, now I had a dollar a day. I'll be a millionaire. And we went there and we loaded pulp. We worked there 3 months before it froze and we quit. Well, I made 90 dollars. I was a rich man. After that, relief was open to us. And we had to go to City Hall and "carry the bag." We had to go from Whitney Pier to Sydney and register for the relief, and we had to go there every Wednesday, go pick up our groceries. Give you the codfish, turnips, 2 loaves of bread--a dollar's' worth. That was relief at that time. This was not only Ukrainians. English people were doing this, too. Didn't make any dif? ference what you were--it's the 'thirties and nobody's working. In 1933 I got married to a Canadian-born girl, and jobs started to pick up, the steel plant started to pick up a little bit. Open hearth got four furnaces and blast furnace got one fumace--and I tried to get a job. My wife was working with Mrs.' Melnick in the store, and Mrs. Melnick told her there's going to be an opening at the coal bank, a job dumping coal. "Only thing," my wife told me, "you've got to give the foreman a bottle of rum." And I said, "Where would I get the money to buy the bottle?" And I had to give him the bottle to get the job. And you had to be lucky. You had to have, beside the rum, that Mrs. Melnick knows him. If she didn't know him, I wouldn't get the job even if I had the rum. My wife went to Mrs. Melnick, and Mrs. Mel? nick bought a bottle of rum and gave it to her. And I took the rum and got a job. On? ly thing, to actually work, it has to be a stormy day--because the boss had lots of friends. He gave the work first to his friends. There was no such a thing as you go there in the momipg and go to work. He