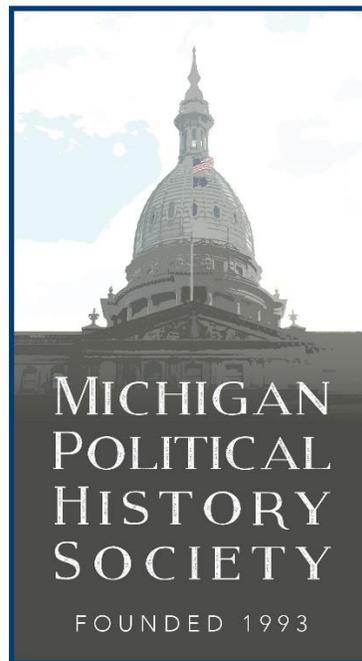


R.D. MUSSER

Interviewed by
Bill Ballenger
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Bill Ballenger: This interview is part of the James J. Blanchard Living Library of Michigan Political History.

Bill Ballenger: I'm seated here with Dan Musser, Chairman of the Grand Hotel Company on Michigan's iconic Mackinac Island. Mr.. Musser, it's a pleasure to be able to reminisce a little bit about the history of the Grand Hotel, your role in it, all the things that you've seen and heard, many of which I'm not sure we can repeat in any kind of a video, but we're going to do our best today. Let me just start by asking you this. When was the hotel built and by who?

Dan Musser: Bill Ballenger, I'd like to thank you for interviewing me today, and glad to have you here, and we're glad to be in our office.

Dan Musser: The hotel was built by the railroads. It opened on July 10, 1887. The lore is that they hauled lumber the summer before that from Cheboygan, put it on what's now the Borough Lot, which is where our tennis courts are and the school on the island is. That was amassed during '86. In the spring, probably in early March, they brought in a tent city. A bunch of guys had built that thing and opened it in July, which is kind of astounding. You didn't call up the window company, and you didn't call up the door company. You built those things.

Bill Ballenger: That's amazing.

Dan Musser: I believe it's true the building was not as big as it is now but, still, it was big.

Bill Ballenger: Right.

Dan Musser: It's very apparent that thing was built, certainly, with some kind of architectural planning, but it's also very apparent that you had a crew that built a section, I had a crew that built a section, someone else did, and someone else did. Floor joists don't always run the same way in that thing. It's cuckoo.

Bill Ballenger: Yeah. That's amazing. Did it have anything like the famous front porch that it has today?

Dan Musser: It certainly did and almost all, but not all of it. If you were to look at the hotel from a boat today, you'll see that the cupola's not in the center. It was in the beginning, but they added on to the thing. Well, I put one wing on it and expanded the other, but we also have gone to the fourth floor, and it was elongated in about 1910 or '11.

Bill Ballenger: How much bigger today do you think the hotel is than it was back in 1887?

Dan Musser: It was about 220 rooms when it opened, maybe 210, and I don't really know. We are 385 today, so we're not double, but we're approaching that.

Bill Ballenger: Almost double, right. You say the railroads built the hotel. What was their motive and idea in doing so?

Dan Musser: Railroads built all of the great, big northern properties in this country and many in Florida as a place to haul people to. That was their purpose, the only purpose. That was a wonderful trip up there. I used to take it, as a kid, from southern Ohio. I used to get on in Dayton, Ohio. You'd get on a wonderful train and get off the next morning on the dock, which is now about where Shepler is, and roll off to the other side and get on a boat and go to Mackinac Island. You'd be there for lunch.

Bill Ballenger: It was almost like destination travel.

Dan Musser: Absolutely, it was.

Bill Ballenger: It's like build it, and they will take our train to get there.

Dan Musser: That's right. All of the Canadian-Pacific properties were built that way with the railroads, and this was owned by the railroad. They found a guy from the Planter's Hotel in St. Louis to run it, and that was the beginning of it, and that was kind of a disaster, the whole deal.

Bill Ballenger: Well, how many other big houses or even hotels or anything on Mackinac Island was there at that time, do you think? Was this kind of like a pioneering institution on the island?

Dan Musser: Sure it was, but it wasn't either. Mackinac was at least starting to bloom.

Bill Ballenger: Starting to be a vacation spot.

Dan Musser: The Island House Hotel, for instance, was still there. It was there ahead of us. Much of the mission end of the island was there ahead of us, and it was flourishing, and they were successful properties, but this was much bigger than anything that was there. The Island House, today, is about 100 rooms, and we're pushing 400. I suspect that whatever they had then and ours was about the same proportion.

Bill Ballenger: Right. What was the evolution of the ownership of the hotel after that? Did the railroads relinquish it at some point?

Dan Musser: Yes, they did. The guy that leased it for the Planter's Hotel ran it a couple years and told them, "You got to give me this thing, or I'm walking away from the lease," and so that, I guess, took a little while to resolve that difficulty.

Bill Ballenger: This was around World War I?

Dan Musser: No. This was way before that. It was in '90 or '91. Don't nail me on my dates too closely in that early part, but that happened. He took it over, and he really was not very successful with it, and it kind of slivered and slammered around until the Ballards arrived.

Bill Ballenger: Now, who were the Ballards?

Dan Musser: The Ballards were the gamblers from French Lick Springs in Indiana. There were a couple hotels down there with great gambling. They came in before World War I.

Bill Ballenger: Now, this was at a time when gambling of that sort was legal.

Dan Musser: I'm not sure it was ever legal in Michigan. It was legal in some places. The great gambling was the club in downtown French Lick, and that was a great thing, and that was a railroad destination. The coaches pulled up in front of that thing and dumped them out. The French Lick Springs was there, and the West Baden Springs Hotel was down there about five or six miles away. It was golf, and it was Pluto Water and all those things, but it was gambling.

Dan Musser: Well, when the Ballards arrived, he was a circus guy, that family, and they had traveling circuses, and tents, and elephants, and the whole business.

Bill Ballenger: Needed lots of trains.

Dan Musser: That's right.

Bill Ballenger: Yeah.

Dan Musser: They came to Mackinac and, as far as I know, they installed the gambling, and then they ran the gambling for a lot of years.

Bill Ballenger: Now, is this basically like craps, blackjack, slot machines?

Dan Musser: We had an open casino in what's now the Brighton Pavilion. We had slot machines in what's now our art museum area where the Manoogians have their collection.

Bill Ballenger: The Manoogians.

Dan Musser: I remember that, all of that, but the Grand Club was upstairs, and it was a full-fledged casino. It had roulette and craps. I was in there as a little kid, once, twice maybe.

Bill Ballenger: Okay, so this would have been probably maybe in the late '30s, '40s?

Dan Musser: '40s.

Bill Ballenger: In the '40s?

Dan Musser: Well, late '30s and very early '40s. Governor Williams stopped it.

Bill Ballenger: You mean when he became Governor.

Dan Musser: When he became Governor.

Bill Ballenger: He stopped it.

Dan Musser: That's when the slots went. The casino had gone before that and, I suppose, in probably '41 or '42 when the war came.

Bill Ballenger: Do you think it was that the state didn't have any laws against gambling or that they just were not enforced?

Dan Musser: Every country club and Elks hall all had slots.

Bill Ballenger: All over Michigan.

Dan Musser: All over Michigan, all over the Midwest.

Bill Ballenger: All over the Midwest. Okay, so it was a big thing.

Dan Musser: Yes.

Bill Ballenger: The Ballards came to Mackinac Island to expand their gambling empire. How long did they stay connected with the hotel?

Dan Musser: Well, they stayed connected with the hotel but I guess I should get into my uncle, Stewart Woodfill who came to Mackinac, came to north Michigan to Petoskey from his home in southern Indiana to beat hay fever. He was afflicted, and his parents started sending him to Petoskey when he was 15 or 16 and alone, and they had places up there that you could get a kid. He got a job working somewhere doing something in a hotel and, finally, he made his way over to Mackinac, and that's how he got there. Well, then he got the bug and got interested and stayed, and the war came.

Bill Ballenger: World War I.

Dan Musser: World War I came, and he kind of got through that. He was in the Naval Reserve and served a little bit of time, but not much, somewhere in Buffalo. When the war ended, he decided to go back up there, and the Ballards were in charge. His first decent job was the head of the storeroom in the kitchen. He made his way from that to manager for the Ballards and, boom, Mr.. Ballard died, probably '21 or '22, '23. Here's a young guy, he was probably pushing 30, and he and the auditor and the widow, took the company over on a three-way deal.

Bill Ballenger: Wow.

Dan Musser: The old man ran it, and that went along sort of okay.

Bill Ballenger: When you say the old man you mean Steward Woodfill.

Dan Musser: Mr.. Woodfill, yes, Stewart Woodfill.

Bill Ballenger: Stewart. At that point, he wasn't the old man yet.

Dan Musser: No, that's true.

Bill Ballenger: He was still pretty young yet.

Dan Musser: That's true.

Bill Ballenger: Anyway, those three ran it, I mean owned it, and he ran it. Then what happened?

Dan Musser: Well, it wasn't a perfect threesome, and he got out, and they bought him out with a bunch of paper before the crash, so he was 30 years old, newly married, and retired, living in Chicago.

Bill Ballenger: He had a lot of money from the sale because he got it at the right time.

Dan Musser: Well, but he didn't get all his money. I mean it was a lot of paper involved.

Bill Ballenger: Yeah, mainly paper, okay.

Dan Musser: Anyway, here he was, he thought himself was pretty well set, had a good-looking wife, and he was living in Chicago, and enjoying the world, and then, bang, we get the Depression.

Bill Ballenger: Yeah.

Dan Musser: He fought his way back in.

Bill Ballenger: To the company.

Dan Musser: To the company, and finally bought it in '31.

Bill Ballenger: Bought it from the other two.

Dan Musser: From the estate, yes.

Bill Ballenger: From that point on, he was totally in charge.

Dan Musser: That's right, except the Ballards still operated the gambling.

Bill Ballenger: Oh, really?

Dan Musser: He got a piece.

Bill Ballenger: Anyway, okay, he's in charge at that point. What was business at the hotel like at that time? Was it struggling in the Depression?

Dan Musser: Well, the '20s were booming, but the Depression was a total struggler. I don't know how anyone ever did it. He bought everything from meat to paint on due bills. There was a hell of a market in due bills, and you could really buy anything from due bills.

Bill Ballenger: Do you remember how old you were, maybe, the first time you ever went to Mackinac Island?

Dan Musser: Eight or nine.

Bill Ballenger: Eight or nine. You were the son of Stewart Woodfill's sister, right?

Dan Musser: True, true.

Bill Ballenger: Raised in Ohio.

Dan Musser: Right.

Bill Ballenger: Circleville near Dayton?

Dan Musser: Circleville, Ohio.

Bill Ballenger: Okay.

Dan Musser: Near Columbus more.

Bill Ballenger: Near Columbus, okay. You went up there. Were you immediately enchanted by Mackinac Island or not?

Dan Musser: I was enchanted by my uncle and aunt, and they treated us well when we were there, and so it was kind of a romantic place, as a young kid, to go up there. I'm right off the farm, pretty much.

Bill Ballenger: Sure. You kept going kind of on and off maybe ever year?

Dan Musser: Well, every other year, every third year.

Bill Ballenger: Every other year, and then you went to college.

Dan Musser: Not yet. I'm still getting through the war, and then my dad died at the end of the war. That's really the first visit I remember, so I was probably 14. My mother and sister and I went up there for probably 10 days or two weeks that summer. That's the first visit I really recall.

Bill Ballenger: You really remember.

Dan Musser: It's the first time I ever think I had a necktie on. I remember he loaned me one, and it hit me about the knees, and it was pretty good.

Bill Ballenger: From that point on, did you kind of think, almost like your uncle had thought years before, there's something magical about this place?

Dan Musser: I was certainly intrigued, and I worked there three of my four college years and, at the end of that thing, I was pretty well ready to become committed. Went in the Army for a couple of years and came back and got married and went up there. That's where I've been.

Bill Ballenger: Was that in '51?

Dan Musser: No.

Bill Ballenger: Later than that?

Dan Musser: Much younger than that. I graduated college in '55. I went up there in the season of '51 as a first year.

Bill Ballenger: Oh, the first, okay, okay.

Dan Musser: Okay, as a summer worker.

Bill Ballenger: I got you. Okay, so '55 you're out of college.

Dan Musser: '55 to '7 I was in the Army. Came back from the Army, got married in the fall, went to work the first of the year in Chicago for Grand Hotel.

Bill Ballenger: They had an office in Chicago.

Dan Musser: In Chicago, yes.

Bill Ballenger: In the off season in those years.

Dan Musser: Yes, that's right. That's right.

Bill Ballenger: Mr.. Woodfill was alive, and he was still in control, and he lived until when?

Dan Musser: '85 or '86.

Bill Ballenger: '85 or '86. Okay, so it was really 30 years there when you and your uncle were working together in the hotel.

Dan Musser: Oh, goodness, yes. He brought me in as a young kid. He called me an assistant manager. Basically, I was trying to sell conventions in the winter and trying to service them in the summer.

Bill Ballenger: Right. Well now, there's a picture, isn't there, of Stewart Woodfill over the staircase in the lobby?

Dan Musser: Yes.

Bill Ballenger: Is that your idea to put it there? Did he command that it be put there or has it always been?

Dan Musser: Well, it was kind of an all-my-life deal. The first summer, maybe the second we were up there. Now, you got to realize I have a new wife, I have a kid by that point, another one coming along, and this is my vocation. I'm hooked.

Bill Ballenger: Sure, right.

Dan Musser: The old man decided that he was going to have his portrait painted. I'd never heard of anything like that in my life. I'm still on the farm, see? That happened, and that picture was in his house then from '56 or '57 or '58 or '59, along in there, '60 maybe. Yeah, he told me over and over. He said, "When I'm gone, you're going to hang that thing in the parlor, and I'm going to look down at you every day."

Bill Ballenger: "I'm going to be watching you," huh? Okay, that's a great idea. You say hanging in the house, so he actually didn't live in the Grand Hotel himself during most of that time? Did he have a house separately?

Dan Musser: He lived in the hotel in the early '30s and before the war, he bought a cottage up on the bluff, which was then and now called Pontiac Lodge. It's just been rebuilt into a lovely facility, but it was a very small cottage with a kind of a bedroom-living room in it but a wonderful porch over the water. He loved it, and they lived up there.

Bill Ballenger: He lived up there.

Dan Musser: Before the war, he bought the house that I now live in, which is down on the boardwalk. He did that for a lot of reasons, but basically, there was not water up on the bluffs in those days, and you had to be downtown to have spring and fall water or year-round water.

Bill Ballenger: We talked a lot about gambling. What about Prohibition and drinking?

Dan Musser: Near as I can tell, it was pretty much drinking as normal. That predates me. We only had one bar, which is still the bar in the hotel off the parlor.

Bill Ballenger: Right.

Dan Musser: That bar served the dancing room, and it served the dining room, and that was it, that was the show. But as far as I can determine, drinking just went on as normal, and Prohibition didn't stop us. Booze came across on boats, and we received it and served it.

Bill Ballenger: It'd come, usually, across the straits, in other words?

Dan Musser: Across the straits, yes.

Bill Ballenger: Was there ever any attempt at enforcement, evil though it may have been?

Dan Musser: If there was, we'd hide it, and they'd turn the bar into a rug shop, hang them in there.

Bill Ballenger: They'd hang carpets.

Dan Musser: Carpets, yes.

Bill Ballenger: Or rug on the walls.

Dan Musser: Where the bar is.

Bill Ballenger: The bar was.

Dan Musser: I don't know what they did with the booze.

Bill Ballenger: If anybody that looked like a cop came in.

Dan Musser: If the gendarmes came along, man, they were selling rugs, but I think they got about three days notice anyway, so they had enough time to do it.

Bill Ballenger: Somebody would get an alert, I mean, what, from the mainland or something?

Dan Musser: From the mainland, "They're on their way."

Bill Ballenger: They're on their way. Well, when they came in, were they really loaded for bear?

Dan Musser: Bill, I don't know that.

Bill Ballenger: Oh, sure. They maybe just winked at the rugs.

Dan Musser: My uncle never really talked about that much other than he said, "We got enough warning"

Bill Ballenger: Yeah. Was there drinking, though, in the Island House and elsewhere on the island?

Dan Musser: Well, I think all over like everywhere.

Bill Ballenger: Yeah, yeah. What about segregation on the island? How did it manifest itself?

Dan Musser: It manifested itself in, as you think back and you think it through, that Mackinac was a busy place. They could not find enough local people to run those properties, and they relied on black employees.

Bill Ballenger: Okay, so when you say run the properties, you mean like hotels?

Dan Musser: Like hotels.

Bill Ballenger: Restaurants and that sort of thing.

Dan Musser: Yes, yes.

Bill Ballenger: Would these African-Americans come just during the season?

Dan Musser: Just during the season, and many of them had seasonal spots in the South and would work their way south. French Lick was the first stop out of here.

Bill Ballenger: Oh, I see, so they'd kind of work in different places.

Dan Musser: That's right.

Bill Ballenger: around the country depending on the weather and the season.

Dan Musser: That's right. That's exactly right.

Bill Ballenger: Yeah, and so when they come up, though, they were segregated in their living quarters, in other words?

Dan Musser: Well, when I arrived at Mackinac in 1951 as a kid, it was astounding. Yes, we had segregated housing.

Bill Ballenger: Where did they live>

Dan Musser: We now have a lot more better housing facilities than we did then. We have a community we built out in the middle of the island but, back then, they lived in buildings behind the hotel.

Bill Ballenger: Behind the Grand Hotel.

Dan Musser: Behind the Grand, but we always had facilities all over town. Wherever we could buy something, we'd buy it and put employees in it.

Bill Ballenger: Other hotels and restaurants had that.

Dan Musser: Doing the same thing.

Bill Ballenger: Did they send them up to the property behind your hotel?

Dan Musser: No, as we are today, all of us are scrambling all the time.

Bill Ballenger: I see.

Dan Musser: If there's a house for sale somewhere over the years, one of the hotels buy it, and that's become somewhat of a local problem. That's been somewhat of a difficult area, but we had totally segregated housing. We had segregated dining.

Bill Ballenger: Dining?

Dan Musser: We had a dining room that was black-only.

Bill Ballenger: At the Grand Hotel.

Dan Musser: Employees. We had a dining room, which is the dining room we now use for everyone, of course, that was for uniformed white employees. Then we had another dining room that was for people not in uniform that were in coat and tie like you and I are today, and office employees, and department heads, so we ran three cafeterias. We also had two employee kind of hamburger joints and selling beer. Those were segregated.

Bill Ballenger: Do you think this is maybe a product of Stewart Woodfill coming from southern Indiana?

Dan Musser: Oh, no, no. No, no, it predated him.

Bill Ballenger: What was it, the railroad? Just the culture?

Dan Musser: It's a culture, and it predated him. It was there from the 1890s.

Bill Ballenger: From 1887.

Dan Musser: That's exactly right.

Bill Ballenger: This is a way a lot of these, probably, northern resorts, maybe not just Mackinaw Island.

Mr. Musser: Southern too, all of them.

Bill Ballenger: Southern certainly, but in the North.

Mr. Musser: But they were using the same crew we were.

Bill Ballenger: I see.

Mr. Musser: This crews were going North and South, but it was the culture.

Bill Ballenger: Yeah, and the crews weren't treated any differently in the north, really, than they were in the south.

Mr. Musser: No, same deal.

Bill Ballenger: Even though we fought a civil war, like 30 years before.

Mr. Musser: Very true.

Bill Ballenger: That's amazing.

Bill Ballenger: One thing, wasn't there a strike at one point?

Mr. Musser: I guess, over the years we probably had several. The one that I know is, I was a kid, and I was living in the house I now live in, which was my uncle's home. He always lived in the back building, and he was peculiar in some ways. He slept late in the morning, but he stayed up late at night. And he was up at the hotel, probably at midnight or 12:30, and he up to the quarters where the black waiters had lived, and in part of the stable building upstairs they had established a gambling facility of their own, the woman and all. I mean, it was a wide open baby.

Bill Ballenger: Segregated gambling.

Mr. Musser: That's right. And, well, there was a place downtown did the same thing.

Bill Ballenger: Yeah, sure.

Mr. Musser: And women, too.

Bill Ballenger: Wow.

Mr. Musser: So, the old man didn't like that evening and he was up there, and I was a kid had to be 19 or 20, and I'd go into work in the morning like I normally did. I was working in the kitchen, and he got up there that night and said, "Well," to the head waiter he said, "This is over. We're not gonna have anymore gambling.

We're not gonna have anymore drinking up here. We're not gonna have anymore women up here. It's over."

Mr. Musser: So, the waiters came down in the morning and they relayed this information to them and they served breakfast, sort of, and about 10:30 decided there'd be no lunch.

Bill Ballenger: Whoa.

Mr. Musser: So the manager, Nick Bicking, was a capable man and he tried to call the old man, and the old man turned his phones off all the time. And so, he sent me down. He said, "You gotta wake him up, tell me what to do."

Mr. Musser: So I go down there, knock on his door. I said, "I gotta talk to you." "Okay, come on in," and he lived in the backroom of the back building of that place. His desk was a banquet table with a drape on it where he had a typewriter, and that was about it. He always carried a walking stick, and I laid this tale of woe out to him. "Well," he said, "Mr.. Musser, what would you do?" I said, "I think I'd let him go." He said, "You're god damn right we will," and he banged that stick down on the thing and he called Nick Bicking and said, "Tell him to get out of there and get off the island by two o'clock this afternoon, and figure out how we're gonna serve." He said, "I'll leave right now and I'll go hire some waiters."

Bill Ballenger: Whoa.

Mr. Musser: So, he gets in the car and drives to Detroit, and Indianapolis, and Cleveland and Chicago and sent buses of help up there, and it was a pretty motley crew when it arrived there, I'll tell ya. But in the interim, whatever was left were doing the deed. We've taken another couple strikes over the years. I think once with bellmen and once with maids.

Bill Ballenger: Were you pressed into duty yourself, as a hock waiter?

Mr. Musser: I was a waiter, at that point. Whenever I dropped a tray I damn near just missed a lady with this stuff coming.

Bill Ballenger: You were probably glad when the strike got over.

Mr. Musser: Except you're making money.

Bill Ballenger: Well, you're making money but you personally didn't have to be a waiter anymore. Or you were, then what?

Mr. Musser: Well, I couldn't carry a tray very good.

Bill Ballenger: That's a great story.

Mr. Musser: That's true though, and that really started things changing up there a lot. We closed the black dining room and integrated that, and then a year later we closed the third dining room and integrated all of into one. It has to be '61, or '62 or '63, along in there.

Bill Ballenger: That's amazing. It's our civil rights movement right there on Mackinaw Island.

Mr. Musser: That's very true.

Bill Ballenger: Because before the march in Washington, and King's speech, and the civil rights act.

Mr. Musser: It was a culture getting ready.

Bill Ballenger: Culture changing and the spirit arriving.

Bill Ballenger: The employee base that you've relied on over the years, that you've drawn from various sections of the country, at least in the beginning, has that changed much over time? There a lot of employees today that seem to be from the Caribbean. Is that something recent, or not?

Mr. Musser: It's changed dramatically. When I first started working you could hire a head of a dining room crew in Florida, or Arizona or somewhere. Ours might have been Hot Springs, Arkansas. They could bring a full crew with him.

Bill Ballenger: And they were probably US citizens. They were residents.

Mr. Musser: They were US citizens, all US citizens.

Bill Ballenger: Yeah, okay, yes.

Mr. Musser: That started falling apart when properties were no longer seasonal. And so, the main departments would stay where they were. That's their home base, and that gradually eroded and we needed to figure out what to do.

Bill Ballenger: So, you mean these people wanted to stay in Arizona or Florida.

Mr. Musser: Sure, have a home. I mean, they never travel without their families, without their wives.

Bill Ballenger: And so, and they were able to get year round work in those areas. So, why go north?

Mr. Musser: That's right. You had so many seasonal places in Florida and all through the south.

Bill Ballenger: I got you, okay.

Mr. Musser: It became year round properties. I mean, we're a freak now to be seasonal. They're not many of us left.

Bill Ballenger: So, you're floundering around.

Mr. Musser: So, the whole thing was changing and my friend at the homestead in Virginia said to me, probably in the '70s. It was in the early '70s. He said, "I'm gonna tell you, we got some Jamaican waiters. It's a wonderful thing." I said, "How do you do that?" So, he told me what you do. So we did that, and we brought in 10 men. And it was a wonderful thing, our 10 men were not received very well by their American coworkers.

Bill Ballenger: All right, so you had some other American coworkers who were also, maybe, African American.

Mr. Musser: Probably, African American.

Bill Ballenger: But they resented the Jamaicans?

Mr. Musser: That's exactly right.

Bill Ballenger: Huh.

Mr. Musser: So, we kept increasing the number of Jamaicans. And I would guess, in probably the '80s, I think we started with the Jamaican program in mid-'73, '74. And I think in the mid-'80s, it wasn't getting any better. And Paul Nine called me from Traverse City and said, "What's this Jamaican deal?" So I gave him some stories and what to do, so he started it.

Bill Ballenger: He has the Grand Traverse Resort in Traverse City, yes.

Mr. Musser: Yes, that's right. And then, it started going out from that in Northern Michigan and a lot of Jamaicans were here. Well, then more recently we've had visa problems for the last number of years. We've done a lot of different things. But we had, I think, people from 21 countries last year in our building.

Bill Ballenger: Did 9/11 cause a real problem.

Mr. Musser: 9/11 caused a real problem. We used to have no too great a difficulty getting employees in. When 9/11 happened they cracked down, and rightly so. It's hard to argue with.

Bill Ballenger: Sure.

Mr. Musser: And we are hopeful that if immigration is ever addressed in Congress that we can get some kind of a fix for ourselves, and we think we're positioned to do

that. But the seasonal employment pool is difficult in this country today, it's difficult with school kids. Schools start early. They let out early.

Bill Ballenger:

Sure.

Mr. Musser:

Our season's now six months instead of two and half or three, we can't use kids. And we'll only keep doing more of this. I think we just hired, two weeks ago, 50 or so students from the Philippines.

Bill Ballenger:

Very interesting.

Mr. Musser:

That's kind of hard to imagine.

Bill Ballenger:

It's amazing. Are they just coming over just for the job?

Mr. Musser:

Just for this job.

Bill Ballenger:

And then they go back.

Mr. Musser:

That's right.

Bill Ballenger:

What about the renovations of the interior of the Grand Hotel undertaken, I think, in 1997 by Carlton Varney and those have been ongoing and lasted almost until today.

Mr. Musser:

My uncle formed, in 1932, an organization which was a committee of the American Hotel Association, of the resort guys, and these guys were all individual owner operated properties across this country who are in trouble. Didn't have any business, they were trying to get the government to take over their buildings, or any way we could find business. The old man really started thinking about convention business, and was a fore running in our country of doing that for resorts. But he had been the starter of that thing, and ran it for the four or five years.

Mr. Musser:

And so, as time goes along he put me on that committee in place of himself, much as I've done with Dan. I became chairman of it in the mid-'60s, I'd say.

Bill Ballenger:

How many members do you think there were all together?

Mr. Musser:

60, 60 maximum.

Bill Ballenger:

60 maximum.

Mr. Musser:

It still is.

Bill Ballenger:

Would it include places like, maybe, The Greenbriar?

Mr. Musser: It did indeed.

Bill Ballenger: In other words, all the great big iconic resorts.

Mr. Musser: That's right. And they were all, pretty much all owner operated in those days.

Mr. Musser: So anyway, I invited him to Mackinaw for their annual meeting and they accepted, and we did that in, I would think, about '70 or '71. No, no, I'm wrong. Late '70s, '76, or '78.

Mr. Musser: And so, Mr.. Woodfill was up there one night the season before they were coming, then he called me out in the parlor and he said, "Well, I gotta doll this joint up a little bit." He said, "I've been lying to these guys for 20 years now."

Bill Ballenger: About how great it looks.

Mr. Musser: So he said, "What do you wanna do?" And I said, "Well, I don't know, we better hire someone." And he said, "Well, who?" So I finally said, "Well, let's try Dorothy Draper." I said, "She'd done The Greenbriar." He said, "Well, that's a good idea. Figure that out." So I sent a letter to Mr.s Draper, "Dear Mr.s Draper, come out and do us."

Mr. Musser: So about four days later, five, I got a call from Carlton Varney. Carlton said, "Well, Mr.s Draper's been dead for nine years and I'm the new guy in town."

Bill Ballenger: She can't help you, but I can.

Mr. Musser: That's how that started.

Bill Ballenger: So, how long did it take Carlton to put things together to make yourself presentable?

Mr. Musser: Well, we did a lot that year and we did a lot for the next 25 years.

Bill Ballenger: And he was continuously consulting for that?

Mr. Musser: Yes, he still is, still is.

Bill Ballenger: So you put a lot of money into that, right?

Mr. Musser: Yes, we have. Structurally, it's sound building today and it was not. I've put a perimeter foundation in the building.

Bill Ballenger: Really?

Mr. Musser: In my career.

Bill Ballenger: No kidding? Did Carlton recommend that, or was that your own idea?

Mr. Musser: No, he doesn't have any thoughts about that. We put steel inside of the pillars in the front. Those babies are really curving pretty good, and we've done a lot of things like that.

Bill Ballenger: And Carlton did exceed his budget?

Mr. Musser: I called my friend at The Greenbriar when we were getting ready to make this deal, and his name was Jack Lanahan and he was a very competent man. He said, "Yeah, he's a great guy and he could certainly do things, and he's a color genius." But he said, "He's the only guy I know that can exceed an unlimited budget." He said, "I'll give you a bit of advice." He said, "About once or twice a year just send something back to his office that you don't want."

Bill Ballenger: Did you have to do it? Was it good?

Mr. Musser: Yeah, I have. That's good advice.

Bill Ballenger: Let's talk a little bit about the building of the Mackinaw Bridge in 1957, and Mr.. Woodfill's role in persuading the state that that would be a good idea to build that bridge.

Mr. Musser: Well, he was phenomenal in his desire to have that done, and certainly was self serving, to some extent, but not totally. I mean, it was to be the lifeblood of Northern Michigan, and I think it has been. Of course, it brought I-75 too, which was coming, I guess, no matter what. But yes, he probably started in '50 or '51 lobbying for the bridge. And he spent three winters here, in Lansing, at the Jack Tower.

Bill Ballenger: Sure, right across the street from the state capitol.

Mr. Musser: The olds back then.

Bill Ballenger: Oh, the olds. Okay, yeah.

Mr. Musser: And Bruce Anderson was his buddy.

Bill Ballenger: Yes, and Governor Williams would have been governor, Governor Williams.

Mr. Musser: That's right.

Bill Ballenger: And he liked the island, even though he'd shut down the gambling. He'd starting taking-

Mr. Musser: He did love the island, and he and my uncle were friends, and as a Democrat and a Republican, and they thought differently on things but they admired each other and respected each other.

Mr. Musser: But Mr. Woodfill got down there, and Larry Reuben was a young guy who was lobbying for the Portland Cement Association here. The old man got Larry involved in this bridge project, and they became a team and he just down here and he really, I believe, sold the idea of revenue bonds.

Bill Ballenger: Oh, okay.

Mr. Musser: Revenue bonds had been used for the Pennsylvania turnpike, but they were not an everyday occurrence anywhere.

Bill Ballenger: Right, right.

Mr. Musser: And that's how they got the financing of the thing through, and that's what he worked diligently at. But he did crazy things, I heard him on the radio down in Ohio.

Bill Ballenger: This is Stewart Woodfill.

Mr. Musser: Yes, debating a University of Michigan engineer on if this damn bridge would stand up.

Bill Ballenger: Really? Yeah, a lot of people were nervous about that.

Mr. Musser: And he'd say, "Well, you know, I'm not an engineer, but" And then, he'd just nail this guy.

Bill Ballenger: Yeah. That's a great story.

Bill Ballenger: Well, let me ask you this though, was Stewart Woodfill's idea kind of like the Ballards back in the 1880s, build a hotel and they will come by railroad, and Stewart Woodfill was thinking, "Build the bridge and they will come by interstate highway to Northern Michigan," and then some of them won't necessarily wanna go across the bridge, they'll wanna take the ferry across to Mackinaw Island. Is that it?

Mr. Musser: No question, it was self serving.

Bill Ballenger: Well, you can't blame him. It was economic development.

Mr. Musser: That's exactly right.

Bill Ballenger: Sure it was self interest for him, but it is for all of Northern Michigan, for what it's done.

Mr. Musser: Look at what it's done for the UP.

Bill Ballenger: Sure, absolutely. Yeah, I mean, where would the UP be, even though it has a lot of problems, it would really have problems without it.

Mr. Musser: That's absolutely the truth.

Bill Ballenger: So, that was the idea. In other words, it wasn't so much because you almost think, "My gosh, you're building a bridge that is not going to the island. It's actually bypassing the island.

Mr. Musser: That's right.

Bill Ballenger: ... and making it easier for people to get by. But the point is that the road system had to be built to support it.

Mr. Musser: Had to be.

Bill Ballenger: And then, that would bring people up there and that they would come to the island. Okay, that's really fascinating.

Bill Ballenger: What about some of the presidents that have come to the island. Was Gerald Ford the only president who actually was there while he was president?

Mr. Musser: He was the only sitting president that was there for that.

Bill Ballenger: But other presidents have been.

Mr. Musser: Well, Kennedy was there in my time and he was there when he was campaigning for the nomination.

Bill Ballenger: He had a famous meeting with Governor Williams.

Mr. Musser: He did, indeed. It was a Memorial Day weekend, and I recall it very well. And we got our carriage out to meet him, and we were not open. The hotel was not gonna open until the fifth or sixth of June.

Bill Ballenger: Right.

Mr. Musser: And the Governor received Kennedy after he was all over town, and waving and doing things, but he received him and committed Michigan delegation to him for the democratic-

Bill Ballenger: At the Democratic National Convention that summer.

Mr. Musser: That's right.

Bill Ballenger: Which was very important.

Mr. Musser: Which was coming up in a month or so.

Bill Ballenger: Did Kennedy stay overnight anywhere else in the island?

Mr. Musser: No.

Bill Ballenger: He just went back.

Mr. Musser: Went back that day.

Bill Ballenger: Okay, and other presidents? Wasn't Truman there, actually?

Mr. Musser: Truman was there in the mid-'50s, after his presidency.

Bill Ballenger: After he was president, yeah.

Mr. Musser: George HW Bush was there a couple times. And as recently as two or three years ago.

Bill Ballenger: I remember him campaigning for the nomination in the year before 1980.

Mr. Musser: That's right.

Bill Ballenger: So, it would have been the '79 biannual republican conference that they had up there in the fall. It would have been September of '79.

Mr. Musser: That's right. That's exactly right. So, we've had Truman. We've had, of course, Clinton.

Bill Ballenger: Yeah, Clinton a couple of times.

Mr. Musser: At least a couple times, and we've had Mr.s Clinton during his term as presidency. We also had Mr.s Johnson.

Bill Ballenger: Lady Bird Johnson.

Mr. Musser: Lady Bird Johnson was there during the Johnson term of presidency.

Bill Ballenger: LBJ himself wasn't there.

Mr. Musser: Was not ever there. I think that's it.

Bill Ballenger: George W Bush never came.

Mr. Musser: He was close one day.

Bill Ballenger: He was close.

Mr. Musser: He was campaigning and he was due to be there, and I think for the Republican Convention in the fall.

Bill Ballenger: And Nixon and Carter never made it.

Mr. Musser: No.

Bill Ballenger: They didn't make it.

Mr. Musser: No.

Bill Ballenger: That's still a pretty good array of politicians.

Mr. Musser: Yes.

Bill Ballenger: And haven't you had governors' conferences up there, like you had one way before you were born. Way before, right, '27?

Mr. Musser: That's right. We had one before I was born and we had one in the late '40s, which Bill Doyle had a lot to do with but the old man did too.

Bill Ballenger: Okay, now we gotta talk about Bill Doyle a little bit, in a minute. But the governors' conferences, there were those too? I know there were meetings like the Democratic Convention

Mr. Musser: Those are the only national ones.

Bill Ballenger: National ones. Democratic governors.

Mr. Musser: Jim Blanchard brought the democrat governors to us. And you remember the Traverse City Governors' Conference.

Bill Ballenger: Right.

Mr. Musser: We tried to bid on that one, and there was not possibly enough rooms around to do it. But after that, they flew the democrat governors up to Mackinaw for three or four days, and that was pretty exciting.

Bill Ballenger: Yeah.

Mr. Musser: We've had the Midwestern governors, over my career, four or five times.

Bill Ballenger: Wasn't there a democratic platform committee conference?

Mr. Musser: There was indeed.

Bill Ballenger: And wasn't there a famous incident at that?

Mr. Musser: We booked that meeting probably in early May for whenever it was going to be a couple months later. And the only room we had for him, which is now that the Brighton Pavilion, then we used to call the Club Room because the club was the gambling-

Bill Ballenger: That was the gambling room. Yeah.

Mr. Musser: And so we decided we had to do something to doll it up a little bit and we didn't have any time and we using it, so we painted it and got some drapes in there and we bought some chandeliers. Carlton got the chandeliers, he called Scott in Texas, "Make these chandeliers." So they get up there and we hang them up and they've got these big elaborate arms on them, glass. So we set those guys up at a hollow square table, there's one chandelier in the middle of the opening. One on each side of them, yes it looked pretty good.

Bill Ballenger: But it was kind of a makeshift interior decoration kind of job.

Mr. Musser: It was a very best of a makeshift job.

Bill Ballenger: Okay. You're hoping to just get through this.

Mr. Musser: And they were at lunch or somewhere one day. One of those days, two or three of those arms broke bang down, if they had been there, it could kill someone.

Bill Ballenger: Wow. Was it just huge crack? Was anybody in the room or is this like a tree falling in the forest?

Mr. Musser: The kid in the room back in or something.

Bill Ballenger: But he escaped with his life.

Mr. Musser: He escaped with his life and we picked up the pieces.

Bill Ballenger: Did they ever know what had happened?

Mr. Musser: I think they asked someone.

Bill Ballenger: What happened to that chandelier that was over my head.

Mr. Musser: We made sure no one in there under any other chandeliers.

Bill Ballenger: Sit here, when we come back.

Mr. Musser: We get the guy up there the next week and figuring it out.

Bill Ballenger: That's fascinating.

Mr. Musser: Those chandeliers are still there though. They put steel inside of them.

Bill Ballenger: Wow. Let me ask you about the governor's residence as we know it today. Now that was, as I understand it, built like 1904, 1902. Was it a private home?

Mr. Musser: It was a private home, guy from Chicago I think and the state bought that whenever they did, and Bill Doyle was very instrumental in that one.

Bill Ballenger: Why did the state buy it? Did they buy it specifically?

Mr. Musser: Yeah, they bought it specifically.

Bill Ballenger: For?

Mr. Musser: The state park was there.

Bill Ballenger: Okay.

Mr. Musser: So they had some entity you could sweep the thing out when they needed it done and I think that Doyle got the idea it'd be good to have the governor here and no one at Mackinaw opposed that, they thought so. You have to remember there was no official residents for the governor in this state here in Lansing.

Bill Ballenger: Right. Didn't even have one here.

Mr. Musser: No.

Bill Ballenger: That's true.

Mr. Musser: Milliken moved into the first one.

Bill Ballenger: That's right, ironically for years, the only official residence the governor of Michigan had was on Mackinac Island. Just a stone throw from the Grand Hotel. He didn't even have one here in the capital city of Lansing.

Mr. Musser: Exactly.

Bill Ballenger: Where they were serving. Wow.

Mr. Musser: So that was the big sell and how they got them to do it. I don't think they paid much money for it, 35, 40 grand I think.

Bill Ballenger: That's amazing.

Mr. Musser: And the Park Commission has been the custodian of it over these years. It's been redone several times with private money.

Bill Ballenger: Now, was Williams the governor when that happened? When it was acquired as a governor's residence or made into a governor's residence or Kim Sigler or Harry Keller?

Mr. Musser: I would think that Kim Sigler, but I don't know that.

Bill Ballenger: Yeah, but Williams was the first one who seemed to really take an interest.

Mr. Musser: I guess I can't talk to about Kim Sigler. I don't know. But Williams certainly did and Williams basically raised their family there in the summer.

Bill Ballenger: In the summer.

Mr. Musser: All their kids were there from little kids. He was in office for what, 15 years.

Bill Ballenger: Yeah. How about John Swainson, he was only in office for two years.

Mr. Musser: He was there some but not significantly.

Bill Ballenger: And then Romney came.

Mr. Musser: Romney used it pretty regularly. He did not entertain at home very much, but he entertained at the hotel a lot. I can remember getting those calls from Mrs. Romney about 5:30. "Oh, Dan, what's on the menu tonight?" I tell her, "oh, well we'd like three of these and four of those and maybe you could you get some lamb chops and we'll be about 12 and we'll be over at 7:30." Yes ma'am.

Bill Ballenger: That's a good story. What else do you remember about George Romney?

Mr. Musser: Well, George Romney played a lot of golf, but he was kind of like he was and he played by himself or sometimes Carl Nordberg from the park who ran the Park Commission, he would make him play with him, but Romney used one of those golf clubs that was one club and you had a wing nut on it and you change it from a nine iron to a one iron.

Bill Ballenger: I remember seeing Mitt Romney, a former governor of Massachusetts, son of George Romney in the fall of 2005 at a biennial Republican conference on the island and I asked him, I said, "When was the last time you were here?" He said 1968, and that was the last year His father, George Romney had been governor and Mitt Romney was still a teenager at the time.

Mr. Musser: They used that property pretty regularly.

Bill Ballenger: Right. Now, after George Romney, Bill Milliken came in. What do you remember about Bill Milliken?

Mr. Musser: The Milliken's did not use it very much in the beginning and they gradually used it more and more, at the end of the Milliken years, they used it a lot and he would sometimes come up on a Tuesday and Wednesday with one state trooper. Then he would run and swim, play tennis a lot with Fritz Bennetts. And they like the Williams liked it so much that they obtained a property when they were up there.

Bill Ballenger: Right. They have a property up there now and his daughter Elaine is buried on their I believe.

Mr. Musser: That's exactly right.

Bill Ballenger: Yeah. There was one story that I've heard about governor Milliken and the greater Detroit Chamber of Commerce meeting.

Mr. Musser: It's all true.

Bill Ballenger: Maybe it was the first meeting on Mackinac Island at the Grand Hotel after they decided to move their winter conference from the Caribbean or the Southern US where they were getting increasingly negative headlines and they all started to, let's change our image and let's go to the Grand Hotel. Tell us a little bit about all of that.

Mr. Musser: Well, that has become a wonderful piece of business for us, but yes, it was on cruise ships and they flew legislators and others to Florida and went out for three days and I think drank and gambled and raised cane.

Bill Ballenger: Not much policy.

Mr. Musser: I don't think so. So they decided to have a land cruise at Mackinac, Leonard Barns of AAA and Ron Steffens really made that happen and the first year was pretty slim pickings and they were still wearing sailor hats and trying to make it look little like a cruise.

Bill Ballenger: Like it was a cruise.

Mr. Musser: But they got about 150 people or so maximum, probably had maybe four wives or the whole outfit and but it started the thing and it's always been difficult, it's always been on a weekend, but it's always been difficult to hold Greater Detroit on Saturday nights, they want to get home.

Bill Ballenger: Sure.

Mr. Musser: That hasn't changed. And so the speaker for the Saturday night was governor Milliken, the first meeting of this thing and he was there. And so we get down to the wire and we got about 50, 60 people left in the building, set up in the back room was a bunch of chairs and yeah, we got a lot of help and I mostly got 75 or 100 help out.

Bill Ballenger: We got the staff.

Mr. Musser: Put on a sport coat and get a tie on and get in there and have dinner.

Bill Ballenger: Fill up the seats, make it look respectable. So the governor wasn't humiliated by having nobody there speaking to an empty room.

Mr. Musser: It's true.

Bill Ballenger: What can you tell us about other governors on the island? For instance, Jim Blanchard, did he play a little golf up there?

Mr. Musser: He had a hole on one. Jim Blanchard, I don't believe played golf at all until he became governor. And I think that he learned what he learned in his early formative years of golf on our golf course right down below his house. And he did play a lot and he had a hole on one, on a par three that's no longer there.

Bill Ballenger: Well maybe it's been memorialized or something.

Mr. Musser: I think he's become a pretty good golfer and he say he still likes it a lot and he still returns, but the Blanchard's were married at Mackinac up at the residence. And their dinner and reception was at the hotel following that.

Bill Ballenger: And he was also obviously instrumental I think in getting the Democrats to come up to the hotel.

Mr. Musser: Well and Jim used it. He used that facility to his advantage. And I'm not suggesting others haven't as well.

Bill Ballenger: Sure.

Mr. Musser: But he uses it very, very wisely I think. And he had gatherings there almost every weekend he was there, but the Blanchard's used it a lot during their years.

Bill Ballenger: What about John Engler?

Mr. Musser: John Engler came to use it more in his later years, but he was not a heavy user of it. I wouldn't say. I think he used it more as a retreat.

Bill Ballenger: Did he bring the triplets?

Mr. Musser: Sure he did.

Bill Ballenger: Because they were born about five years into his tenure as governor and maybe after that.

Mr. Musser: He certainly did and they were up this last summer.

Bill Ballenger: They were?

Mr. Musser: They're a big young women now.

Bill Ballenger: Oh really? No, absolutely. They are going to three different schools in Washington D.C and with Michelle driving them all over the place.

Mr. Musser: I'm sure.

Bill Ballenger: John Engler says she should get her chauffeur's license at this point. Let me ask you about one person that we've mentioned before, Bill Doyle, who was he and what was his role on Mackinac Island?

Mr. Musser: Bill Doyle was from Menominee and he served in the Senate, I think maybe one term here in Michigan Senate, maybe two terms, but I think one, he got the taste of Lansing is my opinion, became a very successful lobbyist for the chain stores. And I think probably is one of his great accounts was Kroger and became effective as a lobbyist here. And he liked Mackinac Island and he got himself appointed to the Park Commission.

Bill Ballenger: This was in the 30s or 40s?

Mr. Musser: I would think, early 30s.

Bill Ballenger: early 30s. Okay.

Mr. Musser: And he was bright enough to figure out who was running things at Mackinac Island. And he became quite friendly with the boat people, with the carriage people, the business people. And he and my uncle were cohorts and getting a lot of things done at Mackinac Island. And he and my uncle had a horrid fallout. We were filming, This Time For Keeps in 1947.

Bill Ballenger: It was 1947. Esther Williams.

Mr. Musser: Esther Williams.

Bill Ballenger: The swimmer and Jimmy Durante were in the film.

Mr. Musser: That's right.

Bill Ballenger: Wasn't he? Yeah.

Mr. Musser: In any way, that the movie wanted to close the Front street to film.

Bill Ballenger: Up Front street meaning?

Mr. Musser: Being right in the street, right in front of the hotel.

Bill Ballenger: Okay.

Mr. Musser: Which we own and we proved that during that time and we have carefully preserved that. But, so the old man closed it. Bill was chairman of the Park Commission. He said, "Well, you can't close it. It's public street." The old man, said, "Yes we can. It's my street." And we closed it.

Bill Ballenger: It was just a pure power thing. Or do you think Doyle was maybe concerned that if you close a street, it's gonna inhibit commerce or train or something or what?

Mr. Musser: He was concerned it was going to inhibit someone from up the bluff trying to come down the street, but there was some animosity between the two of them anyway.

Bill Ballenger: At that point, or had been all along?

Mr. Musser: They were never as close as I was to Bill.

Bill Ballenger: They were cautiously respect of each other.

Mr. Musser: That's well put. That's right.

Bill Ballenger: It was not an irremarkable relationship.

Mr. Musser: They were not never in love ever.

Bill Ballenger: Yeah.

Mr. Musser: And so anyway, this got into the press and they both were able to generate that locally. And finally the old man told Doyle, you cannot come on our property.

Bill Ballenger: You personally.

Mr. Musser: You personally. So that was kind of a challenge to the Irishman, that's what he felt, he felt a little more stuff going and that carried on for a couple of years.

Bill Ballenger: Wow.

Mr. Musser: And he would not let Bill Doyle in the building.

Bill Ballenger: Geez.

Mr. Musser: And he certainly let the help know that he wasn't welcome in it.

Bill Ballenger: Here he is chairman of the parks commission.

Mr. Musser: That's right.

Bill Ballenger: That's amazing.

Mr. Musser: Wow.

Bill Ballenger: And you got to remember we were leasing the golf course from the state, that point, still are.

Mr. Musser: Well that was 47'. That was Kim Sigler. He was governor in 47', 48' two years only before Soapy Williams, beating him in 40. Anyway, they finally, my uncle tells us that they saw each other in the street downtown one afternoon and looked at each other and said we better end this, bury the hatchet business. And they did.

Bill Ballenger: They did.

Mr. Musser: But it was never a total love affair.

Bill Ballenger: But as far as it went, it sounds like your uncle won, won that part of it.

Mr. Musser: It's true.

Bill Ballenger: Absolutely.

Mr. Musser: And we do own the street, I don't think there's any question. Well, we have been careful that we still close it a couple of days a year, every year and document it.

Bill Ballenger: Nobody's challenging. What about the relationship between the Grand Hotel and the Mackinac Island Park Commission? Was it a good one?

Mr. Musser: In the Woodfill/Doyle days, the commission had people on it that had been on forever and ever. Term limits was not even thought of at this point. And both of them were certainly entrenched in Mackinac Island. Doyle, used to call himself the king of Mackinaw and my uncle didn't like that too much.

Bill Ballenger: I can imagine. No wonder.

Mr. Musser: So it was a different kind of era now. I think you have to credit Blanchard with saying, "Look, this is crazy." Blanchard got Doyle to retire from the Park

Commission. Doyle said one day to him, "I'm going to quit this thing and retire." Blanchard said, "We'll have your party September 22." Or something like that.

Bill Ballenger: He didn't try and talk him out of it.

Mr. Musser: No, Well and Blanchard I think started a different method of appointing members to that thing. Certainly there have been some members that had been there a long time and I think that's good. I'm glad there aren't term limits, but each governor now has put some of his own people in there and I believe that that's appropriate. And to answer your question, our relationship with the Park Commission or mine anyway for the last 40 years has been always fine.

Bill Ballenger: It was really good.

Mr. Musser: The difficulty in the Park Commission in the government up there is that the Park Commission and the city government have never been in love and I think the city government too often nitpicks what they do.

Bill Ballenger: Picks what the Park Commission does?

Mr. Musser: What the Park Commission does. But you have to remember that the Park Commission has control over so much land there. I mean, they've got our electricity's on it. Pipes are on it for the water system.

Bill Ballenger: Sure. What percentage of the island is publicly owned land?

Mr. Musser: 80 some percent, 81 or 82 or 83%.

Bill Ballenger: 80%. Wow. Well, no wonder.

Mr. Musser: It's all mixed up. It's not as if this half is this three forces Park and this is in and out. So there's a state park piece that comes down.

Bill Ballenger: Sure.

Mr. Musser: Between the hotel and the golf course to about the bottom of the hill and then it doesn't. So it's all screwed up all over the island and they need to live together and they need to get along together and they never have too well. But I would credit Cawthorne and Margaret Doud in trying to make it a little better.

Bill Ballenger: Margaret Doud is the mayor.

Mr. Musser: Is the mayor of the city. It's politically dynamite locally. I don't think that the cottagers are concerned about it or others are, but the local people in the Park Commission can get very upset with one another, which I've never also understood. The Park Commission has wonderful jobs that have probably 30 or

40 different for locals that had been the backbone of a lot of good jobs in Mackinac Island. And it's a small community.

Bill Ballenger: Right. We talked a little bit about This Time For Keeps which was made on the island, I think in 1947 and later, somewhere in time with Christopher Reeve, superman.

Mr. Musser: It's true.

Bill Ballenger: A famous movie. Were those the only two movies that were really filmed holy at the Grand Hotel and at Mackinac or have there been other films?

Mr. Musser: I think there have been some other lesser ones.

Bill Ballenger: Lesser ones.

Mr. Musser: They're are the only two that have ever been really successful in the movie business.

Bill Ballenger: And they centered on the Grand Hotel.

Mr. Musser: Both, of them.

Bill Ballenger: Yeah. Both of them did. Well what about that? How did they come to fill those two films on Mackinac Island?

Mr. Musser: This Time For Keeps, I'm not totally aware of. I think the approach, my uncle and he said, "Come on baby, we'd like to have you." Somewhere In Time was a little different, Somewhere In Time was written for the Del Coronado.

Bill Ballenger: In California?

Mr. Musser: In California.

Bill Ballenger: Okay.

Mr. Musser: Which is a hotel that's wood and opened the same year we did.

Bill Ballenger: It was a part of your association?

Mr. Musser: Yes it is.

Bill Ballenger: A resort association.

Mr. Musser: Yes it is.

Bill Ballenger: Okay.

Mr. Musser: But they were going to decide to make this movie and they were going to use the Del. They could now look at the detail and the Del's got a high riser beside of it that he had.

Bill Ballenger: It kind of spoils the atmosphere.

Mr. Musser: Didn't quite work out. So they run a search. They were looking at a place around Vancouver somewhere and they were looking a place on the east coast too. And at that point I was chairman of the Travel Commission and the studio called.

Bill Ballenger: The State Travel Commission.

Mr. Musser: State Travel Commission.

Bill Ballenger: That's interesting.

Mr. Musser: And the studio called whatever the Travel Commissions number was in those days. And said, 'We hear there's a big old white hotel up in North Michigan and we're looking for a site for a movie and what can you tell me?' So that girl was pretty sharp in there and said, 'Well, you should call the chairman of the park commission. They run that place up there and they'd be glad to talk to you.' And gave them number. And this guy called. And so we started that adventure and that's turned out to be a very good thing. It was interesting in booking that thing and we had competition in it and so I finally in those days were still telegrams, believe it or not.

Bill Ballenger: Wow.

Mr. Musser: And I wrote him about a five page telegram and sent it to him. And I said, 'You guys, if you are going to make a movie in one of these buildings, you owe yourself to see this property and if you will get yourself to Chicago at a date you name.' This had to be in February, 'I will get you from O'hare to Mackinac, back to O'hare that night one day.'

Bill Ballenger: Wow.

Mr. Musser: 'And I urge you to accept this and take a look.' So that happened and we flew up and then had a beautiful day and in a Charter aircraft and they had three guys, the money guy and the director.

Bill Ballenger: Director?

Mr. Musser: The director was not there.

Bill Ballenger: The director.

Mr. Musser: Yeah he was there.

Bill Ballenger: He was there. Okay. I can't remember the director. I remember Christopher Reeve and Jane Seymour.

Dan Musser: That's right.

Bill Ballenger: Those two, the stars.

Dan Musser: Anyway, those guys came up and we had a beautiful day. And we plowed the roads and got our big bus out and had them all dolled up. And it was probably 25 degrees and bright and sunny and there's no wind. Streets were frozen. It was lovely.

Bill Ballenger: Right.

Dan Musser: So we met them at the airport and stopped at the hotel and took a tour. And we had a rub because we could not give them the 125 rooms for two and a half months, and we'd have had to tell them.

Bill Ballenger: Whoa.

Dan Musser: We'd had to tell them.

Bill Ballenger: At what time of year?

Dan Musser: From early May until after the Fourth of July, and so we have to steal rooms from conventions, and I said, "We can't do it. We will not do that. But we have rooms that we can obtain for you at Mission Point."

Dan Musser: "What's that? Second place joint?"

Dan Musser: "No, no, it's a lovely place."

Dan Musser: So we stopped first at the hotel. We walked through and that looked like that would work. Went down to our house, which we got open quickly and had lunch. And then we moved on and looked at the Mission Point facilities. And they heated their buildings all winter, so that was pretty good. It wasn't like you working into our joint, which is zero or night before.

Bill Ballenger: Right, right.

Dan Musser: And came back and we got on the plane and went home. And we shook hands, on the way home, on a deal. And that's the only agreement I ever had with him.

Bill Ballenger: Wow.

Dan Musser: We never had a thing in writing.

Bill Ballenger: Jeez, that's great.

Dan Musser: We agreed to doing a lot of things that I figured I could get done. But one was Cars.

Bill Ballenger: Yeah, what about that?

Dan Musser: Well, that worked, they agreed. The Park Commission wasn't difficult on that. They were quite understanding. Council is a little different.

Bill Ballenger: They didn't want any cars?

Dan Musser: "We don't need any cars over here."

Bill Ballenger: But they finally agree reluctantly.

Dan Musser: Yes, yes, yeah.

Bill Ballenger: What about the name of the hotel?

Dan Musser: That was an interesting deal. They were up there to pre-shoot this thing, or pre-think about it. They were getting ready to shoot in another 10 days or so, so it was at Kentucky Derby day, which is a nice afternoon. And so I invited him to my house for drinks and watch the Kentucky Derby. And so he probably had 15 or 20 people down there. And we're watching the derby and we're talking and drinking and eating a little bit. Kensington Hotel was moving, that's the deal. And I said, "Why in the Christ wouldn't you call it Grand Hotel in Mackinac Island? That's where you are."

Bill Ballenger: Yes.

Dan Musser: And the director looked at the producer and he said, "I don't know, why not?" They had stuff printed and billed for Kensington.

Bill Ballenger: There's a place for you in Hollywood, you know.

Dan Musser: So we got that done, and that was good.

Bill Ballenger: That's great, that's a great story.

Dan Musser: We still have an annual meeting of the people who adore that movie.

Bill Ballenger: I was gonna say, it's almost become kind of a cult classic.

Dan Musser: Cult is exactly what it is.

Bill Ballenger: You know, really.

Dan Musser: But we still have 450 people meet with us in late October every year.

Bill Ballenger: Wow, amazing.

Dan Musser: to celebrate that movie.

Bill Ballenger: Wow, that's really interesting. Now, just as you became the only member of Stewart Woodfill's slightly extended family to take a real interest in the Grand Hotel and eventually become the proprietor and the driving main chief force behind all its success, your son, Dan, he's taken an interest, too? He's president, actually, of the Grand Hotel Company?

Dan Musser: Dan's running the joint now.

Bill Ballenger: He's running it? Oh, I can't believe it.

Dan Musser: Well, he's very happy that I'm there to assist him with it.

Bill Ballenger: He's certainly capable of it, I just can't imagine you would step aside.

Dan Musser: No, we've been able to turn a lot of ownership over to him. His sisters, he has one sister who works for us.

Bill Ballenger: Okay.

Dan Musser: He has another sister who's in Ann Arbor and does not. They owned a number of our facilities as a threesome, and he bought his sisters out, I don't know, five or six years ago on a slow note. And we've been able to transfer some stock to him, so he has a very substantive role. I think in another year or so, he's gonna be able to outvote Amelia and I. So maybe I won't be here. But he is certainly committed and he's the man today.

Bill Ballenger: Sure. He's married,

Dan Musser: He's married to Marlee Brown.

Bill Ballenger: Brown, who is the granddaughter of Prentiss Brown.

Dan Musser: Prentiss Brown.

Bill Ballenger: The U.S. Senator from Petoskey.

Dan Musser: Her father Paul Brown.

Bill Ballenger: Paul Brown.

Dan Musser: Who is the youngest child of Prentiss Brown.

Bill Ballenger: Right.

Dan Musser: Ran for Lieutenant Governor.

Bill Ballenger: Right, 1974, he was also, I think, a regent at the University of Michigan.

Dan Musser: Forever, for years.

Bill Ballenger: Yeah, yeah.

Dan Musser: That's right. And Paul now runs the Arnold Line at Mackinac Island.

Bill Ballenger: Okay. And so Dan and Marlee got to know each other pretty early on?

Dan Musser: Over the years.

Bill Ballenger: Over the years.

Dan Musser: And Dan was married after college, briefly, which didn't work out.

Bill Ballenger: Right.

Dan Musser: They found each other pretty soon thereafter. They were married, I think he was remarried within two or three years.

Bill Ballenger: Right.. Well, and so the Browns, has their been some kind of synergy between the Grand Hotel and the Browns all these years extending back to Senator Brown?

Dan Musser: Certainly true. Senator Brown was a receive Grand Hotel when it went broke in '29, and my uncle got it out of receivership and got the ownership of it.

Bill Ballenger: Was Prentiss Brown, was the attorney?

Dan Musser: No, he was the receiver.

Bill Ballenger: He was the receiver.

Dan Musser: Yes.

Bill Ballenger: Okay.

Dan Musser: And the attorney, too.

Bill Ballenger: And the attorney, too, okay. So there was a connection there, right?

Dan Musser: There was a connection, yeah. But if anyone that's in business in Mackinac County is involved with the Browns somehow.

Bill Ballenger: Sure.

Dan Musser: I mean, their tentacles are long, they have the bank.

Bill Ballenger: Right.

Dan Musser: Lots of property.

Bill Ballenger: Big family.

Dan Musser: Big family.

Bill Ballenger: Right.

Dan Musser: And they own and control the Arnold Line.

Bill Ballenger: Did Prentiss Brown or other Browns ever own property on the island?

Dan Musser: The Arnold Line does, a lot.

Bill Ballenger: The Arnold Line, sure, yeah.

Dan Musser: Which is theirs.

Bill Ballenger: Right.

Dan Musser: They must own a third of the downtown.

Bill Ballenger: Now the Arnold Line is the oldest of the three ferry lines up there?

Dan Musser: Yes, yes.

Bill Ballenger: Did they start it? It's called Arnold, was somebody named Arnold?

Dan Musser: It was a guy who named Arnold, guy was named Arnold.

Bill Ballenger: And what, the Browns bought it from him at some point?

Dan Musser: Yes, they did. Otto Lang worked for the Arnolds. And Otto Lang was not connected to the Browns, but became that. And with Otto, they bought the AT&T Company, I would guess in the 20's, but maybe the 30's.

Bill Ballenger: Looking at the Grand Hotel today, you obviously depend a lot on conventions and conferences and group meetings of various interest groups from around the state and country. But that wasn't necessarily always the case.

Dan Musser: I know, but Mr. Woodfill, I think was foresighted in thinking that we had to do that. And that's become the way of every sizable building in the country today.

Bill Ballenger: Sure.

Dan Musser: And I think that we've been as aggressive as anyone in our business in recruiting and trying to sell that kind of business.

Bill Ballenger: Right.

Dan Musser: And we're in it, that's the reason you're seated where you're seated right now. If we weren't hunting conventions, we wouldn't have a sales office here.

Bill Ballenger: Right.

Dan Musser: We should've been here long before we were.

Bill Ballenger: Right.

Dan Musser: This is the center of our universe.

Bill Ballenger: Well you've made up for lost time I think. You've done very well. What are some of the groups over the years that we might be aware of in Michigan that have come consistently to the Grand that Mr. Woodfill got?

Dan Musser: Michigan prosecutors started in the '30s.

Bill Ballenger: Prosecutor's Association.

Dan Musser: The Michigan Prosecutors, and I don't know the year, I know it was in the '30s.

Bill Ballenger: Yes.

Dan Musser: And they've been coming ever since. They missed a few in the war.

Bill Ballenger: Yes. Who are the apostles?

Dan Musser: The apostles, or the predecessor to the Capital Club, which is a lobbyist group. But I guess there must've been 10 apostles, I'm not sure of that. Bill Doyle was one of those.

Bill Ballenger: Yeah, they were lobbyists in Lansing.

Dan Musser: In Lansing.

Bill Ballenger: And so they would have their kind of like annual or semi-annual conference up there.

Dan Musser: Or whatever you wanna call it. We still host the Capital Club once a year.

Bill Ballenger: Banker's Association.

Dan Musser: The Michigan Bankers, the Michigan Hospital, our Michigan Architects and the Michigan Prosecutors have been the four most regular, but we have others now that have been coming.

Bill Ballenger: Oh sure.

Dan Musser: Michigan Knights of Columbus, which is different, not a trade association.

Bill Ballenger: Different kind, but still, a huge group.

Dan Musser: They've been with us since the early '50s.

Bill Ballenger: Right, so over half a century.

Dan Musser: That's right.

Bill Ballenger: These groups have all consistently been coming up, and now you've added to that.

Dan Musser: Thank the Lord.

Bill Ballenger: Well, I mean, you know, it makes you wonder how a resort like the Grand Hotel or other hotels on the island could've really prospered very well without this in the early years of the Twentieth Century.

Dan Musser: The thing that I think bring homes the fact and the truth is that my uncle was early able to understand, you could survive probably in July and August, but you can't make it in July and August, you need more revenue.

Bill Ballenger: You need more days in the year.

Dan Musser: That's right.

Bill Ballenger: Yeah, so you need June, you need September.

Dan Musser: And anyway you're gonna get the shoulder seasons better. And understand that my first year as manager in '62, we opened June 6th I think and closed

September 14. Last year we opened April 29 and went till October 26. And that's been our pattern of expanding, but we need more days.

Bill Ballenger:

Right.

Dan Musser:

The more we can get. It's not totally summer in April 29 or October 26.

Bill Ballenger:

Maybe global warming is a good thing.

Dan Musser:

That's true. Climate change.

Bill Ballenger:

Climate change, we gotta be careful here. One thing more. The biennial Mackinac Island Republican Conference held every odd numbered year, didn't that start out way back also in like the mid-50s or something. How did that happen?

Dan Musser:

Larry Lindemer and my uncle were friends.

Bill Ballenger:

And Larry Lindemer was the chairman of the Michigan Republican party at that time?

Dan Musser:

He must've been. Certainly if he wasn't chairman, he was most influential.

Bill Ballenger:

Yeah, okay.

Dan Musser:

And they made a deal to try this thing. And that happened and it's been here every other year since.

Bill Ballenger:

Ever since, yeah, absolutely.

Dan Musser:

Thank the Lord.

Bill Ballenger:

Yes. I think I first met you in the fall of 1965, if you can believe that, 44 years ago.

Dan Musser:

Up there.

Bill Ballenger:

At such a conference, absolutely.

Dan Musser:

Were you in the legislature then?

Bill Ballenger:

No, that was before, slightly before I was in the legislature, but that was only like the fourth or fifth conference of that sort you'd had. And you know, it's lasted, as you say, every two years ever since. In fact, I think the meeting they had this last fall they claim was the biggest attendance they ever had.

Dan Musser:

It's the first time we've been full with it in 15 or 20 years.

Bill Ballenger: 15 or 20 years. Well that's good. Well, listen, Dan Musser, unless you have something more you wanna tell me, you have been a goldmine of information.

Dan Musser: I don't know about that.

Bill Ballenger: Information and facts.

Dan Musser: Bill, it's always good talking with you and seeing you.

Bill Ballenger: Oh, listen, it's been great.

Dan Musser: You're right, if we met in '65, that's a while.

Bill Ballenger: Well that is, but you know, the Grand.

Dan Musser: Neither one of us were young then.

Bill Ballenger: Well that's right. You know, whatever, but the Grand has gone back even farther than that. Think of that.

Dan Musser: That's true.

Bill Ballenger: I mean, literally, 80 years before that.

Dan Musser: That's true.

Bill Ballenger: The Grand was just opening up. Thank you very much, Dan Musser.

Dan Musser: Thank you, Bill.

Bill Ballenger: It's been a great pleasure.

Dan Musser: It has been, too.