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Transcript of a sound recording in MS 608, WLBZ Radio Station Records, Bangor, Maine, 1931-1973

Title: Interview with Rufus Googins, Proprietor of the Jed Prouty Tavern in Bucksport

Date: November 19, 1954

Recording number: Reel-to-reel Tape 12

Length of recording: 15:50

Please note: Rufus Googins is particularly difficult to understand. This transcript is merely an attempt to help the listener navigate the audio recording and may include inaccuracies.

[transcript begins]

MINCHER: In the center of Bucksport, there sits a huge, white rambling structure known as the Jed Prouty Tavern, and that's where we're transcribing our feature story for tonight. Our guest will be Rufus Googins who is the proprietor of the tavern. And it certainly is a place that has a lot of history behind it. We're going to attempt to find out something about some of that history. How long have you been here in the tavern, Mr. Googins?

GOOGINS: Since 1895.

MINCHER: How old is the place?

GOOGINS: 158 years.

MINCHER: Let's see, that takes us back to...

GOOGINS: 1798.

MINCHER: 1798. Where did the name Jed Prouty Tavern come from?

GOOGINS: Well, Richard Golan, he was clerk here, and he were in a show and he assumed that name, see, and called it Jed Prouty and the whole thing was Prouty, leading actor was Jed Prouty and the whole thing was Jed, [?] around him

MINCHER: He played the lead in it?

GOOGINS: He played the lead of it, and made the script.

MINCHER: Well, but when was that approximately?

GOOGINS: 1890, uh 1890, started him.

MINCHER: What were some of the names of the tavern before that?

GOOGINS: Well Roberts House. Then of course it was the Maine House, but the main [?] was Robertson House, when it changed hands along in 1840, a number of people tried to run it for six months. And then they made [?] and then Mr. Moses came in 1853 and he held on until he died in 1890 and then I,

and then his widow run it, and I took the reins over in 1898 to do the whole business. I worked around here, you know, lugging trunks and everything

MINCHER: Were you born in Bucksport, or...

GOOGINS: Yes, native of Bucksport born right on the, 1875

MINCHER: Well there wasn't any, there wasn't any real Jed Prouty then, was there?

GOOGINS: No, it's true, no Jed Prouty.

MINCHER: The next thing to real, though.

GOOGINS: Well, [?] was, the next thing.

MINCHER: Well some, some quite famous people have stayed here through the years?

GOOGINS: Oh yes, we've had four presidents. William Henry Harrison, John Tyler, Andrew Jackson [Martin?] Van Buren. And there's some big liars, Daniel Webster, Ben Butler, and then we had Jeff Davis below the Mason-Dixon Line. I don't know what happened, what [?] the Mason-Dixon Line was all [?]. He was a big lawyer you know.

MINCHER: Oh yes, that's right. The uh... I was wondering how many rooms are the here at the tavern?

GOOGINS: Well, we have 17 sleeping rooms, that is, but it had about 25.

MINCHER: Now how many of the, what are some of the old features of the place which, uh, you've tried to keep it pretty much in tact?

GOOGINS: Oh, I've not touched it, only kept it clean. We got fireplaces in the old dining room. They all set at one table, you know. That is where the long boarding house reach came in, you know. The food was all put on the table and everybody reach. Fella got the first [?] he was all right.

MINCHER: How about, we're sitting in the kitchen, by the way, where we're making this tape recording and there's a... could you tell us a little bit about the kitchen?

GOOGINS: Well, it's just as is. It's no changes, not a thing. It's kind of tipping, but nevertheless gone the limit, see [?]. No trouble about it.

MINCHER: [Laughing] How about the oven over there?

GOOGINS: There's the oven that they used to cook all the vegetables in a big pot, you know. Then they only had the potatoes and turnips, they didn't have any green stuff then, you know.

MINCHER: Well, there's a that oven was what, along side a big fire place? Did you tell me?

GOOGINS: Oh, yes, the draft went through bricked into the fireplace and everything went up one chimney. Chimney is very large. You can walk right out, walk up, crawl up through them if you want to, you know.

MINCHER: Now the, the stove there is one of the biggest that I have ever seen outside of a restaurant

GOOGINS: Well, that's a real old country stove, you know

MINCHER: Now how old is that would you say?

GOOGINS: Oh must have been there since 1870. Been there, I know, still at it, going strong. Burns a cord of wood a week.

MINCHER: [Laughing] Well, that's almost expensive in upkeep.

GOOGINS: Well, that's all right, as a man had to do something beside lay abed in the mornings, you know, got to get up and get the wood up.

MINCHER: Well now, how about out in the out in the lobby? There's some, still some old features out there?

GOOGINS: Why, yes, everything's just the same, the lobby's just the same, only except in the old, the old stairway, and all things around it. That's the old stove out there. Everybody used to chew [?] and had a sand box around it years ago before they put the feet on a rail and in the morning you scrape up tobacco [?] you could find, chew tobacco and spit at it. They try to hit the stove, but they couldn't, and they'd go down through, you know.

MINCHER: Well, you used to do some cooking here, didn't you?

GOOGINS: Oh yeah, I did the broiling. We all broiled, there was just broil and boil, there was no frying then.

MINCHER: Well, you don't you don't cook anymore for guests now, do you?

GOOGINS: No, we had to get out of that because people only get up in the morning, a cigarette and a glass of water is all they have for breakfast. [Mincher laughs in background.] See? And they eat a lunch for noon and at night, they're alright.

MINCHER: Ruf Googins has been described to me as being a character before, and I guess that the people who told me that were certainly right. I'm having more fun making this tape than I think any other one we've done so far. Well, what was tavern life like back in the old days, when this place was...

GOOGINS: Well in tavern life, the cook always went out and meet the guests. He went out, when the guests come in, he went out there an old white apron on and he'd have a soup ladle in one hand and a boot knife the other. [?] And he showed he was a good cook, if there isn't too much grease on his hand and sleeves, don't you know they slip off, and he'd wipe his hand on his apron, don't you know, perhaps his nose at the same time [?]

MINCHER: The common idea of a tavern today is a place mainly for drinking

GOOGINS: Yes, that's the way, that's, but then they didn't. They was an old-fashioned tavern keeper, you know, he was what they call [?] host [?] would say. Those days are not. There's no more host. You go to hotel now wouldn't know who runs it, who owns it, or anything.

MINCHER: That's very true.

GOOGINS: There no hand of a fellowship. They just want your money.

MINCHER: What about some of the prices back in the ...

GOOGINS: Oh they're way back. A dollars a day 25 cents, your breakfast 25, cents your bread, dinner and all, 25 cents each. If you had a horse, we'd feed the horse, but him to bed for a quarter. Had good luck, all right. If you got your pay, you're lucky, then.

MINCHER: Well what did some of the the, the meals consist of of?

GOOGINS: Well there's our roast you know and nothing boiled, corn beef, and salt mackerel. You'd serve also salt mackerel for breakfast because there used to be quite liberal drinkers. At night they'd drink rum and feel bad in the morning, but a good salt mackerel, [?] you know just good as [?] indigestion bubbles or anything like that it cure them all of that stuff. Didn't have to take any. That's a fact, oh, well, we used to buy the salt mackerel in kegs, boy them boys, them old traveling men go for salt mackerel. Now all we use tomato soup, where they can't do that anymore.

MINCHER: Well, how were the, how were the rooms lighted and heated, and so forth?

GOOGINS: Well, they were heated by an old airtight stove.

MINCHER: What was that like?

GOOGINS: Well the stove, the drum was a very thin iron, more of a thin... and oh you could heat the room up with a newspaper, if you you got one, but we only had them once a week. And that's not too much then there's not too much now, Bangor Whig and Courier, some of them fellas down

MINCHER: Now there's no there are no keys.

GOOGINS: No never had a key. Never had the door locked in the world. Never locked the front doors, you can't now.

MINCHER: That so?

GOOGINS: No, never had any trouble. They go to bed and, don't you know, there were nobody wondering and round and the girls didn't get out of their room when they run away lights, or any

MINCHER: Well how about some of the, there must have been a lot of stories, anecdotes, and yarns and so forth, pile up through the years. Can you think of a of a couple of stories, for us, maybe some..

GOOGINS: I don't know what to tell about, yarns, how about, boy, you got me now. Tell those yarns about getting a fellow up in the morning. They couldn't do that, that is went all over the country. There was an old fella that come in and want to stay all night. We had three trains a day then. The train went out six o'clock the morning. The old fellow ahead of me he got up, he stayed awake all night to get that fella's breakfast, you know. God, he went up to snoring like a devil, you know. He had to get breakfast 5:30 and they call him, and call him, and say ain't you going to go [?] by god, it's rainin. He's says by God you are goin. He got 'em at the back, hauled him out of bed made him to kick him into street. Now that's a fact. It went all over the country. Everybody else [?] Do those things, [?] way to go, then of course...

MINCHER: Can you think of anything else, maybe something that uh, anything unusual that's happened here in the in the tavern while

[A woman's voice is heard faintly in the background.]

MINCHER: Here's a hint from Mrs. Googins

MRS. GOOGINS: The fellow that came and asked you to find a minister.

GOOGINS: Well we had that the other night. He come in here and wanted me to do everything, even up to modern times, they come into town and wanna get married and they say go see Ruf Googins. They want to bury anybody, they come see Ruf Googins, but I have to tell him I'll have to dig a hole, but this fella come in here and want to get married. He run away with a girl, says what am I going to do? I says, I [?] for ya, I ain't a Justice of the Peace, but we got the minister up and worked it out all right, and he got married. He give the minister \$5 and then a few years ago [Afton Summers Roads?] come in one night. He was a great writer, you know. He come in here five o'clock, no three o'clock in the morning, he wanted to get married. I didn't know him, didn't know who he was. He was running away with a woman down in Bucksport. So I went got Dr. [Clark?] and doc says we got a job on a hand do says what's the matter? Well this fella wants to get married. Well, I give him away but I don't know who the devil he was, a fella who wrote a story and wrote a lot of books that time. [A S R] was great writer. don't ya know.

But after those weddings, things like that, of course people come in, they want different kind of rooms and they, I had a woman come up here, and I guess you've heard this from Dr. Fellows. She wanted fancy, years ago they used to come in chauffeurs, a man's chauffeur, and footmen, don't you know. That's when they first stood out. They'd unload more bag grips, you know, they brought the cumulation's of a life time with them. She wanted to know if I had a room with a bath. She wanted to give a dollar. I said good god, so would I. When they told that about her, I did so but I don't want [?]. That was years ago.

MINCHER: Well, I understand that besides the tavern here, you own some land in Bucksport and that you've decided to set some of it aside

GOOGINS: Right across the street, that open piece of property there, was gonna set that across street for a playground for 'em, have a good time. The town Garden Club was going to take it over.

MINCHER: So, it's going to be a public park?

GOOGINS: Yeah sure, now, so they can go down, sit down, sure.

MINCHER: Has any, any work been done on it yet or

GOOGINS: No just filled it in, that's all.

MINCHER: And they're going to

GOOGINS: Mrs. Young, [Annie?] Young up the road, she was going to tend it with her father's very loans or just looks at... She's gonna fix it all up.

MINCHER: It's going to be a planted and so forth?

GOOGINS: That's right. Centerpiece and everything.

MINCHER: And there's a dedication scheduled for sometime

GOOGINS: I hope so... after donate, I hope so.

MINCHER: Next year?

GOOGINS: Next year. Next spring. Yes, we're gonna make it, I hope so, right out at the front the road, I hope they'll use it well.

[Silence at 12:36 to 12:48]

MINCHER: Well, we've enjoyed talking to you, Rufus Googins, and I'm sure that people who have enjoyed listening to this program will also enjoy reading in Downeast Magazine, something relatively new here in Maine which was, began publication this year. Phil Buxton, who was the editor of the Bucksport Free Press has written an article about the Jet Prouty Tavern, Rufus Googins and Mrs. Googins and some of the characters who have now passed into history who have had a hand in the making of Bucksport. The, I believe that that's going to be out in the January issue of Down East, Down East Magazine, which is published in Camden. Thanks a lot. Anything to say before we say good night?

GOOGINS: Oh, I don't know. It's a very good town to live in, a person would say. We've had a number of murders here but never convicted anybody yet. [Group laughing] Never, never convicted any murderers.

MINCHER: Thank you very much.

GOOGINS: I don't know of anything else I could tell you. I'd go a little rank. I don't want to do that. But that's a fact. You know it. [Name, and second name] McClendon and everything. I could take them out to the cemetery and show them those signs they got out in the graveyard, don't want to do that

MRS. GOOGINS: That isn't ours is it

GOOGIS: That isn't nice, boy uh, if I could think of something, when I'm, oh geeze, I don't know. You can come down again and you and I will have a talk.

MINCHER: OK, I should be glad to.

GOOGINS: Well, I'd be glad to take you around, and show ya. That's a fact. Never had a, never convicted a murderer. By god, I don't know how they got away with it.

MINCHER: I'd like to come down sometime, when you've got, to stay a minute, to kind of proul around.

GOOGINS: Well, I'll take you around. Take some summer afternoon and take you up in the attic, all around. Show you the place up there where they used to steam them out when they got drunk. Had one of them cages and you could take it up. Don't you know that thing there, they had a box in the steps right around, like that woman, there. Sit him in there, in the chair, close him right up. And they had a little light on the right. You don't have to go on to Colorado from salsa bar. We got the cure right up there. We got the [profit?] but never cured anybody. They all drank and made their own rum.

MRS. GOOGINS: He's got one of the first wheelchairs.

GOOGINS: And they used to give them all they could drink for ten cents.

MINCHER: In Bucksport, you mean?

[Talking over each other, hard to discern]

MRS GOOGINS: Oh, dear. I got an old sewing machine in here that's, well, must be 100 years old. At least.

GOOGINS: What's that?

MRS. GOOGINS: The old sewing machine.

GOOGINS: Well, yeah, show him all through the dining room, show him the old crafts, the things, you know. He's got 10 minutes, you can show him around.

MINCHER: Well, I'll uh...

[Recording ends]

[transcript ends]

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