Barbara Frey: Okay, I'm at Mrs. Frank Dufresne’s [Anna Mildred Mueller Dufresne] house talking with her and her sister in law, Mrs. Julia Dufresne Van Holt, who also lives in Milltown. Today is February 24, 1976.

This is the first picture I've seen of sheep in this period. Did everyone have sheep, or did many people have sheep at that time?

Julia Van Holt: Every family—if they could—had sheep. I had sheep. They would shear the wool, wash it, spin it, and knit it.

BF: They made their own yarn?

JVH: Many of them did, yes. I used to card the wool.

BF: What did they use to dye the colors, do you remember?

JVH: I think they bought commercial.

BF: Commercial dyes. Can you remember your mother with a spinning wheel and—

JVH: Oh, I remember.

BF: How many sheep would you have at one time? Two or three, or—

JVH: We had about five or six.

BF: So sheep in the valley were a common sight around the turn of the century?

JVH: Yes, they were. Not these great huge flocks like you see now. Mother always used to keep one black one so we could have black wool to mix with the white.

BF: The black with the white. So you always had one black sheep. (laughs)
Goldie Dufresne: My maiden name was Goldie DuFresne.

Unidentified Female Speaker: Cole.

GD: No! Goldie Cole Dufresne. So long—45 years. I was born in Missoula. My father [George Alfred Cole] was an early day sheriff in Missoula. When I went out to teach school at Six Mile, I was just out of high school and had a few months in normal school. That's where I met Julian who's an old timer out there.

BF: What year did you teach school?

GD: [Nineteen] twenty-four and twenty-five. I taught out there two years.

BF: That was at the Six Mile school?

GD: Six Mile.

BF: Okay. Now we'll go to you. Tell us your name and when you were born.

Julian Dufresne: Julian Dufresne. I was born February 11, 1902. I was raised up there on Nine Mile. What else do you want to know?

BF: Well, we'll go over here, and then we'll come back.

Margaret Dufresne: I'm Margaret Dufresne. Margaret Allen. My dad had that place that is now the remount station [Nine Mile Remount Station].

BF: Oh, so you were born there?

MD: No. I was born in Wyoming in 1905. I came to Montana in 1910.

William Dufresne: I was born in 1894 in Canada at Saint Maurice, Quebec. I was six months old when we came here.

BF: You were born in Canada before your family came here.

JD: I was six months old when we went.

BF: Oh, my goodness. They traveled from Canada to here with a six-month old baby, and you made it. (laughs)
WD: Six children. I was the sixth one.

BF: Six older children?

Julian: Five older children. I was the youngest of the six. I had five older brothers and sisters. We came to Montana in May. It took a month on the train to get here, and they couldn’t speak English!

BF: Isn’t that something with a tiny baby?

GD: And they couldn’t speak English.

BF: Do you have any idea why they came to Frenchtown valley particularly?

WD: Mother’s sister was here. Six Mile. She was here first, Clara Matt.

BF: Do you know why they came? Has anyone ever passed the story down?

WD: Mr. Matt was here first. Then he came back to Canada and married my aunt, and they came here. At least that’s what they told me. (laughs)

Anna Mueller Dufresne: The conditions in Canada at that time...there were fewer jobs than there were people. The people had large families, and there weren’t too many industrial opportunities or farming opportunities. Most of the land was held by seigneurs. So they needed jobs.

BF: Was Mr. Matt...did he have relatives from that area? Was that why he went there, and then he met...?

JD: Yes, he was born there.

BF: Did your father have a job waiting for him, or did he come just hoping to find one?

JD: Fred Matt said he would help him find one.

BF: What did your father do then when he came? Did he work in the sawmill there at Huson?

AMD: First they went to Cyr Spur. They weren’t there very long. Mr. Matt worked on the railroad when he came out here first. He worked on the construction of the railroad. That is why he was here so early.

BF: Your family lived at Huson first before they moved up Nine Mile?
JD: Yes, yes.

GD: Huson first and then over there.

That was the one near Frenchtown?

Ya, ya.

JD: First Huson, then we moved to the old Raymond (?) place near Frenchtown.

GD: What was the name of the man that had the place for a long time?

BF: Oh, part of the Donians.

GD: By 1900 they were there.

BF: Then when they moved up Nine Mile, did they homestead up there?

JD: No. They bought land—from Jack Hanratty.

BF: Just bought land and the ranch.

AMD: Was it Miller or Hanratty (?)? Now why is it...? I was looking at these land deeds last night, and I thought that Miller had to do with it. There was a Miller that they gave some sort of a deed to. But Henreddy was one of them too. Henreddy was one who had a sawmill...

JD: I don’t know. Jack Hanratty had the sawmill there. That’s where we went sawmilling. Remember the sawdust pile there. That’s where we went and saw the (unintelligible) before we were born, I should say.

AMD: At Nine Mile.

BF: Then how long did your family live up Nine Mile? Did your parents live there until they died? Or did they go somewhere from there?

AMD: They moved to Milltown in 1938. Mother died in 1941.

BF: Oh, to Milltown.

JD: Not for very long, I’ll have to check. That was 1939, so it’d be 1938.

BF: Were you parents buried in Missoula then, I suppose?
JD: Yes.

BF: All of you went to school out there at the Six Mile school. Then where did you go to high school? You didn't...

JD: Yes, we all went to the Six Mile School, but none of us went to high school. Some years the school year only lasted three months.

GD: I taught there two years, and it was about eight months a term.

JVH: That was much later. In our day the term lasted four months, then later six months.

BF: No wonder you didn't go very long. Why bother?

Were you Catholics? Did you belong to St. John's Church? Did you find that that was a big part of your social...every Sunday? You can remember that?

WF: Oh yes. St. John's Day was our main social event. That was our big day.

BF: You hope to reenact it. Well, that would be good. Why don't we talk about that for a minute? Why don't you tell me what you can remember about early St. John's days? What did you do first thing in the morning, and how did the day go?

JD: We still had to do our chores. We had to milk the cows.

JVH: We had to spend the morning baking pies, making bread, and getting the chicken or whatever we had that year ready for the dinner. I remember that.

BF: Then did you all pile in the buggy and plan to be there for a whole day.

WD: We took the wagon.

JD: It took a wagon for us. Eight kids.

BF: There are eight of you in your family.

JD: All together there were 13 kids in our family, but by then some of them were gone. A lot of them were gone before I was born.

GD: We've been married for 53 years.

BF: Well, congratulations. That's wonderful.
GD: Going for 54 this year.

BF: That's great. That's a long time.

JVH: Our oldest brothers and sisters had gone by then, but I remember Ernest. He was sick, and he wanted to see the twins before he died so they put Julian and I on the foot of his bed. I still remember that.

JD: I remember that too.

BF: How old were you then?

JVH: About three years old. We didn't know why. We just play on the bed. The next day he was gone.

WD: We sure hated those kids. We had to take care of them. (laughs)

BF: Were you the babies? Were there younger than you?

JD: Yes. There was one after us, but it died. The doctor was on the way when we were born, but he didn’t get there in time.

BF: With such a large family then to suddenly have twins no wonder they can remember. No doctors?

JD: Mrs. Lebert, a midwife, was the doctor.

BF: Was she from Huson, the Huson area?

BF: Is it L-i-e-b-e-e-r-t?

Woman: L-e-b-e-r-t, isn’t it?

BF: What was her husband's name, do you remember?

Julian: John Baptiste.

(unintelligible)

BF: You mean that, she died?

JD: She died before the war (unintelligible).
JVH: Marnier died in 1937. Dad died three or four years after her. She died in '41.

AMD: I’ve found something here that might be of interest to you. It’s the prospectus of the Stoney Creek Coal Company, a corporation. It has no date on it, of course, but it would have been in the early teens when Larry Stevens came up there.

JVH: It was about 1913.

AMD: “Owns a group of coal mines…” et cetera. It gives a list of names here (reads parts of the article) It’s too bad there isn’t a date on it.

WD: I remember helping in the mine for a while. I would pick up slabs of coal. It was dripping in there.

MD: Was it a good grade of coal?

JD: It was a good grade of coal. The water kept them from—

MD: Nowadays they would be able to take care of that.

BF: Did you family use coal to help heat your house? Did most of the people use coal for heat?

JD: You bet.

BF: What did they do with the coal after it was mined?

WD: They shipped it out. It was really too hard to get. It was only opened for a while.

JD: I was opened between six months and a year.

WD: I used to be scared to death in there. The timbers would crack. Opie would say to me, “Don’t worry, don’t worry!”

BF: How old would you have been then?

WD: About 11 or 12.

JD: We were seven when we moved up there so we were about 9 or 10.

AMD: During the early ’30s—the Depression—it was worked at again.

JD: Do you have the picture that Larry Stevens took of the whole bunch of them that worked
there?

AMD: Maybe Lucian took it? I don’t know where it would be.

BF: Was Lucian your brother? I was several World War One pictures of him at Dona Corr’s last week.

JD: Yes, he was our brother. He was the only one that went to the service. He wasn’t gone very long—just a year.

(Discussion of pictures)

BF: Can you remember the fire in Frenchtown?

WD: Oh yes!

BF: Were you there? Was that the St. John’s Day fire or the earlier one?

WD: We never missed a St. John’s Day.

BF: Well, I know there was a fire on St. John’s Day, but that was later. I think it may have been in the ‘30s, but there was a fire in about 1911 when one whole side of the street burned. Can you remember that?

(Interviewees answer in the affirmative saying they remember Mrs. Hamel’s hotel burning down.)

WD: The fire started in the hotel.

JVH: I can remember going to church, and all that was left of the hotel was a safe. The Hamel girl, Blanch, she was just wild. “Look at that! I wonder if the money burned!” The safe was leaning.

AMD: I think you’re right, Julian. She [refers to Mrs. Agnes Gerard Dufresne, William, Julia, and Julian’s mother] was born in 1864 and was married in 1885, and in 1885 she would have been 21. She died on the 24th of December 1937. She was going to be 74 that December.

(Discussion of birth and death records written by Agnes Dufresne. Noted that babies, because of high infant mortality rate, were baptized as soon as possible after they were born, usually within one or two days. Some children were confirmed on the same day they had their first Communion.)

BF: When you first went to teach school there, how many pupils did you have?
GD: There were some in every grade. I must have had about ten. The little first graders could hardly speak English.

BF: Did you speak any French?

GD: Well, I had had two years of French in high school. It helped me some, and of course, I lived right there with George’s family. When you live with a family, you pick up a lot of it, none of which I remember now.

BF: Was George a Dufresne?

GD: Yes, he was the older son. He’s dead now.

MD: William’s first teacher was Margaret Murphy.

GD: Julian’s first grade teacher is still living in Missoula. Florence Irving Shannon. She’s gotten so fragile, poor old thing. I still can remember my first graders, Cecilia and Brian. They were so cute. Blanche, their mother was a Dufresne, but they were Lanoues. They had such cute French accents. For calendar, they would say ca-LEN-dar.

JD: I can remember riding to school in that surrey with Frank. It didn’t have the fringe on top.

(unintelligible conversation)

Two of the family are nuns—Sister Vicenza.

JD: I can remember when I first went to school I didn’t speak a word of English. My teacher would talk to me, and I would look at her. I didn’t understand a word she was talking about. Her name is Florence Irving Shannon. She lives in the Orchard Homes.

BF: Were you the only twins in the area?

JD: Aunt Matt had twins, but they died. The Longpres had twins.

JVH: Fred and Fredlina Longpre. Mrs. Scheffer’s brother and sister.

GD: When they were children, the Indians used to come down to their place and visit.

WD: We used to watch them go by the house.

JD: They used to sell us huckleberries. I remember that. Mother used to buy huckleberries from them.

Julia Dufresne Van Holt, Julian Dufresne, Goldie Cole Dufresne, Margaret Allen Dufresne, William Dufresne, Anna Mildred Mueller Dufresne Interview, OH 047-003, Archives and Special Collections, Mansfield Library, University of Montana–Missoula.
MD: They used to have these travois they would pull.

JD: They would camp near Richardson’s. It was kind of a halfway house. They would camp overnight.

JVH: Mother would bake bread, and they would want that bread. So they would trade moccasins and dolls. I had a doll for a long time. They gave Mother beads.

GD: That was their way of paying.

BF: Which Indians were these, and where were they going to and from?

JD: The Flatheads, and they were going up to Fish Creek to hunt.

BF: Did they come from the Bitterroot?

WD: The Bitterroot, yes.

BF: Did they camp near your house?

JVH: They always stopped because they thought Mother was great.

WD: No. They would camp near Richardson’s on Six Mile Creek. They had about four dogs, and they would bark all night.

BF: Did they have their wives and children with them?

JD: Oh yes! Everyone would go. They would be dragging little children behind them.

BF: Did they speak French to you or English?

WD: They wouldn’t talk. They would just mumble. The bucks were very dirty. They had long hair and would always wear hats. The old squaw had a blanket wrapped around her.

JVH: I can still remember the papoose on their backs.

JD: No. They had the papoose in the travois pulled by the horse. You could see the little papoose’s face sticking out.

BF: How long would they be in the Fish Creek area?

WD: Oh, about a month. They were hunting.
BF: Were you afraid of them? Do you remember being afraid?

JD: Mother was. We weren’t.

WD: She would call us bank in the house when we would want to go and watch them.

JD: We were so curious about them.

MD: I can remember my grandmother telling me when I was about 12 years old about the Indians.

BF: Did the same families come every year? Would you recognize them?

JD: Oh yes. They knew us, and every year the same families would come to our house.

WD: They weren’t mean Indians.

JD: No, no. They were real nice.

MD: Grandma Allan told me one time she would bake a great big batch of bread. In 1882 a bunch of Indians came to her door, and they were on the war path! They were all painted and everything. One of the Indians rode his horse right into the door. They were telling her they were hungry by making signs so she passed out all the bread she had. She was scared to death of them. She wanted to get rid of them.

[End of Side A]
BF: Could I see that sometime? (refers to Dufresne’s book on Indian translation and something about Fort Owen)

JD: Mr. Scheffer was at Fort Fizzle. He told me the story himself.

BF: Did the Indians ever cause anybody any trouble? Did they rob things or hurt anybody?

JD: Not that we know about.

BF: What we would like to do, if we could, is take pictures of your Indian artifacts for our book. (Goldie Dufresne says, as an aside, “We have Indian gauntlets, too.”) If your articles are from the same Indians that camped near you, they would excellent.

JD: They are. They are from the Salish Kootenai. I promised the books to my son someday, but you can take any pictures you want to. We also have the sword from one of the early day leaders at the fort. It was given to us by the McCormick granddaughter. It wasn’t Captain Rob’s, but one of the other early day soldiers. WE have an old hand-carved boat that was supposed to have been carved by Father Ravalli. That’s what they told me. That’s our son’s too.

Speaking of Lejeuneusse (?), she was Yvonne’s grandmother. Who were he parent in Frenchtown? Our son married—

JVH: She was related to Mrs. Longpre. They were cousins, I think.

GD: Our son married a descendant from the Frenchtown area. Mary Jo’s grandmother was a Lejeunesse, and she was a Longpre. Is that it? Yvonne says she is related to the Longpres.

JVH: Mrs. Longpre was related to the Scheffers. She might have been a Scheffer.

GD: She always says—Yvonne, that’s our son’s mother-in-law—that her relatives were the Longpres. Bill Longpre is related.

JVH: Mrs. Longpre is a Rose.

AMD: No, she was a Ledoux.

JVH: That was Absolom’s wife. Mrs. Pete Longpre was a Rose. Mrs. Annie Rose Longpre.

JD: Yes, that’s right. Annie Rose.

GD: We were saying that we would like to go back to Quebec, and she said, “Be sure to look up the Longpres that are still there.” I didn’t know there were still Longpres there.
JD: We all probably still have some relatives back there. Your Uncle Jack, Johnnie Reeves and I were really good friends.

BF: Is Johnnie Reeves the one who drowned?

JD: Yes. His aunt lives across the street from us.

GD: No, his aunt isn’t the one that lives across from us. That’s Mamie. She’s the teacher. [Mrs. Cecil] Reeves lives across from us. Mamie lives in Missoula Manor. She taught at Six Mile years before I did.

JVH: What happened to her sister Laura?

JD: I haven’t really talked to her enough to find out. Laura is still alive. She lives here in Missoula in some apartment.

AMD: Do you have any pictures of the Six Mile School?

GD: No. I may have had one at one time.

AMD: I just had the one that showed a little piece of it.

WD: We have one of just the flag pole.

MD: Yes, Bill was climbing the flag pole. He put the flag back up.

BF: Was that at the Six Mile School?

WD: It doesn’t show the school. Just the flag pole.

GD: The early days of teaching were sure different than they are now. We used to be our own janitors and build our own fires and do our own cleaning.

BF: Who has the land now where your family used to live.

Multiple Speakers: We don’t know. It has been sold many times.

MD: The Forest Service still call the remount [Nine Mile Remount Depot] the Allan Ranch. My Dad was the last one to have it before the Forest Service bought it. No, Dad sold it to Jack Ray, and Jack sold it to the FS.

BF: Can you remember any epidemics or any situation that sticks particularly in your mind
where a lot of people died or were hurt.

WD: The worst epidemic was the flu during 1918. My sister died.

JVH: Our aunt died the same year your grandmother did [Clara Cyr 1923] during the flu epidemic.

WD: What about the fire of 1910? I remember that. It was dark at three in the afternoon. We had to go out and pick the chickens up.

JD: The chickens all stayed out in the field, and it got dark. They couldn’t find their way home. Papers and ashes from Wallace floated down in our yard.

WD: The stumps were all covered with ashes. Even our home was covered with ashes.

BF: Did a lot of your neighbors go to fight the fires? Did any of your family go?

JD: We didn’t go, but I think some of the neighbors went. I can’t remember.

JVH: Wasn’t that the same year of the flood when the bridge washed out, and people couldn’t go to Huson?

JD: That was the flood of 1908. The railroad bridge went out.

JVH: People couldn’t go to Huson because the water was too high.

WD: We watched a chicken house go floating by. There were chickens sitting on top of the roof!

JD: I remember that too. We were just six years old.

BF: Were you stranded in Huson?

JVH: No. It was at the start of Mill Creek (?). Nobody could get any groceries. I remember a lot of them couldn’t get back.

BF: How long was the river flooding?

WD: It took the railroad bridge at Huson.

JD: It stopped the train that goes to Wallace. Remember when Dad got lost? It was during the fire!

Julia Dufresne Van Holt, Julian Dufresne, Goldie Cole Dufresne, Margaret Allen Dufresne, William Dufresne, Anna Mildred Mueller Dufresne Interview, OH 047-003, Archives and Special Collections, Mansfield Library, University of Montana–Missoula.
BF: The 1910 fire?

JD: Yes. He went after the priest, and after taking the priest back to Frenchtown, he couldn't find his way back. He let the horse got, but the horse took the railroad track instead of the road, see, when he got to Huson.

WD: It was black—he couldn’t see anything.

JD: He couldn’t see a thing so Mr. Cadieux was the one who caught Dad going down the track. He turned him around and started him on the right road. The horse made it home. Dad couldn’t see. He had to just let the horse go.

BF: That was during the middle of the afternoon...the day?

JD: Yes. It must have been about four in the afternoon. You couldn’t see a thing—in the summertime!

MD: Why was he getting the priest?

JVH: That was when Frederick was born.

JD: Yes. 1910. He was born in 1910.

BF: I imagine you fellows can remember Prohibition?

Everyone: Yes.

WD: I saw the sheriff [Goldie Dufresne’s father] chasing the bootleggers. He asked me if I saw the car go up, and I told him I didn’t see any car but he went up anyway. Pretty soon he came back down. He hit a horse at the corner of the fence. There were a bunch of horses up Six Mile. They wouldn’t move out of his way so he hit one.

GD: He used to go after Thibadeau.

MD: In the book about our school, I tell about how he was hanging on the back of the car instead of on the running board, and his coat tails were flying. Away he went up the Blackfoot. They dropped him off somewhere.

GD: Yes, indeed. He used to chase old Bill Thibadeau. He was quite the slick old French bootlegger.

BF: Was he from Frenchtown?
GD: No, he was from Missoula.

MD: He was part of our story. Milltown had five saloons in a row.

BF: My dad talks about Petite Blanc Tremblay.

WD: That’s Frank Tremblay.

JD: Those were the good old days.

MD: When was this picture taken in front of the mine?

JVH: About 1913.

BF: Who was the lady that had the grand piano?

JD: Mrs. Blanchard. We didn’t know her, but we remember her playing. That was just above our ranch aways. She lived in the log cabin. I don’t know how she ever got the piano in the cabin.

BF: Maybe they built around it. Do you know what her husband’s name was or what her first name was?

JD: No. All we knew was Mrs. Blanchard. We didn’t know why she was there or where she came from. They used to have a logging camp above there.

JVH: I think they used to have dances, and she would play for them.

BF: Would you go and listen to her play?

JD: No. I don’t really remember her. I just remember that piano.

WD: Alexander Lanoue was a bartender during the 1800s.

MD: Who else did you say was there?

[Ida Richardson’s grandfather was Alexander Lanoue. Peter Matt also tended bar for Napoleon Glaude.]

GD: There are some Indian graves up Nine Mile. That was part of their sacred burial ground. Dufresnes all knew about it, but we’ve kind of kept quiet about it. We didn’t want people to be digging everywhere.

MD: It’s probably part of the Dale Moore Ranch now. They probably don’t know about them.

GD: And we’re not going to tell them. I took a course in anthropology out at the university [University of Montana?] once, and we got to talking about the graves. They wanted to know where those graves were, and I told them, “I’m sorry, but I have no idea.”

BF: Did they bury their dead underground, or did they put them up in the trees like the Sioux did?

GD: There they buried them under ground.

JD: I think they burned their dead, and then buried the bones. That’s what I was told.

BF: You had cousins—I know the Plourds and the Matts were your cousins. Did you all get together on Sundays?

Everyone: Oh yes.

JD: New Year’s was always at our place. After butchering there was a whole week of celebrating.

JVH: Everyone would stay at our place for a week. From one holiday to the next, we would stay from one aunt’s place to another. We would make the rounds.

MD: They didn’t give or get their gifts on Christmas day or Christmas Eve. They exchanged them on New Year’s.

BF: Oh! Is that a French custom?

MD: French Canadian. Christmas was for religion.

WD: We would always go to midnight mass.

(Discussion about Mrs. Plourd and identifying people in photos.)

WD: I remember Mr. Bourgoise had the first car around, and he had a heck of a time with it.

JD: He was shaky anyway. The least thing would go wrong, and honestly, he would carry on! He used to go to mass. He had to crank it. He was afraid of the thing anyway. He was scared to death. He would say a prayer before he would crank it.

BF: Did you know most of the Frenchtown people, or were you mainly friends with the people from the Huson area?
JVH: We knew pretty near everyone. They would all come to church, you see.

JD: At St. John’s Day, we knew everybody.

BF: Did you join in the horse races?

WD: They had them of course, but I was a foot runner. I remember, I won. I was about 11 or 12.

MD: He was a fast runner. Hardly anyone could beat him. When he was little at those St. John races, he was always a winner.

JVH: It is too bad they discontinued the St. John’s Day. I ran in those races, too, and I won a box of candy.

JD: I was too shy. I didn’t want to race.

WD: John Boyer was a prizefighter. He scared all the Houle’s. There weren’t any around when he got through.

[End of Interview]