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Interview with Blanche, Flore, and Ed Hamel
March 31, 1976

Ethel: One of the things we would like to know more about is your memories of the Western Hotel. Can you tell us about the parties and dances?

Blanche: The parties and dances. They were very numerous because of course, there were no cars in those days.

Flore: They started to dance early. At midnight they would serve a great big dinner. Turkey, suckling geese, suckling pig, and everything you can imagine. We had a Chinese cook and he was just wonderful. The things he would bake— the cakes and pies—Blanche 2 TeeLee. You probably saw the picture Charlie Rose had of him.

Flore: And Mr. Trehan, Jules Trehan played the violin and someone else played the piano. There was another one that played the fiddle Mr. Primeau.

Blanche: And Johnnie parent played the accordion.

Flore: We always had a lot of dances.

Barbara: Did the hotel sponsor the dances?

Blanche: My Mother did. She had the hotel from 1894. Before that—my Father died in '94 and left her with 7 children. She had been married before in Canada. Her name was Bergeron and she married a fellow by the name of Richelieu. They had 2 children. They bought this ranch from Teles for Demers in 1893. When my Father died, they had to dissolve the partnership, so my Mother bought this ranch. It had to be a cash deal and, she was the one who had the money so she bought this ranch and lived here ever since. At the hotel—they would start early, about 9:00 to dance. They would dance till the wee hours of the morning.

Flore: The post office was in part of the hotel and they had a meat market and there was a dentist's office. A dentist named Thomas. You can see the sigh of the dentist in the picture of the hotel.

Blanche: They had at that time the meat market on the ground floor. The whole upstairs was a dance hall except for a few bedrooms in the back. The lumberjacks and miners would spend their winters at the hotel.

Flore: The hotel had 23 rooms. Both upstairs and downstairs—Blanche: And we had a house next to it. Of course that burned down but the hotel didn't burn at that time so my Mother sold it to a man by the name of Ballard Gow. (?)
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Barbara: Were your rooms rented by the night or by the week?

Blanche: Well, the miners and lumberjacks would rent them for the winter. They would just quite working in the woods for the winter.

Flora: The people would come from Missoula to the dances. C. H. McLeod never missed a Few Year's dance. And they had to come with a horse and buggy and Jack Hays had a livery barn in Missoula and he would furnish the Missoulians with horses and buggies. He had a crush on my sister, Mrs. Dussault. He had a horse by the name of Charlie S. He would come from Missoula in an hour and a half.

Ethel: You mentioned lumbermen having rooms in your hotel. That was something I was wondering about. Do you recall that there were a lot of loggers and lumbermen around and that suddenly there weren't any?

Blanche: They would disperse. Some would marry in the mean time but those that didn't would stay at the hotel.

Ed: That would rent rooms and board with us.

Flora: You know in the winter time we would have a party every night and we would go from one house to another, but we mostly landed at our house. You see these two rooms here were a dance hall upstairs. (The size of their kitchen and living room.)

Blanche: In those days before people had cars, they did things differently. Instead of a rumpus room in the basement, we had a dance room upstairs. There were five of us girls and two boys in our family. My Mother gave us everything she could possibl give us after my father died. I was only nine months old and he was three (Ed) and she was five(Flore).

Ethel: I wish you would tell us more about those parties. This was Few Year's.

Ed: They would have them right along.

Blanche: New Year's night they would go and start out in big sleighs and they would stop at everybody's house. They would call it "Les gales".

Flora: That would last till morning

Blanche: They would want to kiss all the girls before they went home.

Blanche: (The name of the celebration) is a French word for "jolly good time."

Ethel: Are you saying "here and there"?

Blanche: No.

Ethel: Oh. Alley, going, I see.
3.

Blanche: You can imagine since they would all be treated at every house.

Ethel: What kind of a drink would they usually have?

Ed: Oh, they would have regular liquor like you have today.

Blanche: They didn't have any mix like 7-up or Ginger ale. They would drink it straight.

Ethel: Were they hot drinks?

Ed: Oh no. They'd drink plain whiskey.

Ethel: When you came like here to your home would you have dinner then? Would you have food?

Blanche: We wouldn't have dinner. It was more like a lunch. We went from house to house and lunched.

Ethel: What kind of food would you have? Were there any special foods?

Ed: We had the same kind of food that you have now.

Barb: No special French dished?

Blanche: Well, they did. Suckling pig stuffed and with the apple in the mouth. It was in the center of the table. That was the lunch for the holidays.

Flore: In not too many years about how long ago we were raising pigs. (My sister, Mrs. Dussault, her son is teaching at Gonzaga.) Suckling pigs weigh about 75 pounds— you get them after they are weighed.

Blanche: After that they are too big. We would send to— there was a big French Colony that would come down from Butte to St. John's Bay— We would send the pigs to my sister there and they would come to her house and get them because the French people couldn't get them in Butte. We did that for many many years.

Barb: Did you raise them?

Blanche: Yes.

Ed: We used to farm here for many many years— quite a bit.

Blanche: On a big scale—

Flore: And he used to butcher.

Ethel: Would you have butchered them early and then have them out in an ice house or with salt?

Ed: Oh no.

Blanche: We put them on the train right after they were born.
4.

Barb: But they were born here?

Blanche: Oh yes. They were about 6 weeks old.

Flora: They weigh about 40 lbs.

Ed: They weren't that big, Flora.

Flora: Yes, you bought one from Romulus Deschamps.

Ed: That was a special case.

Blanche: When the K. P. went through here, there were 14 lawyers here. When the Engineers went through, when they built the Paradise Cutoff. My sister landed the Chief. Mr oldest sister-she was a beautiful girl.

Flora: That was a hotel. About 15 or 20 years ago, Mr. Gagnon lowered the roof.

Blanche: That building was a cheese factory. It was also the first school. It was where Seiberts lived and they moved it. (Mrs. Bandy's house).

Ethel: I have another question about the town itself. We've been confused even 6n the streets. There is Mullan Road and then they mention the Hotel as being on Main Street, and yet it seems to face Mullan Road.

Blanche: Main Street and Mullan Road are the same.

Ethel: Was the old hotel at the same place the new one is now?

Blanche: It was just a tiny bit east. They built that building as a replacement. They built the cement building closer to what was the corner at that time. You can see in the picture that Art Donlan has where the post office was in the corner. That corner is where the green cement block building is now. After the post office burned, they moved it to Normand's house. Mr. Domochelle moved it.

Ed: This an original map of Frenchtown itself from 1883. The street just east of the church is named DuCharme.

Ethel: Was this street named Beckwith in 1883?

Blanche: It was. It's a very short street and we've been kind of sore because nobody recalls a Beckwith living here. I went in to see them. When the railroad went through, they went through this land. She, my Mother, bought it from Telesfor Demers. In 1933 they came in front of our house and we only had about 17 feet of land left.

Ed: That was the road.

Flora: The first U.S. 10.

Blanche: Then 10 years later in '43, they went back of our house and they went right through the kitchen and the two bedrooms.
They forced us to move our building. We moved 9 buildings, all except that coop over there. That big barn was moved and this house was moved.

Flora: We moved 9 buildings and we tore down 7. The fellow who moved the house was from Kalispell. He did such a good job, that not even the plaster was cracked.

Blanche: So I went in to the County Commissioner and I told him they have gone through our land three times and I said you named that road that goes through our land right along and you named that road Beckwith—it's only about three blocks—so he sent me a new map and he said we would have to petition the people and we weren't going to do that.

Ethel: We are interested in getting it changed, too. In all our research, we've never found a Beckwith.

Blanche: It's just a little piece in front of the Alcan Bar. There were Beckwiths in Missoula but the majority of the Beckwiths I would say, moved to St. Ignatius when the reservation opened in 191C. They had a big store there. They were there for years and years and years.

Barb: Were they Missoula Beckwiths or had Beckwiths lived in Frenchtown before going to the reservation?

Blanche: No. No one recalls there ever being any Beckwiths in Frenchtown.

Ethel: I did see one reference to Beckwith and I meant to pursue it. This is really interesting (the map). Bid Art Donlan get a copy of this from you for Harry Hansen?

Ed: No, he didn't get a copy of this.

Blanche: No.___________sent us a copy. When I went in there to see him, I said, "You know, no one remembers of ever having any Beckwiths in this valley. You stick that wretched sign up on the road.

Flore: She went and talked to Callville (?) and she gave him the works.

Blanche: I was sore because it was such a little bit of a street, you know.

Barb: Do you know anything about Bonacina?

Blanche: No, I don't recall him.

Flora: He must have been an Italian.

Ethel: So Main and Mullan were the same? (They answer affirmatively). Where was your hotel? (They show her on the map.)

Blanche: And this here is where Gagnon lived. When it was a hotel, it was owned by people by the name of Pero (phonetic spelling) poirer?
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Flora: Poirer. She was a distant relative of my step-mother.

Blanche: Louis Barrette, you know, that discovered Gold at Cedar Creek. At the time of the double track went in and the Paradise Cutoff, all these Engineers lived in that hotel. (Mrs. Bandy's house.)

Flora: They had a saloon there. And they would rent rooms upstairs.

Barb: Do remember how much the rooms rented for?

Flora: $1.50 a night. Some were just a $1.00

Blanche: That was a fancy place during the '90s.

Flora: We have some receipts from the MM when my father traded with them. A ton of flour and sugar, etc. They would ship everything on the train and we would pick everything up at the depot.

Ethel: Do you remember anything about bananas on the train?

Flore: No.

Blanche: I do remember that they told me if I talked on the telephone from our house at the hotel that if I wanted oranges, maybe I would get some oranges. When I was gone, the/would come and put some oranges there and of course, I would come and pick up the oranges and I thought it was because I had talked to the phone. I don't remember anything about bananas.

Flora: These were our calling cards. (And she shows us pretty little cards with flowers on them and their names.)

Ethel: Did you buy from him or somebody?

Ed: Yes, we bought this property. My Mother did.

Ethel: This is the first homestead patent I've seen. It's dated 1893.

Blanche: Now this is a deed that was never recorded. It was made in 1886. We sold some land here recently and we had to quiet the title. Do you know what that it?

Ethel: No

Blanche: Well, you have to advertise for about 3 months to get a clear title for that land and it is very very expensive. It costs 4 or 5 hundred to $1000. Our lawyer said since you have all kinds of ancient papers, look around and you might find that deed. We did find this deed so we didn't have to have the title quieted.

Ed: That deed was moved back and forth from hotel to hotel to here.

Ethel: Oh, I see. It was not recorded till March 9, 1976 I
7.

thought I was looking at 1876. Now this was made on the 28 of Dec. 1876.'

Blanche: The lawyer just shook his head to see that there is so little change in the papers now and the deeds from that date.

Ethel: This is the Northwest quarter of the southeast quarter-

Blanche: That is down below Dick Lucier's trailer court.

Ethel: Do you happen to know how Hamel and Bedard became partners? Did they know each other before they came here?

Blanche: No, they just became partners here.

Ed: They were both working with iron. They both were blacksmiths. They shoed horses and stuff like that.

Blanche: When they came here, I don't imagine there was room for more than one blacksmith, so they probably got together.

Ed: My father first went to Missoula. You know where the Florence Hotel is, he had a blacksmith shop right there. In 1869-

Blanche: Frenchtown was bigger than Missoula was then.

Ethel: '69. That's when he came to Frenchtown____

Side II

Flore: Did you know Lajeunesses?

Barb: I talked to Goldie DuFresne and her son married a descendant of Lejeunesse.

Flora: Isn't Wakely from Missoula a grandson of Lejeunesse?

Ethel: Back to parties, in H. Lacasse's history, she mentions Mardi Gras. Now do you recall a Mardi Gras celebration?

Blanche: Oh yes. It was a big French celebration. You see, most of the New Orleans people were of French descent and it was the same way here. They had done that in Canada and France and here, it was the same thing. It was always a big celebration.

Flora: It was a big celebration! They all had costumes. They had masks and some of them would dress in Chinese--I have a little fan that my sister had. She wanted to dress in Chinese clothes so she sent for wig and they sent some little umbrellas and fans. I've been wanting to bring them down and put them in the planter.

Ethel: Did they have a parade through town?

Blanche: No. They didn't have a parade because the weather wouldn't be right. The only parade we had was for St. John's Day.

Flora: For all the cleaning we had, we sent to Pullmees (?) in
Butte, We had some lace dyed very light lilac and we sent it for a dress.

Blanche: Back to St. John's—Well, they used to go up into the hills and get evergreens, like Christmas trees, and they would put them down from the church all the way downtown. Dorilla Lucier was always on the decorating committee. So —

Ed: We were getting ready to decorate and Dorilla said to me, "If I would have known then what I know now, I would have planted those trees years ago. Then I wouldn't have to go into the mountains every year to cut them!"

Ethel: When did they stop cutting trees?

Ed: They did it for a long time.

Flora: They had all kinds of red, white, and blue bunting.

Blanche: And some years they would have an alter and say the Mass where ever it was appropriate. They would decorate that alter fantastically.

Ethel: Do any of you know how the custom of the trees got started?

Ed: It was just a custom. They had the St. John's Day and they had a St. John's Society.

Blanche: First it was just the Parish. Then they organized a society. They had members from here, Missoula, Butte, Deerlodge, and Anaconda. You have heard probably that they had a special train from Butte and they picked up all the members from all the towns that belonged to the Society. They had 3000 members.

Ed: They would come for the dance. That lasted all night. Till 3 or 4 o'clock in the morning.

Blanche: They had oyster stew at noon and at night they would always have something to eat. In the real early days, we celebrated in a grand fashion, and then it was moderated and moderated and moderated.

Ethel: You say in the real early days, did they have suckling pig? (I think that is what the question was.)

Blanche: They would have—more so because turkey wasn't plentiful. They did have geese, though. There were a lot of geese. Most everybody raised geese.

Barb: Oyster stew at noon? I wonder where that would come from. Why oyster stew?

Blanche: I don't know. It must have been canned stew. Canned oysters anyway. And of course, in our day, we were right in the midst of it. My Mother took charge of the meals. Many many times she was chairman.

Ed: I started working on the St. John's celebration in 1914 and I was one of the race masters—in fact, I was a little bit of
everything and not much of anything. I was on the main committee. There were four or five of us.

Blanche: And he would go up town and solicit- He did that for years and years. They still talk about it. Lud Polish (?), he has the East Gate Drug, he says, "I can still see Ed. He would always come in and get $5.00 out of me for St. John's Day.

Barb: Where did the 3000 people that came for St. John's Day stay?

Blanche: The train would stay here until the dance was over and then it would take them home.

Ethel: And everybody really dressed up, didn't they?

Blanche: Oh yes. They would dress up in the afternoon and in the evening they'd change dresses and then they would change dresses again 'at midnight.

Ethel: From what to what?

Flora: They would change at midnight. Then they would dance until 4 or 5 o'clock in the morning and then they would change again for breakfast.

Ethel: Would they change into really fancy evening wear?

Blanche: Oh yes.

Flora: And everybody had a parlor. It wasn't a living or sitting room. It was a parlor.

Blanche: And they would do pretty much at Mardi Gras, too. But at Mardi Gras midnight was the end, because at midnight Lent started.

Flora: They had fun! It was much better than it is now, because everybody partook of it. Everybody was-there was no distinction.

Blanche: Yes, the community was close you see, but now it is so divided that you can't do anything.

Ethel: We're going to try.

Blanche: Well, we wish you all kinds of luck. It's going to be hard to put on with the disunity.

Flora: I wish I felt like I did about 3 or 4 years ago. I could do a lot on this thing.

Blanche: I'm writing a history of our family and I will rive you a copy. I'm doing this for our family but you can use what you want. I've traced my Mother's first husband's family back 8 generations.

Barb: I understand you have a picture of a man hanging from a trestle bridge. Is that right?

Ed: Why, Barbara! We wouldn't have anything like that 1

Ethel: I have another question on the spelling- you know how bad
the record keepers were on spellings. We have another a record of a Heimel and I'm sure they are referring to Hamel. Do you know if Hamel is French?

Ed: Yes, it is.

Blanche: Ours is spelled Hamel. Some have added Hamill and most people don't pronounce our name as it should be. They say Hamel or Hamill or something like that.

Ethel: They pronounce it wrong and then they spell it like they pronounce it. So you finally can't recognize it at all.

Blanche: Yes. That's right.

Ethel: We've run into Mrs. McGowan's restaurant. Where was that located?

Blanche: Do you know the picture Art has of the horses? That was built in 1911. Well, her place was right next to that. It was a rooming house, a boarding house. It was a good size house. Did she have four children? Emma McGowan? She had Wilbert and Robert and the girls.

Flora: Yes. She had two that died of diphtheria.

Blanche: She was a Marion, you know. And her father didn't approve of her marriage and her husband left her when she had four children.

Flora: He would stay for awhile and then he would leave. She would get pregnant and have a child and then he would go.

Blanche: She got $1000 from her father's will. He took it (I think but both Flore and Blanche are talking so it is garbled) and he left her with two little girls.

Flora: Both girls died during the diphtheria epidemic. Then there was Wilber, Robert, and Camille.

Ed: Camille was his father's name.

Ethel: Somebody had talked of eating at Mrs. McGowan's after church as if this was a place to eat on Sunday. (They all say, "Oh yes.") How big of a place was it?

Ed: It was a pretty good sized place.

Blanche: It could accommodate quite a few. 10 or 12.

Flora: Oh, yes. It couldn't accommodate any more than that.

Ethel: Was it a family type serving?

Blanche: Oh yes. In those days, like in my Mother's place, that was how they did it.

Flora: Father LeGreis used to eat there an awful lot.

Blanche: She was a good housekeeper and very clean about the cooking.
Ethel: So you would just pay whatever the amount was and you would eat as much as you wanted?

Blanche: Yes.

Ed: That's it.

Ethel: Those were the days.

Barb: I would enjoy that!

Blanche: There were five saloons all in a row out from the Community Church and that all burned. In that picture you can see the buildings.

Ed: One fellow set fire to the building and that is how the buildings burned.

Barb: Deliberately?

Ed: Yes. This was an earlier time than 1911.

Barb: Was he arrested?

Ed: No. They never did.

Blanche: I was born in '93 and I don't remember that.

Ethel: What are some of your childhood memories?

Blanche: There is so much I remember. I remember the fire of '99 when all the saloons burned.

Ethel: How did they attempt to put the fire out?

Ed: They had no fire department.

Blanche: They tried with buckets to begin with.

Barb: So did you just watch it spread from one building to another until it burned out?

They all say, "Yes."

Ed: Do you remember the grist mill, Barbara?

Barb: No. I'm just a youngster, Ed!

Blanche: It was three stories high and it was painted pale yellow with white trim. It was beautiful. It was run by a ——

Flora: The machinery that was in there!

Barb: Why did that fellow burn down the buildings? Was he insane?

Ed: Well, he wasn't quite right*

Ethel: I wanted to ask you about the course of Mill Creek. I understand that it used to come clear over here. Do you know why
Blanche: That water was diverted from Borcher's house and it was diverted here to run the grist mill. Also to irrigate this ranch. By ditch.

Ethel: Do you know who built the ditch?

Ed: Bedard and Hamel.

Blanche: Don't you think it might have been Demers?

Flora: That was the Ducharme ranch and this was Sam Kien and Warren

Ed: Sam Kien Warren was here.

Barb: The Ducharme ranch was what later became the Bedard ranch?

Ed: Yes.

Blanche: You see, when my father died, -this is in the history of the Century Ranch- my Father wasn't married when he went into partnership with Bedard. Bedard was married and he had seven children and so they had a verbal agreement that if one should die, then all the property would go to the other. So then my Father married in 1883. He went back to Canada and married my Mother. He had been there many years before. They had a corn husking party and when you found a red ear of corn, you were allowed to kiss the girl of your choice. He came to my Mother and she slapped his face! He said, "Never mind, Brown Eyes. I'll be back to marry you!" And he did. He was gone about 8 or 9 years. She had married in the meantime and her husband had died. She had 2 children.

That was why that water, you see, some of that water is now from seepage. They marked Mill Creek here and that is not where Mill Creek was. Mill Creek was right in the middle of that creek bed.

Ethel: You mean where it runs now?

Blanche: No, not over there, but right here next to our land, and the water was diverted to run the mill.

Flora: To run the wheel. It was run by water wheel.

Blanche: The wheel was half as big as this room.

Ed: Oh yes. It was as tall as this room.

Ethel: When did they allow the stream to go back to its original course? Would you say that where it is now is the original?

Blanche: Where it is now is the original. They diverted it for irrigation purposes and for the mill.

Ethel: Now it is back in its original channel. When did they do that?

Blanche: Oh they just took part of the water. They never dried up the main stream.
Ethel: That one did always run there then. So there was a creek on either side, then.

Blanche and Ed: Yes. Either side of the house.

Blanche: And also up above the edge of the hill, quite a bit up on the hill, there is an old place above that my folks diverted water from Mill Creek up about 2 or 3 miles up Mill Creek to irrigate that bench up there. And they used to have a fellow by the name of Marlow, Jean Baptist Marlow, he lived up there in a stone house and he had the most wonderful garden you ever saw.

Flora: He peddled vegetables in the valley.

Blanche: Not many people had water, you see. Marlow was the fellow that milked the cow for me when I was young.

Ethel: Do you recall way back in your earliest memories any orchards that were already quite large?

Blanche: That O'Keefe up there. Mose Clemons had a big orchard.

Flora: Mose Clemons and Mrs. Houle had orchards. Philias Loiselle had one two. Clemons had a huge one. Up on the hill where it now is alfalfa— it was once an orchard.

Ed: You know where Archie and Roy's place was, Barbara?

Blanche: The Trehan place had an orchard, too. At Donlan's, Mose Tetrault had one a big one. Some of the plums the Donlans, they still have wingage plums that Tetrault planted.

Ethel: Do you remember any east of town? We're trying to figure out where Tipton was.

Blanche: I don't recall. I know I've heard the name. Do you know Ed?

Ed: No, I don't recall.

Blanche: The O'Keefe's had a huge orchard.

Flore: You were asking about dressing up for the dances. At the dances, everybody wore a hat.

Barb: Did they dance with their hats on?

Flora: No. They would take their hats off.

Blanche: And some of the kids would wreck the hats. They all had hat pins.

Flora: Some of the hats were very nice. I had one with a little bird-Rhinestones and a little bird, and some of the kids would wreck everyone of them.

Blanche: They would step on them, you know.
Ed: And they had hat pins that were that (about 5 in.) long. And they would use that to defend themselves.

Blanche: It's too bad that women don't have those now.

Ethel: I think you did have some more stories about the things you did as children playing. Mr. Johnston wanted to know about them.

Flore: We skated and we had bon fires. After we got through, we would go to someone's house and have lunch.

Blanche: It was generally Hamel' house.

Flora: Then we would play "Fox and the Goose."

Blanche: There used to be a mill pond and they would make ice for the summer.

Flora: The whole valley would come and get their ice from us. Everybody had an ice house. One year we didn't have any ice. The Northern Pacific RR had to have ice so they sent a car load from Detroit, Michigan. The Great Lakes. They stored their ice in our ice house. They put in the ice and then fill it up with saw dust. That would keep it from melting.

Blanche: The Northern Pacific needed the ice to keep their produce from melting going to Wallace. They furnished the ice so we furnished the place to Keep it,

Ethel: Otherwise would they—they didn't stop to get it out of the pond, did they?

Ed: No, no. We had an ice house. We furnished the housed and they furnished the ice.

Blanche: In those days, you could start up at Flaget's house and skate all the way to Dick Lucier's on the slough. The kids don't have fun anymore like that.