The following transcript is a scan of the original and has not been edited. For additional assistance, please contact Archives and Special Collections.
Marie Louise Plourd, age 101 and her daughter, Mrs. Dona Corr, interviewed April 8, 1975 at the residence of Mrs. Corr

Mother came to the Frenchtown Valley in xxxii, 1900 - July 14, 1900. Her brother-in-law, Mr. Matt met her in Missoula. At that time, all there was in Missoula was a depot, few streets, plain dirt streets what there were, and they went by oxen horse and buggy to Huson. She was born in Quebec in Canada, April 25, 1874. She was the 7th of the family of 13, having 4 brothers older and two sisters, and four brothers younger and two sisters. Her two younger sisters have married and have migrated to Montana, settling in Huson. The oldest of them is Mrs. Agnes Dufresne, and the next one is Mrs. Clara Matt. She had been the first to come to Montana. She was married in Canada and came with her husband to Montana. He was employed as a blacksmith for a sawmill, a lumber camp. Later, a couple of years later, her sister, Mrs. Dufresne, joined her. The Dufresnes had seven children when they came, and the Matts, when my mother came in 1900 had five children. They lived across the road, about a mile west of Huson. Mr. Dufresne worked for a lumber mill, the Jack and Ready lumber mill, and so did Mr. Matt. On

Mother came to Montana to help her two sisters...they needed the help...she had been a seamstress in Canada, and being a rather adventurous person, she wanted to see the world, and I think that's one of the main reasons she came to Montana. She came in 1900 and met my father, Dona Plourd; she fell in love with and in June 12, 1901, they were married and settled on a 160-acre farm 4 miles east of Frenchtown where they spent almost all their lives, until 1927.

**MJ:** Which farm is this now?

**DC:** Fred Deschamps lives in the house where I was born in. He has remodeled the house, but it's the same house.

**MJ:** Just out of curiosity, those big cottonwood trees...were they there?

**DC:** No, the cottonwood trees were not there. The elm trees, up above the farm, in the gulch there, were there, they had been planted there by Mr. Sorrell. He was an immediate neighbor to the north. He had beautiful daughters, all were married at the time of my mother's marriage, and the youngest one was married to Louis Bisson. She is the mother of Mrs. Armand Lucier and the Louis Bisson children. She is the sister of the mother of Pete and Alexander Bisson who live in Frenchtown.

**MJ:** When did her husband (Mr. Plourd) come to Frenchtown?

(French conversation)

**DC:** He came in 1890 and must have moved to Frenchtown about 1894 or 1895. She says 1884 is when he came to Butte. He worked in lumber camps. My dad was a teamster in lumber camps before he went into farming; before he was married.

**MJ:** Did he come from Canada also?

**DC:** Yes, he came from Quebec too, from ____________

**MJ:** Do you know why he particularly chose the Frenchtown Valley?

**DC:** Well, in the first place, they were all poor people...
from poor families in Canada. The youngsters had to get out as soon as they could, but one of the reasons my dad left Canada is because he didn't want to be inducted into the army. You see, they had to, were forced to serve some army time and my dad didn't want to go into the army...there was no war going on, but there was the mile they had to spend two years in the military training...he left at the age of 16, my father did, and went to Massachusetts and eventually migrated to Montana, coming to Butte.

M: Did he buy this place?

DC: Yes. He bought the place from Mrs. Barrett; Mr. Bedard...question, in French...answer...Mr. Theodore Bedard and Mrs. Barrett who was formerly Élvin Hamel, the mother of Blanche, Flora and Edmund. They could tell you a lot...he bought 160 acres from them. To the north of us was the Sorrell family, to the east of us was the Lucier family, Mr. Jean (? Lucier, the grandfather of Armand Lucier. And he had seven sons and nine daughters living on a 160 acre farm and father up, now the Lucier place is not occupied at all, it's a pasture belonging to the Deschamps, Arthur and Gaspard Deschamps, and up above that was a family by the name of Smith, but they spoke English, and with all those Frenchmen around there, we don't know much about them. Then east, too, was a family by the name of Johnson, she can't remember his name because they always called him "Gooseneck" Johnson, had about three children. He had a small fruit orchard, where he sent up in a deep hole in the hill, there was a spring for watering his fruit trees. That was east.

First of all, I should have told you there was an alley, they called it an alley, but it was a road that connected between the river and went straight over the hill and connected to the Flathead road, and from that alley, the Deschamps had bought enough land along the alignment to make an alley that went clear up into the woods. They had bought or rented government land to pasture their cattle, driving them up in spring and bringing them back in fall. And they lived in the corner of those two alleys, so that straight on up the alley, towards the Kalispell or Flathead road, was where Mr. Johnson had settled, on the hills.

To the south of us, immediately across the alley from where we lived, across our barn, the Emil Bisson family lived; that was Pete and Alexander's dad. And farther in the hill, in a gulley again, everybody settled in gulleys because it was easier to get water, you see, they could dig wells more easily, or there were many creeks or springs that were there all year round was the Peter Hamel family. Now, I can't tell you who lives there now...there's a new home built there exactly where the Peter Hamel used to live; the land used to belong to Mrs. Hamel. ...

To the south of us, oh yes, and rather on to the west, where Bill Lucier lives now, that was Wilfred Bisson's ranch, and alongside Wilfred Bisson's ranch, along the big creek that runs there, was...own by Francoise Bisson, the grandfather of Pete and Alexander, the father of Emil. And later on, Louis, his younger son, took that ranch and raised his family there, and right next to him was Alexander, the second youngest son, Alexander. Old Francis E. Bisson was married twice, and Emil Bisson was one of the brothers by the first wife, and Louis and Alexander were sons from the second wife. The second wife was the only one that mother knew. Later on he gave ranches to his sons, and he moved to Frenchtown, and built that house right in front of the church in Frenchtown. It later became the Parent house, and right now I don't know who's living there.
MJ: Where did (your mother) meet your father?

IE: (Fr. conv.) She met him in Huson. He was a logger, driving a four-horse team, and he came by Mrs. Matt's place where mother was, and he stopped, and that's where she first met him. Father was a tall man, and she thought very handsome, so mother fell in love with him, and it was about a year's courtship before they were married.

MJ: Where were they married?

IE: Frenchtown, in the Frenchtown Church, by Father Kamez (sp?) Her bridesmaid was (sounds like Feemey...Baird...) Now, became the mother of Cyr, who married Anna Schaeffer, and the best man was Wilfred Bisson.

MJ: And after they were married, they moved to Huson?

IE: No, they moved four miles east of Frenchtown.

MJ: Was there quite a wedding celebration?

IE: There was an empty house next to where Mrs. Matt lived, and that's the place where they had the wedding party and the dance that evening.

MJ: Was that a very large wedding?

IE: Oh no, not all the people in Frenchtown came. She was a newcomer, and anyway, the Huson people were 6 miles away from the Frenchtown people, and although they met at church, and they all knew each other, they weren't necessarily intimate...the Huson crowd stayed together and the Frenchtown crowd stayed together.

MJ: The road between Huson and Frenchtown...was about the same?

IE: About...especially the Mullan trail.

MJ: How long did it take to travel?

IE: Oh, it didn't take too long...it took us about an hour with a horse and buggy. My sister and I used to, later on, at Huson there was a hotel run by Mr. Glaude, and it has burnt down since, but when my aunt Clara's children grew older, she moved into the hotel, kept the hotel, and there was a big dance hall, and about twice a month they had dances down there...my sister and I would ride ahorseback to the dance in Huson and stay all night with my aunt and come home the next day...dance all night and come home the next day. It made it about 10 miles from our place to Huson...so it took about a good hour and a half.

BF: Were there a lot of other businesses in Huson at the turn of the century?

IE: There was that hotel, and a saloon, of course, and a saloon in the hotel, and there was a store, Mr. Bourgeois's store, I have pictures of that...a general merchandise store.

MJ: What was the name of the hotel?

IE: In Huson? The Glaude hotel. - GLAUD she spells.
MJ: Was the saloon the same name?

XC: Yes. There were two saloons -- the hotel saloon, and there was one run by Joe Bureau (Bureau she spells)

MJ: Do you know the name of the saloon?

XC: Just Joe’s Place is all I knew

MJ: Were there any other business establishments?

XC: (Fr. conv. w/ mother) ...Of course, there was a depot, too, the Coeur d’Alene line of the NP.

MJ: How about the town of Frenchtown? What were some of the buildings both you and she remember?

XC: We remember a small post office, and of course, the main road did not run where it runs now. It ran through the Mulvan Trail...that Hi Ho was a store, owned by the Marion’s...Fr. conv... and the railroad...she thinks it was in 1908 and 09 that the Milwaukee came through but it was...(garbled discussion...French)

XC: We went back to Canada, my folks and older sister and myself went back to Canada in 1909 for a visit, from November until March, all the way by train.

MJ: How long did it take you, do you remember?

XC: (Fr. conv.) It took us four days and three nights.

MJ: Did you get on the train in Missoula? (yes)

XC: (Fr. conv. interr.) **It** was four days and four nights coming when she first came, but in nine years they were going a little faster. We went on the NP too, and changed to the Canadian Grand Trunk in St. Marie near Minneapolis...there were no sleeping cars...you just sat all the way. And there was a stove in the train...in the parlor...you could make some coffee and bring your food along...they didn’t serve any food on the train in 1909...less in 1900.

MJ: Back to the town. You said there was a post office...

XC: Yes, there was a post office run by Mr. Desmouchelle (sp?) (fr. conv. Desmouchelle she spells. He was living there with his sister; they lived there in the back, and in the front was the post office and the store; he had a candy store... and the Marions had a general merchandise store... (fr. conv.) Besides that they sold farm tools and implements...plows... and binders, I think they had to come to Missoula for...for those big machines... (much mixed conversation about who sold what where...) Dr. LeTourneau was the doctor in Frenchtown when she came here in 1900...when you could catch him sober...Ida and I, my sister and I, were born in the ranchhouse, of course, and he was the attending physician. Now later on, in 1911, when my sister Georgette was born Dr. Coates was there. He replaced Dr. LeTourneau.

MJ: Did they usually have an office? Did they have a regular doctor’s office?
Yes, well, wherever they lived. One room was their office, and I don't think Dr. LeTourneau had much of an office, but he must have had, because he had medicines, but he lived all alone...and Dr. Coates was married and he lived in the house that had belonged to Bill Marion...he had his office there...I remember he took a growth on my nose off...and he had an operating table.

Do you know if this house is still standing?

I don't know who lives in there now, but it was the Runnings house...it's the one that's closest to the...along the road, closest to the creek there...

Back to Frenchtown...At the time of the Prohibition, I can only name six saloons that were running at the time Prohibition came. I remember there were seven, but I can't for the life of me think who was running the 7th. But there was the Grover Saloon, Mrs. Pankratz's...Gauthier...bought or rented the bar from Grover...and Grover's two sons, by the way, were among the first class to graduate from Frenchtown High School......Anyway, Gauthier must have been there....garbled...(because he was there when Prohibition came in 1918...)

And there was the Hamel saloon in the hotel, that was in 1919; however the Hamel hotel had always existed; in 1900 Mrs. Hamel was now Mrs. Barrett, ran that hotel. And there was the general store, that hotel, and there was a fellow by the name of Granger who had a saloon off by itself. Now Rubyait came in...(Fr. conv. sp. unsure also) you'll have to get that from the Hamels...anyway, he lived in a great big house...and it was used as a hotel too only I don't think they served food...they had a saloon but they didn't serve food...the food was served by Mrs. Barrett...at the Hamel hotel. And there was Mr. Sorrell who had a saloon there too, and Fredrick Hamel had a saloon and a butcher shop...kept a butcher shop and he had a wagon and once a week he went out through the valley with his meat to sell to the farmers; they would buy their fresh meat from Frederick Hamel.

Where did he get the meat?

He'd buy it from the farmers around and butcher it. This was especially in the summer. He didn't do it in winter because they were able to freeze it, but they didn't have any way to keep it in the summer. And the only way he had was a great big ice house, house full of ice, and salt, and that was the only way he could keep it, and besides he bought the fresh meat, and didn't have to keep it long. Most of the farmers ate salt pork. They would butcher in the winter and they'd salt the pork, cutting it into pieces, and that was their fare, and it was always endless...and look, my mother has lived to be 100 years old, and her diet in Canada was salt pork in the summertime, pea soup, potatoes, garden vegetables in summer, but in winter, they didn't have those, there was no canning going on, and wild berries, raspberries, strawberries, blueberries, gooseberries, and currants, they all grew wild in Canada. And they had a couple of cows on 90 acres of land, and they had milk and cream and butter and bread, they were able to get flour...and she was telling me yesterday how her mother made bread...big batches of bread...they had a neighbor who had a great big earthen oven...I can't name it in English...anyway, it was a regular clay building, a place for a fire, and grates over the fire, and a door to close it up, and they could bake 12-15 loaves of bread at a time...it's like those that you see in France...and you see them in Eastern Quebec too, especially on an island...there...where they're still living the way they lived 100 years ago.
MJ: Were there any families in Frenchtown who cooked bread that way?

DC: No. They had stoves...the majestics, the wood and coal stoves.

MJ: What kind of meals would your mother cook for the family?

DC: Well, we'd have pea soup, quite often, salt pork, potatoes always, and we always had bread, and we had...in Canada, too, they had maple syrup off of the maple trees...here we didn't do that, but she would make the syrup and put mapleline in it, flavor, and we had butter. To refrigerate her butter in the summertime, my mother, we had an old well that had been dug up...first of all, my mother had to haul water, and my dad, too, then there was a spring above us on the Lucier place, but my dad bought the water rights...my dad and Mr. Beauregard both bought the water rights off of them and they piped the water from that spring down to our place and down to Beauregards and farther down...they lived right across the super highway now along the lane that goes down to the Mullan road...you know where Fred Deschamps lives...they lived across the superhighway from Fred Deschamps...towards the hill...but going towards the Mullan road...so we both got water from the spring, so the well was left unneeded so to keep her butter cool, in the summertime, she'd make butter, and to keep it cool, she'd put it in a box and tie a rope around the box and hung it down in the well...that was her method of refrigeration.

And of course we always had chicken and eggs, definitely eggs, and we'd buy the meat from Fred Hamel when he came around, or in the early spring when it was still cool, in the winter time, my dad would cut ice and fill a building with ice and salt, and in the spring he'd butcher a calf or two and keep it refrigerated...and we bought canned corn and canned tomatoes. In the summertime mother always made a little garden and we had fresh vegetables. But we didn't do any canning...we didn't can fruit. In the wintertime we'd buy apples...right over the high hill from our place, along the Flathead road, was a large apple orchard owned by a fruit company, and of course apples were our favorite fruit, (fr. conv. interrupts...mention of gasoline lanterns, no electricity or telephones...no kerosene lamps and candles...later on gasoline; at the beginning only kerosene...the Marions had a...kept the town lit in Frenchtown...with a big lantern they had in front of their store...that was the one light they had in Frenchtown at night. Everything was kerosene lamps...the hotel in Huson, the Lauze hotel, I remember, there were kerosene lamps built in a rack on the wall; there was a rack on the wall... (fr. conv...) I was three years old when there was the first fire in Frenchtown... (fr. conv...) then another one when I was a kid going to school. I remember we went to school at the Miron or what was later on called the Loiselle School which was on the corner of Mullan Road and that alley I was telling you about...that's where we started school...and Miss Girand was our first teacher and she was the niece of that Mr. Desmouchelle, the postmaster, and she spoke both French and English. When my sister and first started to school, we couldn't speak English. And I remember the first books we had, there were no books at this time in the county certain books that we were supposed to have like you have today and anybody who could get a reader anywhere, that's the reader they used for that class that year, and I remember the first books we had were...they were books that had the words all written, but the letters that are silent in an English word were marked silent, the soft e had a soft e mark, the long e had a long mark and so forth like that. The c's that were soft had a mark under them to show that they were a soft c and the hard c had a mark to show they were a hard c. It was marvelous how we learned to read with those readers and went right on through with
those first and second readers, and to this day there are very very few
words that I can't make out, and it improved our spelling, and we saw
why some letters were silent...it was the greatest help you could get for
foreign speaking youngsters to learn to read, the English language.

MJ: Were there quite a few...most of the class spoke English

IE: All of our class, but there were only three or four in my class,
had these kinds of books, but I don't know what kind books they had
before. We had them for two years...

MJ: What percent of the students didn't speak English, like when you
started there? Most speak French?

IE: It must have been about 80% that didn't speak any English when they
started school, but 100% all spoke French...there were no English. It
was too bad for the English ones, because they had a hard time if they
didn't speak French.

MJ: Well, it's interesting you said that the teacher spoke French,
because Hamels told us that their teacher didn't speak French.

IE: How about that? Well, the second teacher we had, Mr. Rand,
spoke French, but the other teacher, Miss Wilkins, didn't speak
French, but by that time, we knew a little English. And the older kids
all spoke English, spoke both French and English... My mother never learned
English but most of the parents didn't learn English...had to... my dad had
to learn English to carry on his business...he didn't speak very good English
as I remember his coming to Mr. McLeod at the Missoula Mercantile one day
and he'd sold wheat to the Missoula Mercantile and they weren't giving him
the full amount of money that he figured he had coming so he came to Mr.
McLeod...Mr. McLeod said, 'I don't understand a thing you're saying
George', and it's true...my dad says, 'yes, if you owe me money you don't
understand me, but if I owe you money, you understand.'

MJ: Did most of the women your mother's age...they didn't speak English
did they...or did most of them learn?

IE: Those that came directly from Canada didn't speak any English, but
those that had been here quite awhile spoke French and English...everyone
spoke French...now the Bissons spoke both French and English...spoke better
French than English...but my mother and my aunts had to learn the English
language...when they came here they didn't speak any English at all, and
their husbands didn't speak any English at all, they had to learn after
they got here. Those that were born here spoke both French and English,
or that came here when they were oh, even, when they were 10 or 12 years
old, because English was taught in schools...Now the priests who were
here until 1923 or 24 always spoke French...they preached in French...
and the life of those people around Frenchtown, the social life, was centered
around the church...the festivities of St. John's Day was the church, and
Christmas and Easter, all the general festivities. Of course they had
dances, public dances, but my folks didn't go to dances very much, they
didn't have too many either. The social life was limited to the men
drinking and to family gatherings.

MJ: I want to ask you a couple of things we've heard, and see if you can
substantiate it, about one of the priests, a very large priest, do you
remember what his name was?
DC: Father Melody, in 190 _) Father LeGree, Leonel Legree, stayed there for many years. He was a tall, handsome, big man.

MJ: Was he the one that dragged the men out of the bar?

DC: Probably. That sounds like Father LeGree. It wouldn’t be Father Melody. Father Melody was large too, from overeating, he was fat. But that was Father LeGree who would do that. I never heard of the story, though. I do remember this story: my father saying, now Father Kamez, he was there, the one that married mother, he was there before Father Boudard was, and you know five or six saloons in Frenchtown, on Saturday night it was a lively town, up until two or three in the morning, and then the people didn’t go to mass. And Father Kamez didn’t like that, so he warned them on Sunday, and talked several Sundays about the sanctity of Sunday and the necessity of going to church on Sunday, but not too many came, and he said because you all stay up too late on the night before, and you don’t come to church on Sunday. And he warned them, ‘Next Sunday, if those saloons don’t close at 12 o’clock, I’m going to ring the bell at 12 o’clock midnight on Saturday night, and it’s time you should go home.” And one Saturday night he did. And the fellows, two or three of the wild leaders there, were very angry with him, and they got a group of men together, and they came to the church threatening to hang him, and he was so frightened that he climbed way up into the present church steeple, and he climbed way up there and hid and they looked all around his rectory and all around the church and couldn’t find him, so he was safe. My father was very distraught at that...one of them was his very good friend and he was very irked at him. And then he used to say later on, the three leaders all died young, violently. My dad thought they were being punished. One was killed by a horse; he was rounding up cattle. Another one went on the gold strike in Alaska and died there accidentally. And I don’t know how the third one died. I forget the names too.

MJ: Are there any other anecdotes you remember about the valley, humorous things your mother might have related...

DC: Of course, there were, I can’t remember any right now ...(Fr. conv.) The girl who could tell you some adventures is my sister. She remembers all that happened and she can tell them beautifully...(more conv.) She remembers sad incidents, like Mr. LaFleur, who one night was coming home and had in his wagon with a team of horses, somehow at the gate something happened that they found him the next day and the wagon had run over him...age about 50...had a son and daughter...they lived where Lena Lucier lives...almost across that alley where Eddie Marcure used to live...(Fr. conv.) Of course you heard about the Frenchtown fire...Frenchtown nearly all burnt down in 1909 or 1910...we were on top of the hill...where Fred Deschamps is now is a beautiful location...you can see everything that happens in the valley...and if you go up the hill a little ways straight to the top of the hill along the alley, you can see Frenchtown, the whole town. Of course we didn’t go to the fire but we saw it from up there. It was a catastrophe. (Fr. conv.) But the place now that was Grover’s place, that was a saloon that burnt down, and where the old Hamel place is now, I don’t know who lives there now, it used to be the hotel (Fr. conv.) Of course it was a major catastrophe whenever there was a fire in the neighborhood and two of our neighbors houses burned down, the Beauregard house and the Lucier house...(Fr. conv...)
It must have been in 1911 or 1912 when the Lucier house burned down; I remember my sister and I were working in the fields up above the Johnson ranch and we saw the smoke and I ran down, and got our horse and buggy and got down as fast as we could but everything was gone... nobody hurt...

MJ: How about the fire of 1910? Was anybody hurt in that one?

DC: Not that I know of, not in Frenchtown. (fr. conv) No, nobody died in the fire (fr conv) ... It was Joe Gauthier who had the bar...and that's where the fire started...and buildings along the hotel, as you go towards the church, there used to be two blacksmith shops, the Sherman shop and the Bissette shops...

MJ: ... It was on the other side of the pond that used to be the mill pond, and the Sherman shop was between the depot and the hotel...who lives there now (Putnam's - the green building) there was a dance hall up above that in there, and there was a dance hall right across the road from it, in the Grover hotel, but that dance hall was remodeled when Vincent's lived there...when the cars came along they needed a garage in Frenchtown so Vincent's changed what had been a saloon and dance hall into a garage... a shop downstairs and he lived upstairs.

BF: Do you remember who had the first car in Frenchtown?

DC: Yes. The first car in Frenchtown was owned, I think, by either Alexander Bisson or Emil Bisson, the Bissons...oh no, Father LeGree... and he had one of those buggies...big wheels...that car had big wheels like buggy wheels. (unintelligible) ...yes, it was Father LeGree, that's right. And I guess the next one was Henri Hamel, who had... (tape ran out, and much lost here...)

Pick up on discussion of citizenship papers...1894, Oct. 16, became citizen, Frank Woody the judge...Kenneth Ross was a witness and G. Bissette... (father's citizenship papers)

has deed to ranch - Theodard Bedard & Mrs. Hamel -- then Barrette - then later on we bought the Gooseneck Johnson ranch -- after 1927, I can't remember the years, Dorilla Lucier bought the old Beauregarde ranch that was adjacent to the Johnson ranch and he owned the lower Beauregarde ranch too that was adjacent to the Fred Deschamps land -- Fred Deschamps owns both of those ranches now too and my dad exchanged the Johnson ranch for the old Beauregarde ranch so all his land would be down below, together, and the Lucier wanted the pasture land, so he had his pasture land together too. The Beauregarde ranch and the Plourde ranch were separated by other ranches, but the upper Beauregard ranch and the Johnson ranch were adjacent, and the lower Plourde and Beauregard ranches were adjacent, so that exchange put them together.

MJ: What do you remember about any of the early weather conditions....

DC: Yes, I remember one winter, the winter of (figuring) 1922, the snow was about three or four feet deep in that alley, that lane, and I was going to Missoula County High School and I wanted to go down and visit my folks, I went down on the train and then took the school bus, which was
a sled, they had to have a sleigh, two horses and a big wagon box with two runners beneath it, and I took a ride with the school bus from Frenchtown to that alley, we used to call it the Loiselle lane, and then I remember walking on the crust on that deep snow, home, a mile, I had to walk. That year Missoula County High School had to close because the water froze in the high school, what is now Hellgate High School. And school was out for about 10 days, and that's when I went back home to spend those ten days at home.

MJ: Being so close to the river, was there ever any danger of floods? Oh, almost every spring, that lower land, near the river, used to flood, that bottom land. It used to flood in back of Lucier's place, there, in back of the Mercure place, that land that's along the river, and the Loiselle land that's along the river; that flooded badly. Yes, and another thing that's interesting -- at the time that mother came, there were some families that lived across the river from Frenchtown and the only way that they had to cross the river was with a ferryboat. They had one of these...just flat platforms that was pulled with ropes from one side...from the Albert side to the Frenchtown side and then back when they wanted to go back...that was the only way...old Mr. Demia Laderre lived there, and his family, he raised his family there on a ranch on the other side of the river...

and when they passed away...

Yes, Emil Footer bought that place and lived there, and when I was teaching in Frenchtown in 22 the kids were still coming across the river on that ferryboat.

where was that located?

It was located directly down, you know that alley...that starts almost in front of the church where it used to be the Parent house and the Vaincoeur house -- that alley went straight down there and when the alley reached the river, that's where the boat was...directly across from the church almost.

MJ: Speaking of the river, you know that swamp that's behind the school was that part of the river...

DC: It always was a swamp...a slough

MJ: Always ran there...

DC: Yes, but during high water, you see, that would fill up. But I don't remember any of the people who lived near that had to move out.

MJ: Did Mill Creek ever flood?

DC: Never to hurt Frenchtown. And by the way, up Mill Creek, up past the cemetery, was the pavilion, that's where we used to go dance when I was about 17, 18, and 19. I don't remember the name...(fr. conv.)... Philip Deschamps had built it and owned it.

MJ: How many years did it operate?

DC: Oh, about 1917-1920

MJ: Just held dances there?
DC: Yes. Seems to me it burnt. Then the Turmell family, who had lived in Frenchtown and moved to Potomac, had the idea of building one up in Potomac, and the crowds in Frenchtown, by then the cars were so prevalent, that they went to Potomac. ...and in Potomac the Meisinger band used to play... Tom Meisinger, in Frenchtown, Hector Deschamps had a band, and it was his father who built the pavilion...I imagine that he did quite a bit of playing down there, but I can't remember.

MJ: I suppose on St. John's Day they had dances there?

DC: No, St. John's dances were held right in Frenchtown. For a couple of years they went to Council Groves, where Sol's ranch is and the Grass Valley school...for a couple of years they celebrated there...there was a hotel and a big dance hall there...but most of the St. John's dances were in Frenchtown. And we used to use the hall in the hotel that is there now, and the hall in the old old hotel too, and then there were two dance halls, the hall across, the Grover saloon, was a dance hall too that we used to use...Now about (fr. conv.)...About 1914 or 1915 Father Legree got the sisters to come to Frenchtown and start a boarding school he built a great big building which is gone now, but you probably have seen it, it hasn't been too long since it was gone, 100 feet by 50 feet lon, and in the top Father Legree first of all built his building and had a bowling alley in the top, and was trying to make a place of amusement and a place of dances, and then he got the sisters to come down there and he changed it into a Catholic boarding school, and upstairs where the hall had been, they made dormitories, one for boys and one for girls, and downstairs were the classrooms and the recreation rooms, the kitchen and the dining room, they kept a few boarders too. In 1923 the Catholic Schools I started teaching in Sept. 23, oh it was 24, and Father Melody was there and there weren't enough pupils going to the school by that time, the Miran school, the Loiselle school, and the O'Keefe school had consolidated with the Frenchtown school, so they were all going there, and there weren't enough youngsters left going to the Catholic school, so Father decided to close the school, and they remodeled the place, and made a big dining room area downstairs with a kitchen and dance hall upstairs, and that's where most of the St. John's celebrations were held after 1924, as well as I can remember.

MJ -- dimensions & location qu. --(definitely) 100 x 50, I remember that. It was located between the church and the new school, right next to the, not next to, but where the road turns in and out, about 50 feet from there.

MJ -- the dormitory, was it individual rooms.

DC: It was two great big rooms...oh, 1/2 of the upstairs was dormitory, and the other half was classrooms...yes, the 8th grade room., I finished the 8th grade there...

MJ: So there were two schools here for awhile?

DC: Yes sir; before it consolidated, when it was only the Frenchtown school, yes there were, there was the Catholic school, and it had more pupils than the public school.

MJ: I'll bet that was pretty unusual for Montana...to have two schools right across the street...

DC: Yes, they were right practically across the street from each other.

MJ: What was the enrollment at its height?
DC: I couldn’t tell you...I imagine...oh, about...must have been 20-25 in 7th and 8th grade, in 5th and 6th the same amount, and in 3rd and 4th, there must have been about 75-100 kids...

MJ: Were these orphans?

DC: No, no, there were Frenchtown kids. But those who lived too far, for instance, we were boarders. We went on Monday and went home Friday. But they had three boarders I remember, the McVey’s, from Butte, I remember.

MJ: What was the exact name?

DC: Let’s see -- the St. John the Baptist school.

MJ: It burnt down?

DC: No, no. It never burned. They tore it down. And I don’t know what year they tore it down -- very recent year...Lena Lucier will be able to tell you that better than I can -- the late 50’s. Before the high school crossed the road...but not long before that. ...You see, I left Frenchtown in ’29, but I’ve always been interested in the place and the people -- my pupils I just love -- but I’ve been so busy raising my family -- I went back to a few St. John’s celebrations but I haven’t kept track year by year...

MJ: You said you went to school at the one by your place...

DC: We went to school at the Miron school -- the Miron/Loiselle school -- grade, my dad, the Johnson ranch belonged in the O’Keefe school district and he decided that we would go to the O’Keefe school located on the Flathead road between the alley, the access road that goes to the Flathead road, and the Sells place, the big building up on the hill, it was located on that side of the Bigfork road, in an apple orchard. But the first O’Keefe school was located right in the corner where the alley joins the Flathead road...it was a log cabin and then they built a nice little brick one-room school, and that served the Bisson family, the Marceaux, the Dewitt (?) from Avaro, the Johnsons and the Singers and all those who lived in that big orchard area. But the district extended farther than that, and the Johnson ranch allowed us to go to that school so dad furnished us a horse and buggy we had an old buckskin horse, and we made a cart, a built a bobby on two wheels on a cart and we drove that horse to school over those high hills along the alley, and I remember the NP railroad runs along the hide hills right along the school...that line from Paradise runs along the sidehill there, and with poor old Prince, we’d get on top...we’d go over the hill, and ordinarily we’d come to that last hill just as a train was going by on the railroad, and we’d make a bet -- ‘I’ll bet we can get to the creek before the train gets to such and such’...and we’d race away -- and one time my dad saw us running a race over the hill with that old horse, and we got a good bawling out that time...he was working in the field on the Johnson place, and the hills are very steep you know and the old horse was going down the hill lickety-cut...Ida and I were in the cart...he was afraid the horse would fall and we’d land on top of the horse...

And there was another time, another anecdote... which wasn’t too funny. Now that place has disappeared, but between the old Bedard place and that turn that you make to go to the Mullan trail...and the turn that you make by Lucier’s trailer camp...there was a big gow up there, it must have been
6 feet high, the water used to come down through there in the spring... it was dry all summer... they had a dirt bridge that the road went right over it... the fences were the rickety pole fences... and they had those fences along that road for years, on both sides of the road... one rail on top of another and then they zigzag... now up where the fences around where my dad lived were the kind we used to call drift fences -- a big post with a brace, another pole bracing it, and then they'd run barbed wire along the posts -- they didn't just dig the holes or cut the rails... they way the fence was along that lane... one time my mother and I were going to mass with a little red horse... she was unpredictable... and we came to that place, that hole where that culvert was, and of course it was deep, and the fence was right along it, and somehow they'd let the water run right along the fence; the horse... there was something that had been dropped in the road... a package in the road... and she suddenly shied, became frightened, and jumped, jumped down into that hole, and there she was between the culvert and the fence, and me on top of her of course, and mother on top of me! And the buggy sitting part way up the hole and part on the culvert. But after she got down there she didn't move anymore. We weren't hurt, and were able to get out and unhitch her and take lead her out of the hole and of course the buggy stayed there. And for the next mass, my dad came along! And he recognized that thing down there! And if you don't think he was worried until he got to Frenchtown! We got a ride to Frenchtown with the Dissault family -- they were on their way to mass too so we rode with them.

MJ: How many years did you go to the O'Keefe school?

DC: Two years. Then the convent started in Frenchtown and we went to the convent... I remember I was in the 3rd and 4th grade because I remember at that time I was just conditioned to 5th grade and when I got to the sisters school I wasn't really a 5th grader; I was conditioned to that grade. And I didn't say too much, but decided I was going to work, and that year I made both the 5th and 6th grade.

MJ: Was the sisters school pretty tough?

DC: No, not necessarily. Not any tougher than the ordinary schools of that day. It was good. We got a good education. The only thing is, it wasn't accredited for 8th grade graduations and they gave us an 8th grade certificate because most of us could come to the academy in Missoula, Loyola High School, because they expected us to go to Missoula High School if we went to high school at all, and their certificates entitled us to go to their high school. But when we went to public high school, the 8th grade certificates weren't of value, so when the schools were consolidated in Frenchtown, they consolidated and had 2 years of high school; well, I'd gone through the first year of high school in the Catholic school in Frenchtown; they taught the first and second year; and then I quit school for two years and went to work... worked for the neighbors, for Mrs. Paul, the lady who was cooking for 4 men and taking care of a paralyzed woman and all that, but I decided I wasn't going to do that all the rest of my life for a living so I decided to go back to school when they consolidated and have those two years of high school... I went back for the second year... and our professor, Theodore Hansen, a great man I've never forgotten... the first professor of the school in Frenchtown... discovered that our certificates wouldn't let us enter public high schools, so he made us take the 8th grade exams, prepared us for the 8th grade exams, we all passed them and then were entitled to come to Missoula high school the following year. They only taught the first two years in Frenchtown, so
I decided to come to Missoula County High School as a junior. I earned my board and room, worked for a widower, took care of his daughter, and sister,...

BP: When did they finally have all four years of high school in Frenchtown?

DC: I think it was in 1922 and 23. Or 21 and 22. I started teaching there in 1923, and I think that was the second year that they'd had high school.

MJ: how long did you teach there?

DC: Six years.

MJ: Did you go to the University of Montana?

DC: I went to Dillon in 1921 and 1922, and then you could start teaching on a second-grade certificate. I think I was the second Frenchtown girl that taught...Anna Deschamps was the first; Fred Deschamps teacher...she then went to Big Bend, and then the nursing profession...Big Bend was between Grass Valley and the Loiselle School in Frenchtown. Big Bend school was near the LaCasse ranch, on the other side of young Fred Deschamps.

MJ: These schools weren't very far apart...

DC: They weren't far apart, no...there was the Miron school, and the Big Bend school. Big Bend didn't consolidate...it was only Frenchtown, Miron, and Hudson that consolidated...the Miron school also called the Loiselle school. The O'Keefe school always remained the O'Keefe; and the Big Bend didn't change either, that I know of...then while I was still teaching school in Frenchtown, the Cormier school joined the district. That Cormier school is near the Six Mile Creek...I'm not too sure it isn't still there...farther up...then Big Bend, I'm very sure, joined after I quit teaching there in 1929. Now, is that all the schools consolidated...?

MJ: Where were your parents when you taught?

DC: They lived in that ranch, and moved to Missoula in 1927, and mother kept a rooming house here, from 1927 until about 1936 when my dad died.

MJ: When was the last time your mother was in Frenchtown?

DC: Oh, last summer. Ida Richardson is my cousin, 2nd cousin, and her great grandniece, and my mother celebrated her 100th birthday last summer. she had a nephew priest come to Montreal to say mass for her, and of course we entertained him while he was here, and we went to the Richardsons, and mother went back into the Frenchtown church...

MJ: Speaking of the church, we heard a story your mother might know about...about the divider in the pews. What was the divider for, do you know or does she?

DC: I suppose one of the reasons was to hold them up, to make them more solid, and the other one was to separate the pews -- when whoever supported the church in the early days, we paid so much for a pew in those years -- $20 was the cost of our pews -- $20 for the smaller ones -- the longer ones, where the separations were, were more. This is what we were expected to pay aside from the Sunday donations.

MJ: Oh, aside from the Sunday donations?
to assure that the priest had something to eat.

MC: Oh, yes, ...the pew rent was beside the donations. They were there at St. Anthony's too...

And of course the wealthy ones had the front pews, and paid a little more for the front pews.

MJ: The reason I asked, we heard a story... we're trying to separate fact from fiction ... we heard it was to separate the French Canadian families...

DC: No, no, they were there to separate the pews for the pew rent... some rented more than others, the front ones rented more than the back ones, the long pews for larger families, and of course, if you couldn't afford to pay any rent, you went to church anyway; you sat wherever you could find a place; however, those who paid rent, that was their pew, and everybody stayed cut!

MJ: Was there any... we've heard from other people, saying that there was a community division, between the French Canadians, depending on what area they were from...

DC: Not by the area they were from; I never felt that way, and I don't think Mother felt that way... but the people who came from the province of Quebec... had about the same ways... and they were friendly... but the people who came from New Brunswick were much friendlier; the Quebec group were very church-oriented; the province of Quebec was 95% Catholic the ones from NB weren't quite so church-oriented, and they grouped together and they were fun-loving people, but there was never any split difference, for marriage, or anything like that.... of course, you see, in the olden days they were all so family-oriented; families kind of stuck together on Easter and Christmas well the brothers and sisters and their families would get together... but outside of that, in marriage there was no division ... excepting that there was an inclination to a caste... the wealthy ones, for instance, were shown more respect than the ones that weren't so rich, and they expected more attention, and they were paid it...

(phone rings, tape ends)