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Oral History Number: 047-020

Interviewee: Henry Lavoie

Interviewer: unknown

Date of Interview: March 21, 1975; February 1976

Project: Frenchtown Historical Society Oral History Project

Henry Lavoie, born May 30, 1896

Father's name, Firmin Lavoie

Mother's name, Ida Cyr

Henry's father came to Frenchtown from Grand Island, Maine, in 1888. He was French Canadian. He had heard that wages were higher out here. When he first arrived, he went to the home of Frank Therriault. (Friend or relative?) They gave him some coffee to drink. He thought it was terrible stuff. For dessert they gave him ice cream. He had never tasted ice cream before so he thought in Montana they had the coldest damn pudding. Henry's father and his brother, Alex, came out here together on a train. They couldn't talk English. They didn't know there was a rest room on the train so they had to make their rest room stops whenever the train stopped at a depot, etc.

Henry's father worked at the Bonner Mill for one winter (1888). Then he went working in the woods—first as a ratchet setter, then a sawyer. He worked sawing for about 23 years. He had no formal education.

Henry's grandfather was Eloi Cyr. They arrived here about 1876. Henry's parents lived with Henry's grandparents for a while on the present Cyr ranch.

Henry's parents went to Granite, Idaho, in 1939 when Henry was three yrs. Old. Pete Longpre owned the place where Henry, now lives. Henry's parents came back from Idaho and bought the ranch at Huson in 1905. Henry started 1st grade then at Huson. He was about eight years old. His first grade teacher's name was Jim Miller. Second grade was William Touchette, then a Mrs. Burr. He went to school at Huson until he was 16 years old. He can remember at one time that one teacher had 68 students. Henry went to school with Henry Clemens. In 8th grade, Henry Clemens was Henry's last teacher. Went to school with Boyers, Scheffers, Beauregards, Longpres, Cadieux, Clemens are some of names he remembers. Says Huson school was located approximately where the slough and field make a point in Scheffer's field—near where Archie Beauregard's little house was. It was boarded with upright boards. Main building was log, and they had to put an addition on it because they had so many kids.

Man that owned sawmill at Huson was named Huson. When they were logging up Houle Creek, hauled the logs down to the railroad spur that was near where the present Lavoie Underpass is now. The name of railroad spur was Tindle. Years later Henry and George Boyer requested the spur back again so they could have their grain hauled from there. They sacked the grain and

loaded it on railroad cars. Had to make arrangements for the railroad car with the railroad agent at the depot ahead of time.

The Cheff's proved on the Thompson place. Got water right on the Six Mile and built a ditch that came out of Gleason place. They raised potatoes there. Henry remembers that Louis Brown lived in a place in the upper orchard above Boyer home. In 1864, water rights were obtained for the Thompson place. Neejay (?) and Prezneau [Primeau?] first owned present Lavoie ranch. Then Pete Longpre. Then Lavoie. Lavoie bought pasture from Cheffs (behind where Dan Rose lives) in 1906.

Henry played on the Huson baseball team.

Lavoie's had their own sawmill that ran on steam. Had 15 horsepower. Henry ran the mill. His Dad was sawyer and his brother Joe was ratchet setter. Henry tells of making hinges for gates, etc. from sled runners salvaged from logging operations behind the Nine Mile Remount Depot. Remembers the big forest fire of 1910. Said it was all cloudy and smoky in the valley.

Henry and Roy Beauregard decided to skip school. They went down in the bottom land behind the school and hid in a haystack. They could see the school from where they were hiding. Some of the cattle were mean and wouldn't let the kids get down from the haystack so they had to wait till Deschamps came to feed the cattle and rode out with them. A couple of kids told on them (was Dan and Bill Longpre), so teacher made Henry and Roy get a switch and he paddled them with it. Needless to say, Henry and Roy got even with the tattletales.

Henry remembers when the Milwaukee railroad went, through the valley, 1908. He has a picture of same. Later, Henry worked on the electrification of Milwaukee railroad for about six months as they went through the valley. He quit when they got to Alberton. Went back to farming.

Henry went to the 8th grade but didn't finish the grade. Went farming. Then he went to the service (WW1) in 1918. He landed in Liverpool, England. He went to military police school in France. Then was stationed in Germany for about seven months. Saw many sites such as St. Peter's Basilica. Went to Mass there. Also St. Marys. Saw Christopher Columbus' home in Genoa. He was discharged from service in 1919. He was in the service about 22 months. While in the service he started out on KP, then was a baker. After he got out of the service, he thought of maybe starting a bakery of his own, but he came home to visit his father and ended up farming again. He batched and lived on the Thompson place until it burned. He tells of working long, long hours—up at 4 a.m. and work until dark. Tells of bachelor fare—diet of salt pork.

Henry remembers Napoleon Glaude and son George called Jr. Henry played fiddle at some of the dances at the Glaude dance hall in Huson. His brother Joe Lavoie played the accordion. Emma (Foster) Lauzier played the piano. They also played at house parties and at Cyr for Daigle cousins. Henry learned to play the violin just by listening—by ear, in other words. His violin had

been made in Italy. It burned in the fire on the Thompson place. They played for free at these dances. When the bow of his fiddle needed replenishing, Henry used horse hair from the tail of his horse, Bill.

Henry remembers Bill Boyer and J.R. Glaude running a butcher shop in Huson.

About 1925, Henry contracted meningitis and polio. Was very ill, but seemingly came through the ordeal without any after effects. Was in the [unintelligible] hospital in Missoula.

McGee was name of agent he remembers at Huson Depot. Remembers the name Sarafino. Says they lived across from Jim Richardson's at Six Mile. They had gardens there and sold vegetables.

NP railroad [Northern Pacific] came through first. When Milwaukee came through, it crossed the NP track at Huson (still does) so it was necessary to have a control tower with levers to operate the signals and to switch [unintelligible]. Had to be manned at all times. Remembers names of men that worked there as: Atkinson, Hughes, and Al Hansen. Men were later replaced by electrical switches, etc.

Henry remembers the first St. John's Day celebration as being in 1908 with Father Legris [Lionel Legris] being pastor then. Remembers they had trotting horse races. Also remembers of having a gas balloon as a big attraction. They launched it from the ground, then cut it loose. Then when the balloon got so high, the man parachuted out. Henry remembers that he landed in the slough behind the school. Pulled him out of the mud and he was [unintelligible].

Says high school was built with debentures and donations from the Frenchtown parish. Says Phillip Deschamps built and owned the Millcreek Pavilion. It was a bootlegging haven during Prohibition days. Says pavilion was a roof and floor with open sides. Many memorable dances held there.

Tells how Napoleon Glaude moved boiler that had been used for steam power at lumber mill up Millcreek (loaded it on wagon, etc. with horses) and brought it down to Huson as "he planned to use it to heat the hotel." But after he went to all that work when the boiler was inspected, it was found to have bullet hole (or holes) in it and not fit for use as he had planned. Henry tells that Napoleon Glaude was a very generous person; would loan you anything you wanted but wouldn't sell anything because he might need it. Henry tells how he wanted to buy a large [unintelligible] for making a buzz saw and how really needed it badly, but Glaude wouldn't sell it to him. Archie Beauregarde told Henry to "borrow it from him," which he did, and he still has it to this day.

Henry bought his first tractor in 1936, also threshing machine. Found that it was cheaper to run tractor than horses, as fuel was cheaper than hay and grain. It took 14 horses to run two gang plows—one tractor to do same. Tractor plowed about 14 acres a day (ten hours a day), while each gang of horses plowed four acres each (two gangs did eight acres a day). It took 13 teams

to do the threshing. The horses were always kept in the barn so must have a large barn and always had a barn to clean with that many horses. Figures it took about 600 bushels of grain to feed horses during threshing.

During the Depression, grain prices fell down to 50-60 cents a bushel so he didn't sell his grain. He stored it for two years when prices went up to \$1.25 a bushel and then sold it. Of course, he had to sell some of it to operate during the two years, but he had pigs and cattle to fall back on and his living expenses as a bachelor were nil. He lived on salt pork and worked long hard hours, thus surviving the Depression years quite well. When he had stored his grain, the yield that year had been terrific—about 50 bushels to the acre.

Henry suffered a tragedy in 1955 losing his right hand in a hay baler incident, but this hasn't slowed him down. He is a very active community sports booster.

Income tax didn't have to be filed until in the 1940s.

Henry's grandparents came out here in covered wagon—his mother's parents, Eloi Cyr. Henry's mother was born in wagon on way out here. They kept her in a basket in the back of the wagon. One day they found her gone out of the basket so they retraced their tracks and found that she had fallen out of the basket and wagon somewhere along the way. Fortunately, it wasn't too long until they noticed she was missing because they found her a ways back where they had come from. The road was [unintelligible]. She was all covered with dust. She was only a few days old when this incident happened. Needless to say, they moved her and the basket to the front of the wagon. Indians never bothered them on the way out here.

Henry recalls his dad working in sawmills located in several locations for a man named Jack Hennraty. All these mills were powered by steam except one located on Six Mile Creek which was water powered through an under-shot water wheel. Through the use of ditches with gates and a large reservoir which would fill overnight, there was more power available than the steam engine would produce. Henry's dad, the sawyer, with all this extra power would crowd the mill over its normal capacity much to the dismay of his fellow workers who, of course, had to feed this hungry machine the logs and take away the lumber all by hand.

[End of Summary]