

Oral History Number: 047-023b

Interviewee: Fred Cormier

Interviewer: Unknown

Date of Interview: circa 1975-1976

Project: Frenchtown Historical Society Oral History Project

Unknown Interviewer: I'm talking to Fred Cormier, and he's going to identify some of the people in this picture of the mill crew taken in front of the Cormier home. Do you want to start there with that top...well, the lady?

Fred Cormier: That's my grandmother.

UI: Your grandmother?

FC: Yes. That's Mrs. Bouchard

UI: Bouchard?

FC: Yes. This is Mr. Bouchard.

UI: Mr. Bouchard. Now, we're in the line of men sitting down. Okay, Mr. Bouchard and then the next one.

FC: That's Mr. Bouchard there. I don't know who this one is.

UI: Okay, the first man sitting down we don't know. The next one is Mr. Bouchard with the hands on his knees and his elbow sticking out. The next one?

FC: I couldn't tell you.

UI: The next one's in a checkered shirt?

FC: I do not know that one either.

UI: Now we have a little kid on somebody's knee.

FC: That's myself and my dad there.

UI: Oh, your father with you on his knee, and you're about a year and a half old I'd say, wouldn't you?

FC: I imagine, yes.

UI: About 1897.

[Knocking on door]

Unidentified Speaker: Fred?

FC: Come in.

[Break in audio]

UI: Okay, we stopped with Fred on his father's knee here. The next man?

FC: That's a (unintelligible) to me again.

UI: Okay, and then next we have a man with an apron on.

FC: That's the cook.

UI: The cook.

FC: The cookhouse used to sit about this way from the house.

UI: Oh, I see, the house is there.

FC: The back, that's all torn down now.

UI: I see. The cookhouse was southeast of the house? Or, northeast I mean?

FC: North, yes.

UI: Northeast, okay. Then we have a girl standing up.

FC: That is my sister.

UI: Your sister. What's her name?

FC: Pardon?

UI: What was her first name, your sister?

FC: Sabrina.

UI: Sabrina.

More kids in front. Are those Cormier kids?

FC: These are Lebert kids, see. Mr. Lebert was a sawyer in the mill and some of his kids...This is a Lebert boy there.

UI: Let's see. The Lebert boy is the shortest one in the back row. Second one from the right.

FC: Fred Lebert. My grandmother raised him. His mother died when he was child, and she raised him. There's one there that is supposed to be Alec [Alex] Lebert. I don't know which one it is. It could be this one, but my father and mother raised him.

UI: You think all three of those boys are Lebert boys in front?

FC: Yes.

UI: Should we go to the back row? Let's see, let's go back over to the left. The left we have a man with a hat on and lighter colored overalls. Do you know who he is?

FC: I couldn't tell you. No, I don't.

UI: Well, second from the left in the back row?

FC: He's another one that I don't know.

UI: Third? You don't know any of these in the back?

FC: No.

UI: Okay, you don't know this fellow with the hat on? Well, maybe somebody else will. If we publish it in the book, somebody will have a good time telling us who those people are. I wonder, would you allow me to take that picture today?

FC: Sure, yes.

UI: Would you? Okay. I'll put your name on it here.

FC: I have got some more here someplace. I don't know if that one will do you any good.

UI: The family pictures you know...We have to pay for every picture that is reproduced in the book, and what we have decided as a policy is that we just won't be able to use individual family pictures, much as we'd like to.

FC: That was taken on the Scheffer place.

UI: Do you know what that building is?

FC: It is up at the Scheffer place. That's a garage there now. It was when I left. I don't know, maybe they tore it down. That was taken in Kansas City. That was taken at (unintelligible) and so was that.

[Long pause] Here is my nieces. That was taken southwest of the house where (unintelligible) lives.

UI: That's one of the buildings that has been torn down, I suppose.

FC: It probably has. This was taken right in front of the house. That big poplar tree was there. That's my nephew and myself and another nephew. That's the way the house looked then.

UI: Now your parents built that house, didn't they?

FC: Pardon?

UI: Did your parents build that house?

FC: They did, yes.

UI: I don't recall if you told me when they built it.

FC: I don't know just when it was built.

UI: Do you know when this picture was taken?

FC: No, I don't. That's one thing that people makes a mistake when they take pictures. They ought to mark the date.

UI: I can't recall if those trees are cut down now. Are they? Did they die?

FC: I believe they are. I am not sure now but it seems to me.

UI: I look down to that house every day of the world but it seems to me there are no poplar trees. I'm sure there aren't. We possible might like to use this picture because it's the oldest house still in Six Mile. If you wouldn't mind, I might take this one. I can't say for sure that we are going to use it. We'll have to decide on that. There are others.

We didn't go through all these. Are they all just the people?

FC: (unintelligible)

UI: I say we didn't quite go through all these. Are they more recent pictures? I guess so. Yes.

FC: There's another one (unintelligible).

UI: Oh, is this...Well, I can't tell. I thought perhaps that showed something before the bridge. I guess not though.

FC: No, that looks like a railroad track. It could have been taken off the (unintelligible) bridge.

UI: Okay, I guess we did look at all this.

FC: There's a picture of my sister here.

UI: Oh, oh my. Look at that outfit. [long pause] Now, is this inside your home? Looks to me like it is. Inside the Cormier home?

FC: It could be. It could be.

UI: Let me go ahead and take that one, because it shows the fashions and that would be possibly...I think possibly we would like to have that one.

FC: There is a picture of my nieces. That's (unintelligible). This one's in Walla Walla, and this one's in Spokane.

UI: That is a bit more recent picture, isn't it?

FC: Oh yes, yes. All the children were raised on that place.

UI: Now, I've heard from Mr. Kelson (?), and he's told me a little about the Cormier and Glaude Mill that I know you know more about but I just didn't get the opportunity to ask you. That mill was destroyed by fire, is that right?

FC: Yes, yes.

UI: Had business started declining a little bit anyway?

FC: Yes, it had, yes.

UI: Because there was a general drop in the lumber market, wasn't there?

FC: Yes.

UI: Would you want to tell me anything about how they did that logging? You must have worked in the mill, didn't you, yourself?

FC: No. I was too young to work in the mill.

UI: It burned before you ever were old enough?

FC: Yes. I was only ten years old.

UI: Oh, is that right? Well then, did your father stop milling? Stop lumbering?

FC: He did when he passed away. See this fellow that he raised, (unintelligible) Lebert, he run the (unintelligible) to sell lumber for the farmers in the valley, but he didn't run it much anyway.

UI: He ran it just get enough lumber for the people right in there. Just kind of a half time operation?

FC: Yes. He would bring a few logs in by himself there on (unintelligible).

UI: I was talking just today, that's why I am in town, to Florida Jette LaCasse, and she said there was a mill up behind their house. It would be west of your house up on the hill. Was there a mill up there?

FC: Well, see at one time I think she used to live on the Lanoue place. At one time, her dad owned that place. See, my dad took it back, and he resold it. I guess he resold it three or four times. Maybe from that Lanoue place it would have been yes, sort of east.

UI: Your mill?

FC: The mill would have been sort of east from their house.

UI: There were never three mills in Six Mile, though, were there?

FC: Not that I know of.

UI: The Ross and Donlan was on up the road where Les Parker later lived.

FC: Yes.

UI: Okay, that's what I thought. She told me there was a mill up on the hill right above their house. Now your mill was not up on the hill, was it?

FC: No, it was at the foot of the hill that comes down from Les Parker's. You know where Les Parker's is? There was a gate there, and you would come down there and the mill was right down at the foot of the hill. There was a pond built along side of the...You see, this is the road that comes down from Les. There was a pond built in here, and there was a flume built, just...like right toward your car there. There was a tank here. I say it must have been 25, 30 feet high, and it was about eight feet square. They would open the gates from the dam up there, and let it come down in that flume. It'd drop, and it would hit the turbine down there and that's is what give it the power.

UI: Now the dam...Are you talking about the dam way, way up above—must be two or three miles up road?

FC: No.

UI: You are not talking about Glaude's dam on the irrigation ditches?

FC: No.

UI: Okay, where was the dam?

FC: Well, there was one right close to the mill, and there was one right where the road goes up to Les Parkers. There was a dam up there too. They'd close all of them at night so the water'd build up so they could run all day the next day.

UI: Was the road pretty much the way it is now? You know where it turns to go up towards Parkers. It makes the curve. It makes almost a 90-degree curve around the hill there. Was that road like that?

FC: No, it wasn't. It used to go straight from the Bissonnette place on up the hill. Instead of going around by the mill, it was going straight up to the gate.

UI: Straight up to—

FC: Where Les Parker comes down there. To that gate down where the mill was. Later on, they took all of that off, and then they put the road and the line. You see it wasn't in the line then. Part of it was on the Glaude place.

UI: I've got an idea. I think I'll see if I can't get you just to draw that for me.

[Break in audio]

UI: One question I neglected to ask you before...In the Six Mile valley, do you remember it as having more trees than it has now in the bottom?

FC: Yes. There was.

UI: There were trees?

FC: Yes.

UI: Who cut those?

FC: I think Donlan and Ross got some of them because they used to have a mill at Huson.

UI: As well as up above, they had two mills?

FC: Yes.

UI: They had the one at Huson earlier.

FC: Yes, and then they moved that one at Huson...I think they moved it to St. Regis. Then when they got down there, they moved all the machinery to Bonner.

UI: Well, were there trees lining the road in the lower part there?

FC: Yes. Some of it.

UI: Were there a whole lot of trees, or were there stumps as though it had been cut?

FC: It was mostly stump and small trees growing up. That was all cut off by small trees. Fred Lebert bought that Glaude place, and he cleared it off. All that land that is cleared down there, Fred Lebert was the one that cleared it. There's only about 15, 20 acres cleared. He'd bought the old school house at Huson, and that's the house he built with up there.

UI: Lebert built the house that we now call the Bissonnette house—

FC: Yes.

UI: —but he used part of the Huson school?

FC: Yes.

UI: Now he cleared that land simply to plant it in hay?

FC: Yes.

UI: He didn't clear it for the timber, did he?

FC: No, he cut the...There were a lot of small trees, and he had somebody cut them off. Then they plowed it and put it in grain.

UI: Grain or just hay?

FC: It was grain.

UI: It was grain.

FC: Yes.

UI: Did he get much of a crop off that?

FC: Oh, yes. First couple of years it was a drought, and he had a terrible crop.

UI: Terrible. Terribly good?

FC: Yes.

UI: In bushels, do you know per acre?

FC: He had about 40, 50 bushels, I guess, which that was good for dry land.

UI: Well, he had that ditch. Did he irrigate?

FC: He was just irrigating on the top of the hill. That was for hay up there. He raised grain down below.

UI: Now, he farmed both sides of the road.

FC: Yes.

UI: That whole thing was the Lebert place after Glaude. Now, about what year are we talking about?

FC: What year?

UI: When Lebert took it?

[Long pause]

FC: I think it was in the early '20s.

UI: Early '20s. Okay, by then that's when Glaude had sold the land, or did he lose it too?

FC: No Fred Lebert bought it.

UI: Fred Lebert did buy it from Glaude. I was curious too about you and your land. Now, after your father quite milling, did you take over the land to farm it?

FC: Right. It was given over to my sister and I, and she was ten years older than I. She got married. She had some children, and I stayed there until 1927.

UI: With her and her family?

FC: Well, she was passed away in 1918.

UI: Oh, at a very young age.

FC: So I stayed there until '27, and her husband remarried and of course, you know how that goes. It don't go well. [laughs]

UI: So you were living there with your sister's husband and her children, is that right, for many years?

FC: Yes.

UI: And farming? Wheat farming?

FC: Yes.

UI: Cattle too?

FC: Yes, cattle. When I left the ranch, I went to work in Bonner. I worked there five years. During the Depression, they laid me off so I went looking for work and got a job at Scheffer's haying, and I was there for (unintelligible).

UI: Where did you live when you worked for Scheffer?

FC: I lived there at the...They had a little bunk house, and I stayed there.

UI: In Huson or over on the old ranch?

FC: No, on the old ranch. Up where the lake is.

UI: What was your sister's second husband's—

FC: First husband. Named George Dufresne.

UI: Oh, George Dufresne. I see that was your sister that...Oh yes, she died of the flu in that epidemic.

FC: Yes.

UI: So George remarried, and he then eventually sold the land. That must have been pretty soon after, or you must have owned a half interest in it, though?

FC: I did, yes. It was too hard to get a loan so I practically gave it away.

UI: Gee, that's too bad. I had wondered about those old ranches in Six Mile, wondering if people lost them because of the Depression or lumber prices or that sort of thing. I suppose it would be a combination of things. Had it been more successful you probably would have been able to buy him out easier.

FC: Yes.

UI: Well, gee, that's really interesting. I think that those were the main things I wanted to—

[End of Interview]