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LIKE DUMONT INSTITUTE TO CONTACT HIM FIRST.

Joe: John Joe LaRocque from Regina. When and where were
you born?

John: In Lebret, Saskatchewan.

Joe: When were you born?

John: When first of June, June 1, 1909.

Joe: Could you tell me a little bit about yourself while you were growing up?

John: Oh yeah. I went to school.

Joe: Whereabouts?

John: Right in the Village of Lebret.

Joe: What was the name of the school you attended?

John: I think Lebret Public School.

Joe: Is there Metis children attending this school?

John: Yeah there was quite a few, yeah.

Joe: How long did you go to this school?

John: Oh till I was in grade eight I guess.

Joe: In grade eight.

John: Grade eight, yeah.

Joe: What did you do after you were...

John: Well, I, I kept on going to school but I went to Campion College for awhile and then I went back when depression kind of started off, I had to go back to the Public School in Lebret.

Joe: Did, was there, were the Metis children that were attending this school would the white people try, white children try to beat them up always discriminate?

John: Well, there was a little discrimination yeah.

Joe: There was eh?

John: A slight amount yeah. Not too much, you know, some. Not that bad, you know, it wasn't really bad.

Joe: What did you do after you were finished your schooling? Did you go out and help on the farm?

John: Well I did yeah. Then I farmed on my own for oh I'd say maybe fifteen years.

Joe: Did you have modern equipment?

John: No. No it wasn't modern, not what you call modern equipment like today.

Joe: Well not like today, but...

John: Well, as far as farming when I was farming we used horses instead of tractors. And all the machinery was made for horses like seeders and cultivator and everything like that.

Joe: Was there land when you were farming was it hard to till and all that?

John: No, because it was light land. It was kind of a sandy land it wasn't hard to cultivate. Well it's the same as any other farming.

Joe: You were saying it was sandy land, were you able to grow just about anything you wanted to in that?

John: Well not so good, you know, it would dry it that's the only reason I quit farming. And it was pretty sandy we could hardly, the government took some of the land out of it for gravel pit, they bought it off me. And then I sold the rest for gravel pit afterwards.

Joe: When you finished, when you sold your farm was there a lot of other, was the government buying other people's land down there too?

John: Well, no. This twenty acres they bought off a quarter section that's all they took, they fenced it off. But it was, I had to sell it to them they were building a highway and they were short of gravel probably if I didn't sell it to them they would have just broke in on it anyway.

Joe: When you were running your farm did you have cattle?

John: Yeah. I had some, sometimes I had a size of fifty head, sixty.

Joe: Well, were there, were you conscience of Metis history in your family, was there lots of that?

John: Well, I knew we were Metis that was... My dad's and mother's name was, know that we were Metis. Well, they spoke the Metis language which was half Cree and half French. (inaudible).

Joe: Well you said your farm was down in the valley there, right?

John: My farm was up on top of the valley.

Joe: On top of the valley.

John: You mean my own farm or where I was born?

Joe: When you were born.

John: Well it was on top of the valley, yeah.

Joe: Well, there was lots of Metis living in the valley eh?

John: In the valley yeah.

Joe: Did you and your family every go to visit them when you were there?

John: Oh yeah. There was some (inaudible) and my dad hired a lot of them, different ones, you know, different times like for cutting cord wood, and like at harvest time when he had to have somebody to stoop the grain, and thrash. He hired all of them, there were all the Metis outfit.

Joe: Well actually they did help each other out eh?

John: Oh no, he had to pay them there was no...

Joe: He had to pay them eh?

John: There was no, no, well they wouldn't, there was work for them on other farms see. My dad had to pay them the same price as what they'd get from the other farmers.

Joe: Do you know anything about your grandparents?

John: Not very much.

Joe: Any stories they might have told you when you were small?

John: You mean my parents told me? Well, they didn't tell me anything that was outstanding in anything. They were just (laughs)...

Joe: Stories eh?

John: Yeah. Just the fun tell story, never...

Joe: So actually the old stories were they true or not?

John: Eh?

Joe: Were the stories true they told you?

John: Well I don't know this. There's no way of proving it.

Joe: I guess that's right. What role did the religion play in you and your family?

John: Well, quite a bit, you know, we went to church and the priest was a person that mostly any, most Metis people listened to him. And he played quite a role, yeah. As I said, I had two sisters that become nuns, you know, what they call

them. And one quit and the other one stayed on, she's still there but she's pretty old now in her age.

Joe: Did your sister when she was coming a nun did she go to that convent across the lake?

John: She went to the convent right in Lebret for awhile. She went to school and then from there on she went to Vancouver. And she's been a nun for, since 1918 I guess. And the other one she was a nun for three or four years and then she quit and got married.

Joe: She found marriage more important eh?

John: Well, most likely yeah. It was a choice I guess.

Joe: Did you attend church often?

John: Eh?

Joe: Did you attend church often?

John: Yeah, oh every Sunday.

Joe: Was there lots of people at church?

John: Quite a few.

Joe: You went to the church in Lebret?

John: Yeah. Them were the horse and buggy days there was no cars hardly at that time.

Joe: Do you know, did you know, did you attend any dances and that?

John: Oh once in awhile yeah. After I got older not when I was younger, you know, after I was, I'd go to the odd one yeah.

Joe: In the valley eh?

John: Yeah.

Joe: What were these dances like?

John: Well there was some for, you know, pretty lively.

Joe: What did you do at the dances?

John: Well, there would be a little drinking going on, you know, wine when, wine was not sold in liquor stores like now, you had to order it from (?) or Regina. And that made a little difficult.

Joe: Was that all you drank was wine?

John: Well, wine was, I think it was the only thing we

could get. But I didn't drink too much of it because I didn't like it.

Joe: Was there a lot of Metis at this, these dances?

John: At these dances it was, the ones I went with were mostly all there was the odd white person.

Joe: The Metis never turned them away did they?

John: No. Not that I know of. They're welcome there as long as they didn't get too rowdy. And, yeah even (inaudible).

Joe: Did your parents or you dress in any special way when you were growing up?

John: No.

Joe: Just as any normal person eh?

John: Yes that's right any ordinary same as the whites. They didn't have no special garment, well the Metis were not known to have a special garment of wearing apparel than white.

Joe: Did you ever think that the, some Metis people tried to hide their native ancestry?

John: Oh yeah there was a lot of them that I had run into. Especially if they might have had a job, you know, and they give him a fairly good job he didn't want to be a Metis. I've seen that.

Joe: Did the Metis stay close with each other?

John: Pardon.

Joe: Did the Metis stay close with other, relatives and friends?

John: Well, fairly close. They'd like to be in a bunch in a coloney like a little place where, like in Lebret there there is a home on the outskirts of Lebret there is a home what they call Little Chicago. There was about fourteen or fifteen log shacks there where they lived.

Joe: Do you know any more about that Chicago?

John: Oh I know a lot about it yeah.

Joe: Can I hear something about it?

John: Oh they used to have some real tough parties over there, you know. The wives would come in with liquor and they'd have some great time.

Joe: Do you know anything else about the Chicago Line when they shipped them up to Green Lake and that?

John: Oh no, I don't. They, I think they tried to taking some out there but I don't know if anybody, some might have went I don't remember really. They had this Metis farm at Lebret there was quite a few...you heard of that one that Metis farm?

Joe: Metis farm, no I haven't.

John: Well Lebret, that's Lebret. You've heard of it?

Joe: Oh yeah I remember now.

John: There was quite a few families moved in there, move in and out. But now it's shut down I hear.

Joe: That was just east of Lebret a little.

John: No, it's north, northwest.

Joe: Northwest of Lebret.

John: On top. I think it was, they put these bigger families in there and they paid the man to work and the kids were they go to school. And there's a few of the young people that was raised on the farm, on the Metis farm or go pretty well without. They got fairly good education. (inaudible) fairly well with white society as far as I can see.

Joe: Is there any hostility or discrimination shown towards the Metis?

John: Well, in my days I don't, I never run into it.

Joe: You never did eh?

John: I never did no. Not that I noticed.

Joe: When the Metis worked for the white people were they paid the same wages?

John: As far as I know yes. I did anyway.

Joe: Like you said you dad paid the same wages.

John: Yes the same wages as the white, because he had maybe one or two white guys working for him. He always paid them the same wage.

Joe: When, like sometimes when some of the Metis wanted to go shopping or something to the store and buy food and that, were they ever turned away saying you can't shop here?

John: No.

Joe: Never eh?

John: No. No not that I know of. If they had the money and maybe if they went and asked for credit they wouldn't buy it, you know, and on the bill they might have been turned down but that happened not only with the Metis it happened to the whites as well. So I don't think there was any discrimination not that I know of. Never heard of it anyway.

Joe: When whites were receiving our relief were, were the Metis ever told they couldn't get it?

John: Well, they could have been some instances I don't know. I really don't know that. Well, say I never really... I guess maybe there was some, I don't know, but I wouldn't say for sure.

Joe: Like the town officials, like the ones that were living in town did they ever try to drive the Metis off their land or other places they were staying?

John: Well, how do you mean drive them off? Buy them out or...

Joe: Yeah, or tell them they got to leave.

John: Not that I know of, no.

Joe: No. Was it possible to see a doctor if you had no money?

John: Well during the depression yeah I guess, I don't think a doctor ever refused anybody as long as they could get there.

Joe: How far did the doctor have to travel to see your family?

John: Well, there was a doctor at Fort Qu'Appelle and one in Balcarres there was never a doctor, oh yeah there was a doctor in Lebret one time but he didn't last there too long. He went out hunting one day and he shot himself I guess, but the closest doctors were Fort Qu'Appelle and Balcarres.

Joe: Did Metis receive the same medical attention as whites did?

John: I think so, yeah. I never...

Joe: Never heard of any instances?

John: No.

Joe: How old were you during depression?

John: I was about twenty I guess.

Joe: Twenty.

John: Nineteen or twenty. I can remember everything that I went through.

Joe: Could a hear a little about it?

John: Well, you couldn't get a job. It's, you know, when the everything dropped, everything, you know, when what the call a crash and people couldn't get a job. You know, they started laying off people just like what they're doing now. They laid them off, well then pretty soon there was no unions, there was nothing. And then wages started coming down, down and down. I worked for fifty cents a day myself that would be ten cents a hour and that was a ten hour day. You know. Where if you were working for a farmer he'd give you \$15. a month and board that's fifty cents a day.

Joe: You couldn't buy very much at that time?

John: Well, I would say things were fairly cheap, you know. You could buy, I wouldn't say you could make a living for a big family. And if you just depended on wages alone I don't think you would make it.

Joe: During the depression did your, did you have to work away from home to help your family in any way?

John: No. They were self-sufficient. I didn't have to help out, help my family. But I got out, you know, travelled a bit. But it was all on freight train, you know, they used to call us hobos. You had to get off before you got into a city you had to jump soon as the train slowed down a little bit you had to get off or they'd, especially on certain land they do when they... It was a very poor life.

Joe: What do you mean they called you hobos?

John: Well because you're travelling from one place to the other, they'd have these soup kitchens. Same guys and then they have (inaudible). But I stayed, I went west too I worked there for awhile for an uncle and really get...I didn't have to do much travelling. Oh I done quite a bit of it, but not as much as some of them. Some were on the road day in and day out. Oh it was a tough life.

Joe: Did you receive any relief during the depression?

John: Did I?

Joe: Yeah.

John: No.

Joe: Nobody in your family did?

John: No.

Joe: What did you do for entertainment?

John: Oh, very little as matter of fact. You couldn't, well out in the country there was no, there's maybe a little school dances and stuff like that. There was no, you couldn't go to a picture show because it was, you couldn't afford it. People that have money could go, as a matter of fact lot of them people (inaudible) during depression. Some never reopened again. So there was not much it's only what you could, the only other time was what you only find for yourself.

Joe: Playing cards and...

John: Playing cards or they had maybe (?) parties. Today (inaudibl).

Joe: Do you know anything about the Saskatchewan Metis Society?

John: Yes.

Joe: Do you know anything about this movement at all?

John: Yeah, well it was, it was a Mr. Hamilton from Regina and my Uncle Jacette LaRoque was the ones that really organized the Metis Society the first time. Then when the war started all the young fellows, you know, times got better and most of them joined the army and it kind of died out. Then it started up again after maybe in the '40s, late '40s under a different president. And it's been going since.

Joe: Did this movement help you in any way?

John: Never.

Joe: It never did eh?

John: No. I joined it, I joined the Metis Society but I never took no, because there was always a little squabble here and there. And then when after the war they got a different president.

Joe: Who was that president?

John: Well, I think it's Joe Amyotte is the one that started it up again. And then it went on right down to the present right now. It's been going since that time.

Joe: How do you think it's going so far?

John: Well I don't know, as far as I know I guess I don't interfer with too much, I think it's maybe doing a fairly good job for some anyway.

Joe: Were you ever in world war two?

John: No.

Joe: Any of your brothers in the war?

John: Well, world war one, one was in the army.

Joe: You had one in world war one?

John: Yeah.

Joe: How long did he serve in there for?

John: Gee I don't know, I was just a kid.

Joe: Just a kid then.

John: Yeah. He was quite a bit older than me. That was from, that was a half brother that was from the first family. But he was in there because I seen his picture in the dressed in the army uniform.

Joe: What was this brother's name?

John: Allen.

Joe: Allen.

John: Yeah. He's dead now.

Joe: How old were you when the world war one was on?

John: Oh, when it started I guess I might have four or five years old. When it ended maybe I was nine or ten. But I can remember my dad used to read the papers and tell us what happened. And (inaudible).

Joe: That would be interesting.

John: I was not interested.

Joe: You were telling me early your dad used to tell you some stories.

John: About what?

Joe: About when he was growing up and that. Do you know any of those stories?

John: Well, he was, well I guess he went to school for a little while maybe for quite a little while I guess, I don't know.

Joe: You don't know where he went to school though eh?

John: I knew he went to school because he could read and write.

Joe: Do you know where he went to school?

John: Yeah, in Lebret.

Joe: In Lebret.

John: He was born in the valley just east of Lebret, maybe a mile. The house was still, I don't know if it's the same house but the building is there. It's still LaRocque around there. So that was in 1870 is when he was born. So that's way over 100 years. But he went to school, I guess a bunch of people build some kind of a school house and they had a teacher in there and he went to school.

Joe: Who was the teacher?

John: Well I guess they were French anyway, French teacher. But he got to learn how to read and write enough that he was accepted in the North West Mounted Police in the '90s I guess I'd say.

Joe: What did he do in the North West Mounted Police?

John: Eh?

Joe: What did he do in the North West Mounted Police?

John: Oh I don't know.

Joe: YOu don't know eh?

John: I know he left the Mounted Police and he was going to buy a hotele in Estevan, but he didn't hold of it so he bought a farm.

Joe: That's how you were raised on a farm eh?

John: That's how come I was raise on the farm or I would have been drinking whiskey in the hotel. (laughs) So that's, that's all I know about him. He first farmed west of Fort Qu'Appelle, well he had a homestead there as a matter of fact and then he bought a quarter section beside that. And them times there was lot of these immigrants coming in, you know, and there's one instance I guess where you kind of squeezed out. See he had a farm, he was farming, he had an old thrashing machine and he said they'd always leave him to the last to thrash, you know, in the fall. (inaudible) snow. But outside of that he didn't notice anything, but anyway he sold this farm after he, that's the farm he bought when he quit the Mounted Police. And then he want to go after that hotel, this is just what I heard, you know, (inaudible). And then he couldn't get that hotel so he bought this farm just east of Lebret from the old Oblate in Lebret, they owned the land. It was a good farm, but it's the farm it's operated by my dad, you know, but he expanded he owned, he's got about three or four, maybe five or six sections there now. He's got a big farm. And now in that case see my half brother, Allen, married a English girl from England now I'd say his kids are more or less white, and this young, he's the youngest of the family, he

bought his brothers out, see that was my daddy's farm but he left it to my oldest brother so he, my oldest brother never went to school very much and he had quite (inaudible) so he left it for him. And that's how come it's still going, it's still the LaRocque. Lot of these old farmers they got too old and nobody to will their farm to so they sold it. Sold it to him. So he bought out about oh maybe three farmers right around our home front.

Joe: What's your father's background?

John: Who?

Joe: Your father, what did he, was he Cree, part Cree or...

John: Oh you mean he's...

(END OF SIDE A)

(SIDE B)

John: Yeah, French/Canadian.

Joe: So there wasn't too much native background?

John: Well there was some, yeah, not that much though. And it's same my mother's side was the same the old grandfather was French and he married a Treaty Indian, so there's quite a mixture.

Joe: I want to hear something about that Robillard, want to hear something about that.

John: You what?

Joe: I want to hear something about that Robillard.

John: You want to know about, I don't know too much about it because I, I was born, they all died before I was born.

Joe: But you heard something about it though like...

John: Yeah.

Joe: Yeah, well I'd like to hear something about that.

John: Well he was, he was a, he wasn't a farmer but he had, always put in a big garden my mother used to tell us. He was a good gardener. And he supplied a lot of vegetables to the Indians around, the Indians were pretty hard up I guess. So they come to him to get some vegetables like corn and stuff like that. The old farmers they'd put in a big crop of corn. They dried them up, you know, put them out in the sun to get real hard and then they'd take them off the cobs and put them away in bags. But still they were able to make soup with that.

Why, they could soften that and they'd make them bigger and it's supposed to be real good soup. So that's probably what

the Indians were used to, or potatoes. That was years ago. That would be in the 1900s, or before that even. But that, I don't know for sure. I wasn't there. (laughs)

Joe: So actually you didn't consider yourself poor to other people, the way they were living eh?

John: Pardon?

Joe: You didn't consider yourself poor compared to the other white people there?

John: No, no, we weren't, no. Really, that's why I say there was a lot of, you should interview some of the older, the people that went through a real hard life. Because we always had a lot of cattle and we had the farm, chickens, pigs, and that. Well, we were farming same as the white man. There was no difference. So I didn't feel no -- we were never hard up, never.

Joe: So you didn't hardly do any trapping or hunting did you?

John: I never trapped, well I done trapping. Trapped weasels just for the fun of it. There was lots and in the fall I had nothing much to do, I'd trap afterwards. But not, I didn't make a living out of it. So I suggest to you that you get some guy you know, that had a...

(END OF SIDE B)

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