McIntire: Emile Lacasse, Sr. here on Chestnut St. location of his bakery is going to give us some background information about the area and also about things that he remembers growing up in this area. I guess we'll start just by some general information if you can describe you know, how you came to the area.

Lacasse: We, I was born in Canada but I came to the United States and ah, I went to Jackman, Sacred Heart Academy in Jackman, and the day after graduation I moved to Lewiston. I worked in the shipyard, I worked in the shipyard about 2 - 3 years and I came back here and I opened up a lunchroom known as Emile’s Diner, next door. Then all week I'm into the bakery business and we were making desert pies, we were serving lunches and people say, "how about a pie to go home? Can I take the whole thing home?" So after a while we were making more pies to go out than you know, we were selling here, and I says maybe in a lunchroom working there they had only half an hour to eat. It's hard you know. So we decided maybe we should go just in the bakery business. So we started making pies that's all we do. We you know, got involved in the bakery. Then of course at that time Little Canada, the holidays, meat pies was the big thing.

McIntire: Sure.

Lacasse: Cause there was alot of French people around and in Canada where I came from ah, course at that time they didn't have refrigeration, so people if they were to eat meat in the summer it had to be pickled, pickled meat you know. Ah, most of the people would slaughter the hogs and the cattle in the fall because then they'd let nature take care of it.

Laughter from both.

McIntire: Freeze up nice and solid!

Lacasse: That's right. So what happened is this; people would make it a tradition that that New Year was meat pie. Meat pie at Christmas, New Years they'd have alot of meat pies. They couldn't make those meat pies ahead and of course they had big families. They'd make those meat pies ahead and put to cool in the shed probably and you know that the way it was kept. So

1 St. Rose de Waterford, Quebec, August 11, 1924.
2 The name of the shipyard is not known. Most likely Bath Iron Works or Portsmouth Naval Shipyard.
that's how I you know. So the people that came here originally of course all big french families. And of course where they came from was the same background I did. I knew the people there ate meat pie and I think 1960 was the top year. That year from the first of December to the ah, twentieth during the Christmas rush we made over 15,000 meat pies.

McIntire: Wow!

Lacasse: You know, so. Course now the families are not as big, smaller families.

McIntire: Sure.

Lacasse: At that time people would probably buy 10 - 12 large meat pies. Now of course they have shrank down so that we diversified. We make salmon pie, chicken pie. Course at first when we came we did it ???, small, then I says, "there's another way that we can do better. We should specialize in one line then we can give the machinery a break." You know. Like now, ??????????????????????????. So that's why we discontinued the other line and we went into you know, ??????

McIntire: Sure.

Lacasse: OK, so that's all.

McIntire: So what year did you ah...

Lacasse: I started in '45.

McIntire: You started in '45.

Lacasse: So next year, ah, this coming June's gonna be 49 years.

McIntire: 49 years, wow!

Lacasse: And before I came here you know, in the first years I was here people I ????, well, I didn't know him but people would tell me there was a particular Mr. Thibeault that run a lunchroom here for 50 years. And I used to think, 50 years. Here it is now, I'm working on it too.

Laughter from both.

McIntire: Now when you first, you first had your dining ??? were most of your customers from
the m....workers in the mill. What you said was it half an hour?

Lacasse: Yes. Ya, that's what was wrong. Course, course we were serving alot of people would buy alot of small lunches, like hot dogs, hamburgers. This is bad. We cannot serve those people so fast you know, hot dog one wants relish the other one wants mustard. Well do all of that in forty or fifty minutes er, thirty minutes. I said we can do it differently. So we decide were gonna put out a low price meal like a hamburg, a hamburger, I mean a meatloaf or spaghetti, something that's ready, you just dish it out. That's what we did for a couple of years you know. We said, give 'em a low price meal so we can serve 'em at least.

McIntire: Sure.

Lacasse: And after awhile I said gee, I feel we could see the bakery was a better line. We operate the diner for eight years. Altogether, after that we went to ah, just the ah, the bakery side of it.

Tape skipped.

McIntire: So did your wife also come here, been here for that long too?

Lacasse: I met her here.

McIntire: You met her here??!! Here in Lewiston?

Lacasse: Here, in other words,,

Mrs. Lacasse: Here.

McIntire: In the restaurant?

Lacasse: She work in the mill when I came here. Course at first I was opening only ah, two shifts. Then after awhile, my sister and her worked together in the mill. So my sister would say well, Marge come over this noon, we'll go over have lunch. People would follow them.

McIntire: Sure.

Lacasse: My sister would say you know you're gonna have to get up earlier, open up, open up the third shift.

McIntire: Well, it's a good thing you were open for dinner then, for lunches then.
Lacasse: That's how I met her.

McIntire: Oh, wow! So how long did you work in the mills?

Mrs. Lacasse: Oh, 'till 1960?

Lacasse: I think so.

McIntire: So were you born in this area?

Mrs. Lacasse: No.

Lacasse: No. She comes from Van Buren. I told her I went to ???? country and saw her relatives.

Laughter from all.

McIntire: So, have you always lived right here in Lewiston?

Lacasse: Eh, we used to live in Auburn, then we bought...

Mrs. Lacasse: Not always, he comes from Canada.

Lacasse: Ya, I told him I'm from Canada. After we got married we lived in Auburn. Then after that we had a cottage in Sabattus and we'd extend our season. Go in earlier and come out. So after awhile I said might as well make it a year round place, so we stay in Sabattus here.

McIntire: Ya, oh. So ah, the first places that you had you probably seen alot of changes in this area with the coming and going of mills.

Some conversation lost.

Mrs. Lacasse: Remember those two lofts there? I got pictures of this place when we bought it. You know, when we bought it and we ah I took pictures. There was two other blocks here and after that we painted the blocks, we fixed that, we painted that and we, four other little blocks in. It's all gone. We're the only one left.

McIntire: Sure. You're the only, you're the only business left here then. Wow.
Lacasse: I'll show you. That's Miss Maine, 1960. We had a grand opening here.

McIntire: Oh, wow!

Lacasse: Those are the picture of the grand opening.


Lacasse: 1960 or '61. That's one up there of Miss Maine. Ya, I want to see Miss Giguere, I want to give her some of those pictures you know, but never got around to it.

McIntire: Uh, uh. Well I'm sure she'd be very, she'd very much enjoy ah, seeing some of the pictures...

Lacasse: It's amazing, ya.

Mrs. Lacasse: I don't remember her name.

Lacasse: Huh?

Mrs. Lacasse: I don't remember her name.

Lacasse: Miss Maine? I don't either. That was part of the grand, no in 1960 when we re-opened we took the whole first floor, so we re-opened here. We had a grand opening.

McIntire: So what would you say ah, Lewiston was like at that time?

Lacasse: Let's put it this way. It was more french than it is now.

McIntire: More french? Yes. Well, you certainly would have that with the large families.

Lacasse: Ya, alot more french people. And you know what I admire the most was to see those kids go to sc., parochial school, ???? all new uniforms you know, and so much different than it is today. I remember I used to see the little girls walking to school, all those little dresses...

Mrs. Lacasse: Like uniform with the white collar and, it's cute.

Lacasse: That's one thing I thought of was you know, what happened. The family itself has changed alot. You know what I mean? It's schooling you know, school.
Mrs. Lacasse: Well, everybody, everything's changed.

Lacasse: Ya, it's changed. That's one of the changes.

McIntire: So what brought you to Lewiston?

Lacasse: (Muffled)

Laughter from all.

McIntire: Up in Jackman you probably know what happened, too. I know of Jackman.

Lacasse: It's nice to go through.

McIntire: Oh, ya, it's nice to go through, is right, even to today.

Lacasse: I went to an all girl school, you know. Lucky eh?!

McIntire: Wow! Lucky you, that's right.

Lacasse: No I told the girls on the 19th, we graduated on the 19th, I said I'm leaving tomorrow. What? You're leaving tomorrow? I say ya. I made it, I just talk to them and now I got to leave.

McIntire: That's right. So what did you ah, when you moved to Lewiston what did you do for work first?

Lacasse: Ah, first of all I went to work in the Bates. I didn't work there too long. Then I went to work in the shipyard. That was good deal.

McIntire: Like the shipyard?

Lacasse: Oh, ya. Because if anybody want to get ahead you could. You know, they hired so many people. Eh, 30,000 people there at one time.

McIntire: Wow.

Lacasse: So anybody that show aggressiveness could get ahead.

McIntire: So at the time the shipyard must have been paying pretty well, so ...
Lacasse: Eh, you better believe it, they were paying pretty well and you know. The first, just goes to show, the first boat we built in the shipyard took us eleven months. We didn't know anything.

McIntire: Right.

Lacasse: At the end we were taking a boat out every 10 to 15 days and we were building 12 boats at a time; 6 boats on waves, 6 boats on the basin.

McIntire: Wow.

Lacasse: Muffled.

McIntire: What type of boats were you building?

Lacasse: Those ah, Liberty ship there. Cargo ship.

McIntire: Ya.

Lacasse: Carry, carry that darn thing across. They had, they needed that to carry the...because during the war.

McIntire: So then you got out of that and decided to ah,...

Lacasse: Ya, they transferred me to New York after this, so to work in New York, but no way, I stayed there ???????(muffled).

McIntire: You didn't want to go to New York.

Lacasse: I did go but I came back fast.

McIntire: Oh, you did? Ohhh.

Lacasse: That's not the life for me. So that's when I decide to open up a lunchroom. And I, I didn't know a darn thing about ?????????? (muffled).

McIntire: Now were you, were you pretty busy then with the...

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3 i.e. during World War 2 (1939-45)
Lacasse: The food? Oh ya, we were. We were very busy just, I found it so hard because you had so little time to serve. You know, so that’s what I found it hard. The only way you could do it is give 'em a meal at a very low price so instead of ordering a short order they'd order that which was ready to dish out. So we then after that we went strong into the bakery business. But of course the bakery was mostly wholesale.

McIntire: Uh, uh.

Lacasse: Probably even now, probably 95% of the business is wholesale.

McIntire: Now who do you ah, you say wholesale.

Lacasse: Who is Shop & Save, Shaw's. At that time you had alot of little stores. This is different today, you know, especially when they opened, they let those big stores open Sundays. That killed the small ones.

McIntire: So initially that's who you were selling to was these small shops.

Lacasse: Ya. Alot and alot of them.

McIntire: Now is meat pie your most requested.

Lacasse: Ahhh...in the ??? pie it's the chicken. Meat pie during the holiday you know.

McIntire: Right.

Lacasse: But through the years the chicken pie still the number one. We buy our chicken, we cook it all, bone it all you know. Like probably if we have a good buy on chicken we cook it, freeze the meat itself, freeze the chicken stock so you're ready to go ??? (muffled).

McIntire: Now I know I've met your son, Emile, do you have any other children?

Lacasse: No, that's the only one.

McIntire: The only one. You didn't carry on the french tradition?

Lacasse: I think we were married, we were married 16 years before he came around.

McIntire: Wow...
Lacasse: (Laughing) We had almost given up. Now he just got, he's got two little girls, he just got a grandson last year, I mean we got a grandson last year.

McIntire: Wow, congratulations!

Lacasse: Thank you.

McIntire: Now the workers that you saw in the area, how would you say the mood was in the area when you were working, was everybody pretty...

Lacasse: Ah, very different than it is today.

McIntire: Ya?

Lacasse: People were sweet and tender. I think of those years I still have them in my mind, the people that worked for us for years always, always on time never miss a day's work. You don't have that today. It's too bad. You know, today they'll call in sick or they ah, you didn't have that at that time. You know not that I want to criticize this generation. It's so that, I had guys, I could say I probably had guys worked for me for 15 years probably missed a day's work. You know, you don't see that.

McIntire: And how many people did you have working for you?

Lacasse: We had anywhere from 8 to 22, depending the season. The same thing that happened to me. When I went to work the shipyard of course they put me right on the waterfront. I wasn't there 2 weeks that I caught pneumonia and I didn't want, I says I can't call in sick. So I went to work just the same. So they took me to the hospital from there, ya the hospital and she, when I, you know the woman when I was sick ????????????????????? about three weeks. Before I go back to work they call me in the office, I go, oh,oh there goes my job. No, they said you don't have to worry about your job, ??????? at the school. They have a school right in the yard, blueprint.

McIntire: Oh, wow. So you didn't have, there wasn't anything like sick days or anything for you while you were in the shipyard.

Lacasse: No.

McIntire: Now what did you do, what was your task in the shipyard?

Lacasse: Ah, it was to assemble frames you know, you take the blueprints and ah, the frame is
the part that goes into the shell, (muffled)

McIntire: Ya.

Lacasse: At first they send me to school for 4 hours a day, 4 hours on the job. Four hours a day. They had the school right in the yard.

McIntire: Wow, that's great.

Lacasse: Ya, but I still say that was the place???(muffled). Lots of time when my boy was younger I could see the frustration in his eyes, (muffled). Course now it's not the same cause they're laying off.

McIntire: So you liked being in the shipyard, then?

Lacasse: Oh ya.

McIntire: Was it a tough place to work? Was it...I mean...

Lacasse: No, if you show aggressiveness of course, people are willing to learn (muffled). I don't know if you know ??? Refrigeration (muffled). At that time he was only 26 years old (muffled). There was people there aggressive. They want to get ahead and course, you know when you come and you have a hard time in your childhood (muffled).

McIntire: Now were there any (muffled)...did you ever get hurt on the job or...

Lacasse: No. I seen alot of people get hurt.

McIntire: You did see alot of people.

Lacasse: Oh ya. I saw alot of people. Alot of people do a job that would cut, like working in the bottoms (?). To me I couldn't do that. I cannot be confined in close places. (Muffled) Some people it don't bother them.

McIntire: How long a day were you working when you were working?

Lacasse: In the shipyard I was working 8 hours.

McIntire: 8 hours?
Lacasse: We worked Sundays, Saturday and Sunday.

McIntire: Saturday and Sunday.

Lacasse: If you, if you showed little bit of leadership you got a bonus. So that's what (muffled).

McIntire: Sure. At least you had an opportunity for a bonus.

Laughter from both.

Lacasse: Ya.

McIntire: Course you probably, probably your hours ah, were stepped up a little bit when you started to open the diner...

Lacasse: Ay, you better believe it. It took me, what I did in one year, five years to do it here.

McIntire: Ya, ya.

Lacasse: The American dream, now I ???? the American dream, the American man.

McIntire: So you had, so you took a pretty big cut probably.

Lacasse: You better believe it. You just ??????. Course the hours are there but you don't see the hours. Just like now, the hours we work here, we work these somewheres else it seems long, but when you work for yourself it seems there's not very much ????? that do (muffled).

McIntire: Any ah, close businesses you missed that you knew or people that moved away or...

Lacasse: Ya, there's quite a few people, small grocery stores you know, like here, when I came here there was 4 grocery store just...

McIntire: Right across, right across from your shop on Chestnut here?

Lacasse: Ya, ya, gone now.

McIntire: Not enough business eh? Now when you had uh, obviously when you're working for yourself benefits were different, but were you having benefits when you were working the shipyard?
Lacasse: Oh yes, oh yes.