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Franco-American Heritage Collection

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Date(s) of Interview APRIL 27, 2005

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SEPTEMBER 8, 2005
 Date

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September 8, 2005
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Rachel L. Widner
French Settlement in the Northeast
HUM 310I
September 7, 2005

Interview with Maureen Perry
Wednesday, April 27, 2005

My name is Maureen Perry and I will be describing the story behind my family's
tourtière recipe.

001 – We have traditionally served tourtière on Christmas Eve or the whole Christmas
holiday, but especially Christmas Eve the big réveillon. We used to have our extended
family at our house. Of course the preparations for this would begin well before that,
assembling all the ingredients. After a while, it became almost an art. You would have
my Memère doing the crust; my Mom doing the filling and me being sort of the runner if
somebody needed something. Since my Grandmother passed away, we were not able to
keep up with the tradition this year and now a lot of our extended family has scattered,
we no longer have the big réveillon that we usually have had. Since most of the people
that we do have over are not family, but friends who often have commitments. On the
holiday itself, we have tried having the tourtière about a week or so before. Another
occasion we have tried doing that so people could come over. Now we are trying
tourtières at different times of the year. -017

Q. What time of the year do you serve the tourtière?

A. It is mostly Christmas; we associate it mostly with Christmas. We
have been experimenting so that the tradition can remain in some fashion and at the same
time so that we can share the tourtière with friends. It is just down to my mother and me
up here. -022

Q. What kind of ingredients do you use in your tourtière?

A. A combination of pork, beef and veal. The proportions I have to look up the recipe again, but usually those three ground up. And of course onions and spices, low and slow being the cooking method for the meat and crust. Now we are going to be experimenting on that because Memère is not here to do the crust anymore. It is basically ground beef, ground port, ground veal. -031

Q. What kind of vegetable do you serve with that?

A. We usually serve it as part of a buffet. Traditionally we would have the big réveillon as an open house. We would have 55 to 60 people in a place that does not fit that many. The easiest way would be open house and buffet so that people could sit any old place, not simply around a table. Some of the other stuff we would serve in the buffet would be baked beans, potato salad, condiments; it would be easier to say what we don't serve. Condiments would be things like pickles. -041

Q. Do you do anything with maple sugar with your desserts?

A. It is French-Canadian definitely, but we have not kept that tradition up too much aside from the occasional stream of maple syrup on pancakes. A few times, we have done that going to the maple sugar houses. So we have tried doing that. But as far as making it regularly at home, the sweet tooth did not descend that far down into the family beyond my grandmother who did do sugar pie. But that is one recipe where I did not inherit the sweet tooth. That recipe has not been transmitted. -052

Q. Has your tourtière recipe been passed down from one family member to another?

A. Pretty much direct line. I forget how many, but a few greats back. So it has usually been by oral transmission, but my Mom did write it down not too long ago. Especially when we had the tourtière cook-off, not with the Labor Festival, this year; but three years ago when we had the Franco-American Convocation and they had a tourtière cook-off as part of it. My Mom entered her pie. -061

Q. Was there a tourtière judging contest?

A. Yes, and the story behind that was originally, I was asked to judge. So when I mentioned that my Mom was entering, that there might be a conflict of interest, they said that they would arrange it so the it (her pie) would not be among the ones I would taste. But it did not work out that way. -069

Q. Was your mother's tourtière one of the ones you tasted?

A. I legitimately thought it was the best one. But of course, I could recognize it in an instant. Granted that there were no identifiers, but the taste, I grew up with, of course I could tell. -073

Q. How did the other people's tourtières taste in relation to your mother's?

A. Quite different and I can't even put my finger on it; my Mom had mentioned that most people don't use the veal. But my Mom mentioned that it is a big factor. Oh, she also puts in bread crumbs and that might be another factor rather than a potato base when some people use, and the fact that the meat is ground rather than chopped. I think that affects how it tastes. So, on a total point scale, I gave my second place first. What would have been my second place, first by one point, so that I would not lose it for my Mom. But it would not necessarily win it either. I tried to look up the

recipe on the Franco-American Woman's Institute web site, but I did not find it. So I will have to do it out otherwise. But I did, thanks to the publicity, write an ode to the tourtière chef.

-089

Q. Who was the tourtière chef?

A. My Mom, but I assisted. Especially in most recent years because my Mom had injured herself the other year. And to be able to stir the meat was very difficult. So, I took up a little more than I have traditionally.

-093

Q. What is your mother's name?

A. Pauline Perry. So I thought they deserved an ode as when the ancient people used to celebrate their athletes.

-098

Q. Do you have a copy of it?

A. That I could dig out. That form of creativity deserves to be celebrated as much as the athletic accomplishments. And I like to play around with words anyway. That and maybe one too many episodes of *Iron Chef* or something.

-102

Q. When you serve the tourtière to your family in a traditional setting, what other types of things do you do? What kind of music do you play or do you have a preference for certain kinds of music?

A. I depends on the occasion, for example, it is to be for the réveillon, we pull out all the Christmas carol recordings, not only Franco ones.

-109

Q. Do you have any specifically Franco music that you listen to?

A. We do have Josée Vachon Christmas compact disc which has a lot of the traditional stuff like Minuit Chrétien, etc.

-111

Q. Do you find it hard to find your compact discs and traditional music around here?

A. Well, it depends; Josée Vachon is relatively easy to order. She has her own web site and I keep up with the Festivale de Joie every year. Some artists, it is a lot harder; so it depends. -116

Q. Do you to any other musical events or festivals which feature French cuisine?

A. Not as much as I would like to. My schedule shift does not allow. But I do try to go the Festival every year. And when we had the Convocation that I was mentioning, I was not only judging the tourtière contest, but I was involved in one of the other events. I contribute occasionally to the Franco-American Women's Institute e-zine and Le Forum. So I get the new stuff even if I can't physically make it to these events as much as I would like to. -125

Q. Are there any events around her on weekends or do you work weekends too?

A. They don't have a lot on weekends. A lot of them are in the evening when I do work, or even when they are on a weekend sometimes, they are not on a weekend when I can make it due to prior commitments. -129

Q. Are there any French restaurants around here in which you might find the cuisine palatable?

A. That is a good question, because if you are talking continental French, I have been to Rolandau's in Auburn. But that usually is for very special occasions.

Q. A little pricy, even for a special occasion?

A. Well worth it for a special occasion, but it is far and rather elaborate for a casual dinner for a weekend. In fact a lot of the stuff is a long way out as far as continental cuisine. Of course there are the church bean suppers. I can't forget that because they are such a big part of the Franco tradition. -141

Q. Do some of the parishioners bring their cooking there?

A. Not usually, because the bean suppers are not potluck, but maybe the parishioners contribute their dishes to the church fairs. I honestly forget whether at church fairs we have the potluck items contributed. But as far as something we do on a fairly regular basis, the Saturday night bean suppers are a big part of our social activities. -148

Q. Are baked beans the only thing that people are eating at the bean suppers?

A. This is the center piece of the meal with usually cole slaw on the side. And some kind of luncheon meat, bologna or ham on the side. Bread varies from place to place. The one at my parish is usually rolls, dessert and coffee. But that ties into the traditional Saturday night Franco-American gatherings. -156

Q. Is the food usually American at these gatherings?

A. Well, the beans are tied to a French tradition, but I don't know whose recipe they specifically are. It is by some of our Knights of Columbus. It is a big tradition in the Franco household to have beans on Saturday night. -161

Q. Do you buy the beans, soak them and prepare them yourself? Are they basically a homemade recipe?

A. I believe it is.

Q. It is not a canned product?

A. Not that I know of. I know the ones we make at home for the réveillon or any other occasion where we make our own; we soak them in the crock pot.

Q. Do you use any particular type of bean?

A. It is usually the smaller ones. I think it is the small pea beans or like the ones you would find in the can as far as look. The big difference, of course in the spicing and the seasoning.

Q. A lot of baked beans that I have eaten have brown sugar and molasses. Do you use either of those ingredients in your recipes?

A. We use molasses. I don't know if it was something they used to do back in Canada, or if it was adopted, but it was something I grew up with in my family. I would assume at the very least with the immigrant generation. How far back it goes, I can't say.

-189

Q. Do the French use a lot of garlic in their cooking?

A. I think it depends on the cook. My Mom and I do, not so much because it is a traditional thing, but because we like it. My Mom was the first American born generation.

195

Q. Did your family immigrate from Canada or France?

A. Canada.

Q. Are they from Québec? My Mother's Mother was from the Beauce Region of Québec. My maternal grandfather was from the Eastern Townships Region, but both were from the Québec Province. At any rate, they both moved to the States. On

my Dad's side, we've got Acadian background but that is via Berlin, New Hampshire first. -207

Q. Is the Acadian on your Father's side?

A. Yes.

Q. Are any of the family members down in Louisiana?

A. I doubt it or at least certainly no close family members on that side because my ancestors managed to hide out during the deportation and managed to become one of the founding families of this little settlement in Prince Edward Island.

Q. What is their surname?

A. It had been Poirier and became Perry.

Q. What is your surname?

A. Perry, we kept it since the time of the ancestor who changed it was running for office in Prince Edward Island.

Q. Why did he change it?

A. To get votes. He was running for an office and they would not have elected someone with a very French surname. At least it did not seem likely that he would get elected. -222

Q. So at that time, was there a great deal of anti-French sentiment going on in the area?

A. And also Prince Edward Island was primarily an Anglo Province. So, the Acadians were very much the minority. -226

Q. Do you consider yourself Canadian or Acadian?

A. I have both, so I say Franco-American. Sort of covers the whole gamut; there is probably a mix of other stuff in there. We believe there is Inuit in our background and some other Native American. We can't trace it, and we may even think that there may be a little bit of Scot in our background. So it's a mix. -232

Q. Have you researched your genealogy?

A. We have researched some branches of it. We have so many different lines, but we did trace one all the way back to France.

Q. What year?

A. It would have been during the reign of Louis XV. -237

Q. That's interesting because I traced the Pelletier Family back that far.

A. That's quite something though, one the ladies in waiting at Versailles was a mistress of King Louis XV and that child or that child's child, was in danger of being guillotined during the Revolution because of that royal tie and stowed away onboard a ship and landed in Canada. Still in fear for his life, fled up into a remote part of Québec, Côte du Nord, near what is now, I think Labrador and Newfoundland. -247

Q. Could that be the Maritime Provinces in the far north?

A. Yes, Newfoundland and Labrador is considered one province.

Q. Do you have nay other relatives who are residing in the area?

A. They're scattered all over the province. We have a lot in the Les Iles de la Madeleine which is between their part of Québec but not far from Prince Edward Island.

Q. Are the Iles de la Magdalene closer to Québec nor Newfoundland?

A. They are part of Québec. They're more south and I think it was over a few generations that they started to scatter because the threat to life had passed and he changed his name when coming to the states. But either his children or their children or however many generations took back the original name. -260

Q. Were you ever able to note a pattern in the diasporas over the years from the time of the deportation forward of those generations returning to Newfoundland? Did you see a pattern of influx out of the area or a pattern of influx back into the area?

A. No so much of a pattern because it depended on which cousins went which way. We have some cousins in Ontario. We also have some way out in British Columbia and we still have some on the Iles de la Madeleine. And of course, we are the American contingent. So I think we are scattered all over Canada and parts of the United States. So it is very hard to tell any sort of pattern. In the more recent generations of Ancestors, we had to follow where the jobs were. -276

Q. Were many of the jobs in New England and points south?

A. Some, and we had a lot in Montreal. There were also some that owned night clubs. I don't know if they still do. We have so many cousins that after a while, it is hard to keep track of who is who. -280

Q. Does your family follow the French tradition of having large families?

A. Up until these most recent generations or two, yes. And actually, even not back that far. My Great Grandmother on my Mom's side, had eleven children. Most of those eleven children, my Grandmother being the exception, had large families. So

there ended up being eighty-seven grand children. Of those eighty-seven grand children, my Mom, was the only one born in the United States. -291

Q. Is this all one generation?

A. The age ranges would be widely dispersed. In fact, we had a great aunt who is not that much older than my Mother. There was not a huge age gap between the youngest of one generation which were all my Great Grandmother's kids, and the next generation. That would have been the youngest great aunt and the ages of some of her nieces. When my Great Grandmother turned one hundred, they had a big blow out party. There was a case with the typical 'Happy Birthday' message in the center, and the name of the eleven children were around that. And then they had to use a cake board for this, the names of the eighty-seven grand children. It was a huge cake board. And they had a little American flag next to my Mom's name because she was the one born in the States. So we do have a lot of large extended family. Now it is scattered to the four winds. -312

Q. Do you ever keep in touch with any of them?

A. We have some who are in town and we see them fairly regularly. When I happen to be at their place of business, I say "Hi" or that sort of thing, or the occasional visit. Some of them we don't see much except unfortunately, funerals. But we do still have a contingent here in the area. -320

Q. When there is a funeral for a family member, is there the traditional wake where food is brought in for the family of the person that has passed away?

A. Yes, usually, how it is done differs from funeral to funeral. Usually, there is the visitation at the funeral. Then usually after the funeral, there is a luncheon.

How that is done differs. We had one family funeral where it was a fairly large one and the neighbors handled the food, to give the poor family a little bit of a break. But then on another occasion, when my Grandmother Perry passed away, who was over one hundred and had outlived almost everybody on her side of the family. So there really was not going to be a large number of people attending, so we reserved a table and held the luncheon at a restaurant and held it there do the small number. It would not have made sense to have a large spread for such a small number of people. -340

Q. Does your family have reunions?

A. Nothing formal.

Q. Do you have family gatherings in a park?

A. Sometimes we have had things like the réveillon would be a big occasion, where every year we would see most of the people. But now it has sort of been a catcher as catch can. For my graduation party when I finished college, for example, we had an open house similar to the réveillon except that it was a different time of the year. Those events sort of serve as a reunion. And as I was mentioning, the funerals and if there is a family wedding which we have not had in quite a while, weddings would probably be the most likely occasion.

-353

Q. I was reading in one of textbook about the tradition of going around to house to house caroling. Does your family participate in something like that?

A. At least nothing as far as a family tradition is concerned. I have been to neighborhood caroling parties and that sort of think, but not part of a large family tradition. We sometimes do things if the family réveillon was being held at one person's

house. Thanksgiving might be at another house or any other related even. For a few years, we were not the host, the tradition was whichever branch of the family had the youngest child was the host. For the years where we kept with that tradition and I was no longer the youngest child, we would go to the cousins for that. But they might have come over for that on another occasion. And of course, there is First Communion, Confirmation and that sort of thing. So basically, if there is an occasion that involves some family member, some milestone that is usually when we got together. Mostly that would be for the réveillon. So these, more so for any other, of those occasions. But of course, food has always played a big role no matter what the occasion. But whether it is the finger rolls or beans, for a wedding reception or a first communion or the tourière. And the food is plentiful.

Thank you.

-385