

Leblanc, Leon (side 1)
Funeral Tradition; Janelle, Adelard; Jokes (side 2)
Transcribed by Julia Rhineland, 2020

Leon Leblanc (Side 1)

Interviewer: We Mr. Leon Leblanc describing the traditional funeral process among the French-Canadians.

[*Break in Tape*]

So, what about the gay '20s and --

LL (00:30-01:00): Well, insofar as the tradition, it changed in about 1926 or '26. Things were changing in the world. Things were gettin' a little bit more modern. Transportation was different, because I remember the French, they had their [*hack?*], they'd call it. Their [*hack*], which was pulled by 2 horses, well-decorated, and in a funeral procession, this was it. They had what they called the [*cabillard?*]. [*Cabillard*] was what today, what we have, the -- what is it they call it? The -- well, where they put the casket in. Doesn't matter.

Interviewer: The hearse.

LL (01:30): The hearse. That's the word we want. But it was a [*hack*] and then the [*cabillard*] and then they followed all processions. One big tradition in the French, if you wanted to make enemies, was that once the funeral director, whoever he was -- you had to have all the aunts and uncles by rank. The oldest aunt and uncle -- if you bypass them and put a niece in front --

Interviewer: In the cemetery you mean?

LL: No, at the procession to go to the funeral procession, which was very interesting. Because you had to make sure that the oldest were first, and then we went by degree. So, it took about 3 to 4 days to organize --

Interviewer: And they were really big families too.

LL (02:00): We're big families, yes. So, I seen as much as 25 to 26 of those [*hacks*]. *Les [hacks]*. With all these horses. Can you imagine this? And this I have seen. And it was quite the thing. And in the church, naturally, there was nothing in French. No eulogies were given. No.

Interviewer: Nothing.

LL (02:30-03:00): Nothing. But they sang all the Latin mass. The funeral mass, which today is going out of style, as it would seem. But as far as -- this was very -- well, very impressive when you saw that there was no coffin and you saw this body, just on a board, which they call it

planche. In those days it was *planche*, it was board. And with all the church, the little lights around. No lights, the room well-decorated, which changes today. Flowers was minimum. As a matter of fact, I do not recall we had flowers. This was not the style. And then every hour, on the hour, was a recitation of the rosary. The rosary was recited. And this was a must. And then, to top it all, it was a constant 24-hour vigil.

Interviewer: How many times? One 24-hour?

LL: One every hour. We recited the rosary.

Interviewer: For 24 hours?

LL (03:30): For 24. Around the clock. And the body was more or less the vigil, eh? The vigil, or whatever -- or the wake -- we shall call it the wake -- was around the clock also. So whoever was there, you had to make a lunch for them. This was tradition. A lunch at midnight for those that were there. And then you took their names also to find out who would be there. Make sure that the body was never alone.

Interviewer: And was there any particular kind of thing that people ate at the vigil?

LL (04:00-05:30): Ate? Well normally it was a fairly big meal. Fairly big meal. They didn't have the *tortières* because that was reserved for New Years and Christmas. This was out. But they had the regular lunch. And the French, you know how they are. And they had pastries galore, and they had their coffee, homemade. And this was done at every wake. And then it disappeared in 1930, '31, '32 -- disappeared. Why? Naturally, we were in the depression and the law had changed, as you had mentioned before. The law changed these things. They had to be changed. And then in 1930, '31, we started to have the regular funerals. One thing that was also a tradition was that the body was laid home, not in the funeral parlor. Not in the funeral parlor. And you could always tell if a person was dead in a specific home because they had what they put on the door a *crepe*. C-R-E-P-E. This was just a bouquet on the door. You knew that somebody was dead and you could see the blinds or the shades down. This was really a tradition that -- then it disappeared all of the sudden and today: zilch. It's out. This is one of the traditions we had. And I think -- I don't know about the English people, but I think the French were noted for their tales -- I would agree to this -- regardless of what tale it was -- they were tall tales -- to scare you. And the word is S-C-A-R-E.

Interviewer: Why do you think that was?

LL (06:00-06:30): Why? To me, I don't understand. Maybe I was too young to realize, but I knew they were scaring us. Example: Grandmother thought it was very funny. She had one of my uncles dress up, you know, as a ghost [*laughter*], with a long knife. This was to discipline us. With a knife! And he started to run after us and in her house, we'd go from one stairs to the other, up and down, up and down -- were nearly exhausted. To scare us! This was their way of discipline. And another little tradition that they had -- this is funny, I think it was -- when they tied

you, you know, for punishment, with a piece of string, they tied to a stove or a chair. They would find out if you break that string. It was not a rope. Uh-uh. A string tied. So you see that, these people --

Interviewer (07:00): What would happen if you broke the string?

LL (07:30): [*Laughs*] It was the woodshed on the first degree. And they were very severe. They were very severe. The love -- the French were noted for that. First of all, the children were raised -- and it doesn't matter, because blasphemy was really preached from the pulpit, because the French were noted for blasphemy. It's too bad to say this, but they were. And they used curse words. And the word [*calvary?*] was nothing for them.

Interviewer: Right! [*Laughter*]

LL (08:00): And this went on. Oh yeah. And there the lodges. Christ was [*grunts*], as if nothing. It was a habit [?]. But they were very strict. It seemed that they -- today it would seem psychologically that they had inferiority complex, and what made it, I don't know. Because possibly they saw maybe somebody richer, but they still made a living. They made a good living on the farm. They had plenty to eat. [??] But in the mill, naturally they were pushed.

Interviewer: Right.

LL: And most of the supervisors were of English name -- you know, descent -- themselves. So, it could be --

Interviewer: That makes sense, yeah.

LL (08:30): It could be that they thought they were very -- lower than these people, these -- what's it called -- yankee. Well we can stop there a little bit, if you want to. I think uh --

[Recording ends at 08:39]