

Interviewee: Claude LaPierre
Interviewer: Pamela Daly
Date: March 13, 2002
Location: LaPierre Home, Route 116, Shelburne

The LaPierre family came to the eastern edge of Shelburne in 1912. Although the LaPierre Farm has suffered recent setbacks, with a fire in 2002, but the family intends to remain on the land.

Topics discussed: Winooski, schools, farms, farming, roads and transportation, the Depression, Burlington woolen mills, Quebec, Co-ops, Route 116, World War II

Pamela Daly: To repeat what you earlier said: were you born in Shelburne?

Claude LaPierre: Yes.

PD: Were you born in this house?

CL: Yes.

PD: Which part of your family was the first to live in this house?

CL: That was my father's family – my father's parents. They bought this farm in 1912.

PD: What brought your father's family to this area?

CL: They were from Canada. They were farmers in Canada. They came from a very poor part of Canada and they came to the Woolen Mills. Either the Woolen Mill or Cotton Mill at Lakeside, where General Electric was. They lived there for three or four years and then they moved over here.

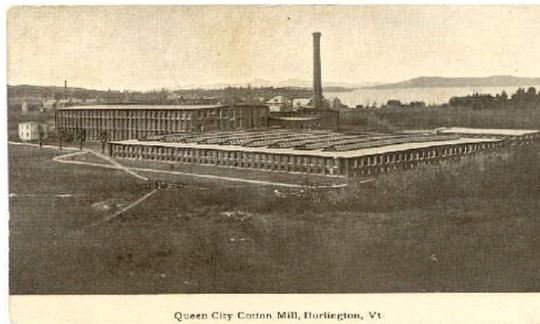


Figure 1 Queen City Cotton Mill, Burlington

PD: So they decided to go from the mill industry and back into...

CL: Back into farming.

PD: Was it dairy farming that they were interested in?

CL: Yes.

PD: Did your father have any stories of how it was to travel around this area?

CL: In fact, then, it was just horses and buggies and sleds in the wintertime. Then, cars came in the mid to late teens. There were stories about going through a swamp up here. The road used to go...instead of circling around this way...the road used to go through the swamp.

PD: Would they be isolated in the springtime when the swamp rose?

CL: When there were horses and sleighs, traveling was all right but when cars came, you would get stuck. You would have to go to a nearby farm, get a team of horses and pull them out.

PD: How many acres did they have here at the farm?

CL: The same acres that it has today.

PD: How many is that?

CL: 192.

PD: Do you still have relatives in Canada?

CL: Oh yes. Distant cousins.

PD: Did your father grow up on this farm?

CL: Yes. He was three and a half when his folks bought this farm.

PD: Where did he go to school?

CL: Actually, he went to school at a little schoolhouse down here about half a mile.

PD: South on 116?

CL: Yes. He went there only a few years. My father was the 11th in a family of 13. My father was the first in his family to be born in the states. His ten brothers and sisters before him were born in Canada and after that there was another brother and another girl who were born. In fact, my father's youngest sister was born here also. They went to school in Winooski and they stayed there as boarders.

PD: How old was he when he went to school?

CL: He was maybe about 7 or 8 years old.

PD: That must have been tough?

CL: It was tough. I remember him talking how lonely he was. They would bring him into the boarders school there in early September and they would go get him for Christmas. His brother was there also.

PD: Was it a religious, catholic school?

CL: Yes. That is where I went to school too. I never was a boarder there though. I traveled back and forth.

PD: Was the road paved when you first started going to school?

CL: It was paved during the ...in the 1940s. I always remember seeing it paved. Yes, in the 1940s.

PD: When you started farming, you increased the size of your herd. What was your father's herd size and what was yours?

CL: My father's herd size was probably 30 milking cows. I went to high as 110. That is just milking cows – not including heifers. I had another 80 heifers.

PD: Have you been leasing land in addition to your 192 acres?

CL: I rented the farms on both sides of me for 40 years. My father was renting them back then and I continued on. Doctor (Stokes) Gentry just north of me here and what used to be the Carse property just south of me.

PD: What were the other farms along this road?

CL: From South Burlington to Hinesburg, it was all dairy farms.

PD: Was there a cooperative for dairy farmers?

CL: There were cooperatives. AGWIK was one. Milk co-ops. There were several milk co-ops years ago. You would have three or four farmers belong to this co-op and another three or four farmers belong to another co-op. It was out of choice. You went where you wanted to go. .

PD: Did you or your parents have any dealing with the Creamery on Falls Road?

CL: You mean the Shelburne Creamery?

PD: Yes

CL: A long time ago. Back in the '30s.

PD: You would take your milk there?

CL: Yes. In fact, I still have a couple of milk cans from the Shelburne Creamery. There was a place in Starksboro also. There were quite a few creameries. I remember going to Robinson, I guess that is the name of the place, in Starksboro. There was one over here in Hinesburg.

PD: You had the cows and you grew hay to sustain them. Did you have any other crops on the farm?

CL: Corn silage.

PD: Did you have working horses here?

CL: Before tractors, yes.

PD: How many horses did you have?

CL: Two teams.

PD: The school that you went to down the road – is there anything left of it?

CL: No. Do you see there past my hedgerow? That is where it was.

PD: Do you know who owns that property?

CL: Guillemettes.

PD: Did you go to the school in Winooski until high school?

CL: Yes.

PD: Did you start farming after high school?

CL: Yes. That was in 1964.

PD: What was it like traveling? Did you parents ever go to Montreal to visit?

CL: They went to Montreal to visit but not too often. The family was more from Saint Highesan – about 40 miles east of Montreal. They went to Montreal once every three or four years.

PD: How did they travel north?

CL: My folks drove.

PD: How did the depression affect life around here?

CL: Back in the late '20s and early '30s, they farmed. They were probably debt free and they basically existed – they were not getting ahead. They weren't saving money – they just existed. They had enough to put food on the table and that was it. But they managed to keep the farm.

PD: How many children in your family?

CL: There were five. I am the fourth one.

PD: What do you remember of World War Two?

CL: Milk prices had gone up. After the war –late '40s and early '50s – the milk prices went down. All throughout the '50s, it was hard.

PD: When did the farms around here start to close?

CL: Early '60s.

PD: Was that because of the milk prices or changing generations?

CL: Milk prices probably had a factor in it but more people with money started coming out here and buying the farms for the privacy.

PD: Do you know anything about the families that lived in the house before you?

CL: I assume that they were all farmers. The original developer of this farm was a family called Higbees. From what I understood, the Higbees...the elderly Higbee...I think his name is Nathaniel...he bought the Gentry property and he built that house for the

Gentrys. That is an old colonial house just like this one. Then he had a son and he bought this land over here for probably a few bucks per acre and he built this house for one of his sons. He then bought some more land which was the Carse Farm. He built that house for his other son. These three houses – they all look alike. They were all built by the same man. In the early 1800s.

PD: Did the Carse farm build the little camps on the pond?

CL: Those camps were there back in the '20s.

PD: Does your farm have access to the pond?

CL: Yes.

PD: Did you ever have any wintertime activities on the pond?

CL: No

PD: I know that you are at a crossroads with your farm. Are you thinking of selling your farm for development, like what is happening at the Sutton property?

CL: The Sutton property, to my understanding, was left to their niece. She is developing it – she has no interest in farming. I think the Sutton boys were like the 7th or 8th generation on that farm. Of course, they never married or had any kids. Their older sister, Margaret, lived in Maine and she had kids. And those kids had kids. I almost think that it is a great niece that has the property now. The Mailles had use of it.

PD: Will you develop, if you decide not to rebuild the farm?

CL: No. We are not developing. It has been the family farm for 90 years. It is tough for me to decide what to do. I would hate to leave it. I am too young to call it quits and I want to continue farming. I have two boys. My older one is in college. My younger son is nineteen. They both have interest. They both like farm work. I really want them to commit themselves to something. They are too young. If I built something, I want to build something with them in mind. I always said at 66, I am calling it quits. My grandfather helped my father until the day he died and my father helped me until the day he died. So, I will do the same thing for the boys. Both of them want to farm and it will give me something to do. If you keep busy, it is a ticket to good health. That is why farmers live so old because they keep busy.

PD: Did your barn that burned date back to the original house?

CL: The house is older. This house here is built on hand-hewn beams. That barn over there was post and beam but they were sawed beams. I guessed that it was about the 1880s.

PD: And you added onto it over the years?

CL: Yes. The original barn was probably 1880 and we added three different sections. One of them was in '61, one on '68 and '71.