INTERVIEWEE: Robert St. Pierre

INTERVIEWER: Elizabeth Duclos-Orsello, Salem State University with Elizabeth Blood, Salem State University

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0:00:00

RS: [My name is] Bob St. Pierre and I've lived in Salem all my life. I grew up in The Point neighborhood until I was thirteen years of age. And, at that time, my family moved out and we moved up to the Linden Street, Ocean Avenue area.

So that's where I hail from. I went to St. Joseph's grammar school, St. Joseph's high school. I served mass at St. Joseph's till I was about twenty years old, which is kind of odd. I was in the service and I was still coming home, serving. So I have quite a connection with the parish and with that neighborhood. And even when I moved away—away was no more than three quarters of a mile or a mile up Lafayette Street—but I used to continue to go back because all my friends still lived there, guys and gals that I hung around with, that I went to high school with, etcetera. So I maintained the connection really until I went in the service, and then when I came home from the service things had changed quite a bit down there, when I got back in 1970. And at that point, I was in college and I was on my way to being married, and so I sort of lost touch with the neighborhood except through my work on the police force.

1:06

EDO: So we're just going to go back a little bit here. Can you tell us a bit about your family history?

RS: Well, my family history is a little different than most French Canadian men of my generation in that—maybe it isn't so different either—in that my father came from a family of fourteen children. He was one of fourteen and my father married an Irish girl as opposed to marrying a French Canadian girl, which didn't pose huge problems but there was a bit of a problem between my father and my grandmother because my grandmother didn't speak English well at all. My grandfather, however, was a Salem fireman. He was very well spoken in English. I don't think there was really any issue with my father marrying outside of his culture. There was a problem with my mother. So consequently, when my father ended up getting an apartment down in the Point on Park Street, he got it from his godfather, Mr. Tom Tremblay.

Homes were hard to come by in those days. The war had just ended and housing was short. So Tom Tremblay gave my father an apartment. A four room apartment on the top of Tremblay's Market on the corner of Park and Dow. And, of course, my mother moved down there from Bridge Street. She was Bridge Street Irish. The Irish in Salem had two enclaves: one on Bridge Street and one up on Gallows Hill. She was born on Gallows Hill but then eventually her family ended up on Bridge Street. But the point I'm making is that she couldn't speak a word of French, and she felt very out of place down there in that neighborhood. So, consequently, we never spoke French in the house, and my father wouldn't allow French to be spoken in the house in deference to Agnes. And he made it clear to my grandmother and to all his sisters and brothers and siblings—or even his own aunts and uncles that would come over at the holiday—there could be no talking in French because Agnes doesn't speak French and he didn't think it was right.

So, I did not learn French in the house. But I went to St. Joseph's and the nuns taught me how to speak French and, of course, the whole neighborhood was French. The church was absolutely French and Monseigneur Messier would not allow any English to be spoken in the church or on the church property. So if you wanted to fit in and you wanted to be a member of the community, you had to speak French, and I didn't start learning French until I was about six and a half or seven years of age. But being a young guy, your mind is a sponge and I quickly absorbed it. But I have to say this: I had two particular sisters. One of them was Sister Francoise du Carmel [sp?] who I had in the first grade when I walked through the doors of that school and couldn't speak one word of English, and everybody was speaking French. I mean, you got demerits if you didn't. She [Sister du Carmel] took me in and kept me after school and started out by showing me the alphabet in French. And she couldn't speak English very well. How we clicked I'll never know, but she spent a whole year with me. When I moved on to the second and third grade other nuns dotted over me and helped me. By the time I had her a second time in the fourth grade, by that time, I was well on my way to speaking French fairly well and I could compete with all of the other French speakers. Her and I hooked up again and we stayed close right through my eighth grade. In fact, she came over to my house for a graduation party. And then there was another sister who did the same thing for me and she's a Salem girl. Her name was Sister Estelle Grenier. Her name is Sister Estelle—well, it was Estelle *Du Sacre Coeur* but it is Estelle Grenier. She's still around and she's off and on back to Salem. She was stationed for a while at St. Joseph's here and she was very helpful to me. So I just wanted to mention those two sisters who were very good, and I think they had a lot to do with my abilities to speak French and even to probably be where I ended up being, you know, in my life.

EDO: Wow.

RS: Ça c'est vrai. Je vous disais l'histoire.

4:39

EDO: *Parfait*. So your father is from Salem?

RS: My father's from Salem. [He] never got beyond the eighth grade. [He] worked at the Pequot mills—as my mother did—all the poor Irish and the poor French worked at the Pequot Mills. My father met my mother at the mills. He could have met many other French women but he met my mother. She was a bobbin girl and he was a loom fixer, and they got married and, as I as I said, they settled on Park Street and I was the only child.

5:04

EDO: And he grew up in that neighborhood as well?

RS: He grew up at 27 Salem Street.

5:09

EDO: And his extended family was there?

RS: His extended family was all there until—about the late 1920s and thirties, and his older brothers started moving out and getting married. They all got married rather young. My father and my aunt Muriel, stayed at home the longest, and my father didn't get married until he was thirty-five. He stayed with his mother—He was one of the older boys, but he stayed with my grandmother till he was thirty-five. And the only other child who was still left at home was his kid sister, my aunt Muriel St. Pierre, who actually went on to be a sister—well, went in to be a sister of the Assumption, the same nuns that taught us at the Academy [St Joseph's Academy] and at the grammar school. She only, I believe, lasted about eighteen months in the novitiate and then she came back home. By that time, my father had already married and she stayed at the house and then she married in the mid-fifties. She married another French fellow by the name of Bert Julien and ironically his brothers—he had three brothers that were priests: Monsignor Julien, Father Rene, Father Robert.

Religion was huge in the French community and it was the glue that kept the French community together. St. Joseph's church was really sort of the glue that kept the whole French Canadian population together, I think. And then, of course, St. Anne's was a sort of spin off of St. Joseph's.

6:20

EDO: And just because you seem to know a lot about the family history—your father was born in Salem, so when did your ancestors arrive in Salem? Do you know that story?

RS: Well, the best I can tell is that my grandfather came down sometime in the early 1880s. I'm not sure how old he was when he arrived here. My grandmother, I believe, came down maybe a little later and her family settled in Lowell. And how my grandmother and grandfather met—Lowell versus Salem—I don't know, but my grandmother was a *Gagnon* [gives French pronunciation], Gagnon [gives English pronunciation] and she came from Lowell and somehow

they hooked up and they were married in 1901. Nineteen-aught-one, I believe, at St. Joseph's. The old St. Joseph's—the wooden church that was there—the first one. That's the most I can tell you about that.

7:10

EDO: So growing up in the neighborhood that you grew up in, if you didn't speak French at home, did you speak French out on the streets?

RS: All my friends spoke French out on the street and English. And their French was kind of a street French. They spoke French in the house and their parents spoke French to them. They got out on the street, they—In fact, if I were to bring a few of them in here for you to meet today, they would tell you they learned to speak English on the street. Because they learned French in the house, [and] English on the street. But when they got into St. Joseph's—I learned to speak French at St. Joseph's. But when they got into St. Joseph's, I can remember the nuns always—or sort of—correcting their French a bit. We had French grammar classes, French reading classes and the nuns would sort of always make sure they spoke it correctly or used a term or a word correctly. So it was a little bit different of a French, you know.

7:58

EDO: So outside of school, what did you do for fun? What kinds of things did you do?

RS: Everything surrounded school and church. And if you weren't going to dances, or if you weren't going to the CYO [Catholic Youth Organization]—For instance, at Christmas time, I can remember the French people liked to have a party sort of leading up to Christmas. I mean, you were supposed to be in Advent. You weren't supposed to be drinking or partying or anything but on Sundays you could sort of break away from that, and I can remember going out with—as friends—I'm saying dating but "dating" was friends. It wasn't the way kids date today. You know, various guys and girls in my class, and I'd go over a couple of these different girls' houses and their parents would have everybody over on a Sunday afternoon for a couple of beers or wines or drinks, plenty of food, and a lot of camaraderie and fun, and everybody spoke French. I can distinctly remember that as we were approaching Christmas. And, of course, at Christmas time every house was decorated like you wouldn't believe. And my father would decorate our house like you wouldn't believe. Most people would think it's—today looking at it—was gaudy looking. But the French were heavy into decorating. I can remember tinsel, and lights, and garland going down from the four corners of the room on all the lights. It was really, very heavily decorated and I distinctly remember that.

And then, of course, everybody on Christmas—Christmas Eve—midnight mass was jam-packed. And, of course, everybody did go to parties. Technically, again, you weren't supposed to drink before mass cause you—the festivities couldn't begin until Advent ended, and it was after the midnight mass. But most people would maybe have *un petit coup* before mass. And then they

would go to mass, and the mass was jam-packed. Absolutely jam-packed. And then after mass everybody retreated home with their families and had their *reveillons*. Those are the kind of distinct memories I have of that.

9:46

EDO: Any kinds of foods? We've been asking people about cultural traditions. Foods, songs—

RS: [shakes head] My mother being Irish, we didn't eat French food at home, but I will say this, my father did a lot of the cooking. Not so much French foods but my mother—I'm not trying to put down the Irish—but my father thought she didn't put enough spices or enough salts or didn't prepare—and my mother was just as glad to have my father cook.

So my father would cook and he would always make a lot of stuff with leftovers and he would always spice it up. And we never made *corton* in the house because my mother didn't care for the smell of it when it was cooking.

That's another memory I have. When you are a kid and you'd go down to the Point, and you'd go into the—It was brick apartment houses, many of them, and three and four stories high. Wood framed structures. You would always smell the *corton* at times, especially during the winter months because they didn't make *corton* in the summer. You could smell the *corton* cooking. And it had a distinct odor, and if you go into some of the small stores that were really—There was about five small stores within about a four block area. It was amazing how many little stores. And they all made their own *corton* and you could—They did it different days of the week, and you could smell the c*orton* cooking if you went in on that particular day in that particular store.

And they all had a different version. It was all *corton* but some of it spread a little easier, some of it didn't. Some of it had more like white fat leaf lard on top of it, some of it didn't. Some people had a more spicy *corton*, others had a milder. So everybody had it different. But I distinctly remember the corton smell that you could pick up all over the Point during the winter during the months. Say, from November through February, March.

We bought our *corton* other than when my grandmother or somebody would make it and send it over to my father. We would buy our *corton* at Audette's Market, and that was on the corner of Palmer and Salem. And Henry Cote was the fellow who used to make the *corton* in there, and he made good *corton*. Except the only problem is there was a big half inch, probably, or a third of an inch of leaf lard on top, and my father used to scrape a lot of that off and put it aside. And he used it for cooking. He'd keep it in a bowl and use it for cooking. He didn't throw it away. He didn't throw anything away. He'd use it for something else. Just like he used to save bacon fat. He'd strain bacon fat and keep that in the refrigerator. But I ate a lot of *corton* in the morning for breakfast and at noontime for lunches.

12:00

EB: Do you want to go back to the story you were telling about the fire?

RS: Well, as I was saying before you turned the camera on—my grandfather—you were talking about—you'd like to start a museum, and if anyone had any artifacts or little things relevant to the French community—My grandfather was a fireman, as I said, and he fought the fire [of 1914]. And the night or so before the fire broke out, my aunt Jeannette died. It's a huge family mystery how she died. I suspect from what I think I heard was that my older aunt, my aunt Delphine, may have dropped her and she died. In any case, they called the undertaker, which was Mr. Orville Boucher, B-O-U-C-H-E-R. And he used to have a funeral parlor, but in those days that funeral parlor was right across from the new St. Joseph's church at the time. You know, where St. Joseph's is now, was the brick church. It was right where the park is. There was a funeral parlor there and a fire station there. My grandfather was at the fire station.

Orville Boucher was my father's first cousin. So when the fire—The night before, when the baby died or whenever the baby died, they had called the undertaker. The undertaker took the baby and then brought the baby back in the casket—had the casket in the house all set up for a little wake. And all of a sudden the fire got going and my grandmother—

They were evacuating—my grandmother would not leave the house till the casket was out. And she had about seven children, my father being one, was only three. My father was 1911, so he's about three years old with the fire of 1914—going on three. Well, it was June of 1914 and my father was born in September of 1911, so he was two and a half.

So they wanted her to get out, take the kids out, and go. She wouldn't go because the baby was in the casket still there. So Monsieur Boucher came back with a horse drawn team, cause that's how they would—He came back and took the baby. And they were gonna bring it up to St. Mary's cemetery up on North Street to bury it or do something up there with it. They couldn't get through because of the fire, so he brought the baby back to his funeral parlor, which had a barn next to it—a garage, a barn—and he no sooner got the—He was gonna put the hearse with the casket in there, and wait it out and see what happens. He no sooner got the casket in there, and the fire started jumping. And I guess it had already burned the church. It took a big leap over, burned the fire station, and it hit his place. And he managed to get the horses unhooked—from what I was told—and the horses didn't get burned. Well, the whole building, and the barn, and the casket, got burned up. Everything burned. I don't know how long after the fire my grandfather went back, and he started digging through the rubble to see if the baby—what was left—

All I know—I don't know if whether there was anything left of the baby but they had a crucifix in the casket. He found the crucifix. It was brass and one arm [holds his right arm with his left then switches] on the cross—the left arm was all melted off. The bottom of the cross, up to the feet, up to Jesus' feet, was burned. It's all black. And on the back, you could see where he

carved—my grandfather carved with a pen—June—I think it was June fourteenth—whatever the [date was], 1914 or June twenty something in it. Well, that—

They didn't have any money but that was passed down and when my grandfather and grandmother died—when my grandfather died—cause my grandmother came to live with us—

When she died, that cross or crucifix stayed in our family and I've got it. So I've made a nice display case, and I actually looked up Jeanette's birth certificate. I can show when all the babies are born. There's no death certificate for Jeanette. It was never filed over at city hall. There's no death certificate for that baby. And I remember one time when the Salem News—when I was police chief—was doing a big story on the fire, and I happened to tell this to one of the reporters, and I mentioned how my—I think it was my father, or maybe it was my aunt Delphine, told me how my grandmother took the children with clothesline. When they got the baby out of there, she was willing to go, leave the house, and they went to Mr. Dion's boatyard. The boatyard's still there now. Freddy Dion.

My grandfather did a bunch of things. He was a fireman. He worked as a mechanic, at Freddy Dion's boatyard. You know, fourteen kids, you got to do what you got to do. And he also helped embalm bodies, and helped his cousin with funerals. He was a man of many trades [laughs].

But anyway, my grandmother was taken on board a ship down there, a boat. And she managed to—she was pregnant, by the way, for another baby. She had all the children, and I can't remember who told me, but she had them all in tow on a clothesline, and she was climbing the gangplank and she, as she was getting on, fell, and I guess she ultimately did some damage to the baby because she eventually had a miscarriage after the fire.

But anyways, she got on the boat with the babies, the kids, and they set out and they watched Salem burn—or my grandmother did—from the vantage point of the Salem harbor. But I was telling that story to the News [The Salem News] and they printed portions of it, and I remember my uncle Leo, who is my father's older brother, who would have been older than my father by several years. He didn't like the part at all I was saying about the baby dying and all of that. It was like that was a taboo, and I can't remember distinctly, but he didn't call me. But he called my aunt Muriel, and was giving Muriel a hard time about it. And I think it was actually Muriel who told me the story, and that's where I found it because Muriel was the youngest of all the children, as I said, and she stayed home the last. And I think she's the one. I used to talk to her a lot, and I think she's the one who told it. But he was very upset that I mentioned that in the paper. And Muriel said she didn't know how the baby died either, but they know the baby died. I guess suspicion is that it was dropped and it could have been by the oldest daughter, Delphine.

But anyway, I remember I got a little—I got backdoor tongue lashing through Muriel who said Leo's mad at you for saying that. [laughs]

EB: That's amazing.

17:50

EDO: So growing up in Salem—Let's talk a little bit more about your trajectory. So you went to St. Joseph's. Talk a little bit about where you went to school and what your life path was.

RS: Well, I went to St. Joseph's grammar school, went to the high school. When I left the high school, you know, it was 1968. The Vietnam War was on. I joined the Marines. I had Vietnam orders, and I was within four days of leaving for Camp Pendleton and I got a telegram. My Vietnam orders were changed and instead of reporting to Pendleton, which was the staging point to go to Vietnam for the Marines, I got sent to Camp Lejeune, North Carolina and I found myself on a—what they call 'the Caribbean cruise'—the Marines call it that—I was on a ship floating around the Caribbean going back and forth between the Panama Canal, training down in Panama. So the long and the short of it is I never ended up in Vietnam. So somebody—[points to ceiling]—My mother was making novenas, I know that. Cause she told me, she was making novenas. She didn't want me over there, especially being an only child. But I never ended up in Nam. I got home from the service and I went to North Shore Community College and got an associate's in law enforcement. And then I went over to Salem State and got a bachelor's. And at the time, they didn't have a criminal justice trajectory or track there. You had to take social welfare and I had—**Pat Roderick** was the head of the department. She was a nice lady. She died about two years ago but she was a great lady. She was the department head for social welfare, and she was very good to me, very helpful to me. Helped get me through [laughs]. I had a lot of people help get me through.

And then from there I got appointed to the police department in '73. And then went to ANC, to the Boston extension or campus.

19:31

EDO: What does ANC stand for?

RS: American National College, in Springfield, and got a master's in criminal justice, and then eventually worked my way up through the ranks and became police chief for twenty-five years. So that's it.

19:45

EDO: So I have two questions. One is, was that particular path similar or different to other friends you had from the Point, people you grew up with, other French Canadian, Franco American kids?

RS: A lot of us went in the service cause we didn't have the money, or we didn't have the grades to be able to get into college. It was mostly a money issue. I had a friend of mine, Bobby Gagnon. My god, smartest kid in the class from day one. Every year I went to school with him this kid topped it—academically topped it. Very good with math and sciences but they just didn't

have the money, and Bobby managed to get one year of college or maybe even a semester, if I remember right. He ended up having to drop out. He went into the Air Force. He did go to Vietnam. He made a career of the Air Force. Spent twenty years and he's, like, an electrical engineer right now. So it is sort of similar. A lot of guys went into the service. I can name a bunch of other fellas that did the same thing I did. And then they came back, and some of them got into civil service type jobs, government work. Others went along. For instance, Bobby Parisien—was a little older than I am—but he went to college, and he became an accountant, and then he joined the FBI. And he had a stellar career with the FBI, and he retired about ten years ago, and unfortunately he died of a real coronary thrombosis about four years ago while he was skin diving. Bu he had a real—I mean, he was involved in books and everything else. He had done some real heavy-duty work with the mafia, undercover work, you know, locking up the mafia down in New Jersey. To the point where they used him as a consultant in movies and he's mentioned in books and everything else. He came right out of the Point. We used to serve mass together—alter boys. We were Boy Scouts together. But his family, maybe, were a little better off financially. And he did go to college, became an accountant. Never went in the service and got a job with the FBI. So—

21:36

EDO: What about any of the girls you grew up with? What was the path? And I ask this because we've had a hard time actually finding women [to give interviews] and we're trying to find out more about what that side of the story is.

RS: I can think of a few of them who went to college. Some of them went to college but a lot of them got married young. They still got married young. We weren't—at least from—We were really sheltered from the culture of the sixties. It was a real shock when I got into the Marine Corps or I went into New York or I went on Liberty in DC. [holds head in hands] Or when I even went to college and I started to go to parties. My first day at college, I showed up with a tie, a white shirt, a tie, a jacket, and I had a briefcase, which I'm still carrying now. When I showed up at class, they thought I was the professor. Of course, I was a veteran. I was older than the other kids. The kids had all beards and dungarees, and torn jeans. And, you know, I was never brought up that way, and we never would go to school at St. Joseph's like that. So we were sort of sheltered from the culture that was taking place in the sixties. At least if you went to St. Joseph's. And I'm sure that that's any small, catholic, real close-knit catholic parish and parish school. So most of the girls that I can recollect, I think they got married fairly young in their twenties. I think a lot of them have gone back to college. I can think of a few who have and have college degrees. But I think they did the traditional thing that our parents did. You know, raise a family first, and then I think they did go out and work after. I don't know that much about a lot of the girls. I don't know why I lost track of them but I don't.

EDO: Your—

23:06

EB: I just wanted to—This is in the same line as what you were going to say, but you said that you started on the police force in '73?

RS: Right.

23:13

EB: So, that was around when Jean Levesque became mayor?

RS: Yes, well I wouldn't be here today if it wasn't for Jean Levesque. I grew up across the street from him. I grew up on the corner of Park and Dow and Jean Levesque and Florence grew up on the corner of Park and Dow, but they were diagonal. They were in a—it was a green three story wood frame structure. Well, two apartments, first and second floor, and they had an attic. And I grew up across the street, or diagonally across at Tremblay's Market. So—oh yes, and I used to play with Jean Levesque's son, Jean-Paul Levesque, and I knew his two daughters, Julie and Jeannette. So, I mean, I was over the house and my mother worked. Florence stayed home. My mother had to work. So in the mornings I would go over there before school and hang out, or if I was sick or something went wrong. I would go over there and Florence would take care of me. So, yes, I knew Jean Levesque, and that's one of the reasons I managed to get on the department.

I mean, I took the exam but—They had these jobs that opened up when I first came home from the service. I had taken the civil service exam to get on when there was a regular civil service opening, but the federal government, at the time, had a program. It was called the EEA. It was the Emergency Employment Act Program. And it was for veterans coming home, and what they did is they provided jobs in police and fire departments back in 1972, '73. And it was a grant. Salem put in for the grant, and they got the money for it. And I saw in the paper that they hired three or four people to be EEA cops, they used to call them—or provisional police officers. And I'm thinking, jeez, I just got out of North Shore Community College, and I'm at Salem State. I says, you know, I'm a veteran. I qualify. I've got a college degree now in law enforcement. And when I went down, Jean Levesque wasn't the mayor yet. It was Sam Zoll, and the jobs were already filled up, at least they told me, and there were four people that were on the police force. One Polish fellow who was a veteran from Salem, one French fellow, his name was Gagnon, a Spanish kid who was never a veteran, and a black fellow from West Virginia who was a veteran, Air Force Vietnam veteran. And they said it was all filled up, so I thought nothing of it. I just—okay, let it go. I didn't even get to put an application in, really.

Lo and behold, within a matter of six or eight months, Sam Zoll's made a judge and Jean Levesque's appointed temporary mayor or interim mayor. So, on my Irish side, there was a fella named **Mike Ruane**.He used to be a representative. Well, he's cousins of my mother. Well, Mike Ruane used to come in the First National where I was working when I got out of the service. I worked for the First National during high school when I was sixteen, and then I went

back and took my job back when I got back from the service, while I went to college. And I used to ring Mike's groceries out, and he was a city councilor. And I said, "Jeez, Mike." I said, "I tried to get that EEA job but they said they were all filled." I said, "Do you think you could talk to Jean—" I didn't call Jean myself. I said, "Do you think you could talk to Jean for me?" I said, "If there is a job opening, I'd like to get on. I've got a college degree. I'm a Marine veteran." Blah, blah, blah.

And within about two days I get a phone call from Mike Ruane saying, "I spoke to Jean. He wants to know why you didn't go down and see him yourself." He says, "Go on up and to see him." So I went up to see him, and he said, "Yeah. Go down and see the Marshall." The chiefs used to be marshalls in those days—they'd call them. "Go down and see the chief." He said, "We're going to put you on the EEA." And he says, "As an EEA provisional police officer." He said, "I hope you did well enough on the exam so that your name comes down." He says, "Because when the list is finally released—"

See, they were holding up the list at that time because of the Castro V. Beecher decision that was requiring more [hiring of] minorities. And Salem didn't have enough minorities, and they were trying—they had to get from Boston, Salem, Lynn, etcetera. So they had frozen the civil service list and they wouldn't release it. My name would have been on it but they were having a big legal argument over it. So for about a year I served as an EEA officer. Then all of a sudden one day the list was released, and there was ten jobs open, and I think I was seventh on the list. So I go the permanent job. But it was Jean Levesque that hired me, and it was Jean Levesque that promoted me to sergeant, and Jean Levesque promoted me to lieutenant, and Jean Levesque that promoted me to captain. I topped the exams. The first exam I didn't top. I came in third on the sergeant's exam, but Jean Levesque reached down and grabbed me and gave me a sergeant's job because he could go one to three. The other ones, I topped it. And I topped the chief's exam at the time. I took it with four people. But Jean Levesque reached for me all the time. Unfortunately, he lost the election when I was a captain. He lost the election just before Charlie Connolly, the chief that was before me, retired. So Jean didn't have the opportunity to promote me. I know he was very disappointed because he would have like to have made the first appointment of the first French Canadian police chief. Cause it was always an Irish position. I mean, it's always Irish. Irish controlled that. And Jean would have liked to make the appointment but he lost the election the year before I was promoted to Chief. So I had an Italian mayor appoint me. [laughs]

28:14

EDO: Can you talk a little bit more about this issue of ethnic identity in your lifetime in Salem? What it meant to be Franco-American or French Canadian in this milieu. I mean, the fact that he became mayor—we've heard a couple of stories about that and your position—

RS: Well, from my understanding—I'm not that old, but from what I remember hearing, and from what I know, the French Canadians were sort of dominated by the Irish. In fact, I remember hearing some of my relatives saying "*Maudits Irlandais!*" Those damn Irishmen. *Les maudits Irlandais!* But they controlled most of the politics. It was either the Yankees or the Irish. The Irish beat their way into politics. They were discriminated against too, and they beat their way up, and they got into politics. They got into most of the city jobs, although my grandfather was a fireman, which was unusual. Most all the policemen were Irish. All the superior officers in the police department—I'll tell you that—were all Irish until I got there.

I wasn't one of the first superiors but two fellas that served with me were made sergeants by Jean Levesque. Until that time, there was no French sergeants. There was no French brass. The last time there had ever been a French brass—and it must have been an aberration—was a fellow by the name of Pelletier, Captain Pelletier. And, he was, believe it or not, made a captain somewhere around 1910, 1915, when it was definitely all Irish, but somehow this fellow—and I'm trying to think of Captain Pelletier's first name. I've seen pictures of him. He was the only French Canadian ranking officer in the police department, a French officer. He retired in 1946 and from 1946 until about 1973, there were no French Canadians that were in any positions of authority. It was all Irish, and then all of a sudden Jean Levesque got in—he gave [got?] the opportunity—Larry Bedard, Laurent Bedard was on the top of the list. So he made Larry Bedard a sergeant, first one. He made Donald Provencher [gives French pronunciation], Donald Provencher [gives English pronunciation], and then he made me in '77, and that sort of broke the ice. But up until then it was really all Irish that controlled the police. And they controlled most of the politics in Salem, except for one story that I've heard and it has been verified, and has been verified from the Harrington family—from Kevin Harrington, and I used to talk about it.

Mayor Harrington prior to Neil Harrington, his uncle, was mayor, Joe Harrington, for one term: 1948. And he lost the job of mayor because of Monseigneur Messier, and it was over the appointment of a French Canadian sergeant named Wilfred Dansereau. And Wilfred Dansereau never retired as a sergeant. He was on the police force when I was there, and he even told me the story verbatim. And the story is as follows:

Monseigneur Messier went up to see Mayor Harrington. And Wilfred was on the top of the list. It was during election time. He was campaigning to get reelected for his second term against a fellow named Collins, Mayor Collins. I can't think of Mayor Collins' first name and I'm embarrassed I can't. I know him. Well, in any case, there was an election campaign going on and the pastor, Monsignor, went up there and he tried to talk to Mr. Harrington about how good it would be, and how the French community would be so excited if you did it, and it would be helpful to you politically. And that was sort of the gist of what he was trying to tell Mayor Harrington. Well, Mayor Harrington was arrogant—even members of his own family might tell you that he had a little streak of arrogance. And he ended up telling—Mayor Harrington ended up telling Monsignor Messier, basically, "Why don't you go back, and you run the parish, and

I'll run the city." You don't say that to—you would never say that to a guy like Monsignor Messier—and I knew the guy personally, and I used to look up to him.

He went back to St. Joseph's and that Sunday—In those days, we had a six o'clock, a seven o'clock, an eight o'clock, a nine o'clock, an 11:30 mass. He got in the pulpit at all those masses, himself. He preached and he told everybody in the French community the story, and he told them not to vote for—not to vote for Mr. Harrington. Mr. Harrington lost, and Mayor Collins became mayor and there's a picture. There is a picture, and I saw it about six month ago because Joe Collins has it because Joe Collins is a former DA [District Attorney] and he's an attorney now in private practice. He showed me a picture of Mayor Collins at Monseigneur Messier's—I mean, Monsignor Messier at Mayor Collins' victory party [laughs]. He helped propel Collins into office and Collins lasted for twenty years until Sam Zoll took over in 1968. So Collins became mayor in 1950 and he served until 1970 . Excuse me, Zoll was appointed in 1970 and he only served one term, and then he became judge.

That's a true story and I got that directly from Wilfred Dansereau who was the guy that wasn't given the sergeant's job. So there was always a little competition between the French and the Irish.

33:28

EB: Dansereau sounds familiar, is that Joan Boudreau's—?

RS: Joan Boudreau's father.

EB: Father.

RS: That's right.

EB: We've heard a couple different stories—

RS: She ran the Lyceum.

EB: Yup.

RS: Wilfred—I don't know what Wilfred's educational background was, but I do know this. He was worth a million or more in stocks. He played the stocks and he was very, very good at it. And every morning before when you go into the police station, he had all the *Wall Street Journal*, all the stock newspapers. He and this other fellow, George Bracket, a very intelligent man as well. They both played the stocks. Dansereau was worth a million or millions and he helped fund Joanie when she purchased the Lyceum. But then—you wouldn't be old enough to remember—but the stock market really crashed badly during Nixon's time. And I remember Bill. It was around '74 or '75 and I was a young patrolman and Bill was on the job. He used to like me. He used to take me, buy me beer over at—We used to go shoot downstairs and after we'd

get done shooting, and the smoke would all be in this little rifle, this little shooting range—He was a great shot. He used to be the marksmanship instructor for at the PD, Wilfred was—

He'd say, "Bobby, I'll buy you a beer. Let's go to the Lyceum. We've got to get all of that lead out of our throat." And I'd say okay. [laughs]. And so I heard all the stories from Wilfred. But Wilfred was telling me that he lost, like, a million dollars when that stock market tanked. I think it was around '74 or '75 during the Nixon administration. It took a real bad hit there for a while and he—I guess—And the guys at the PD, I can remember them saying, "Oh yeah, Wilfred lost a million bucks."

So he was very much into the stocks and everything else.

He patrolled the beat up here [makes circle with hand referencing the area of Salem State University North Campus in 2011]. Everybody—most people are dead now, but the older generation used to know Wilfred. He patrolled this beat up here. He used to do the crossing for the kids coming from Horace Mann. He would do the crossing. He also patrolled the Point. He would go back and forth. And that was when they were on foot. They were on foot. They walked. And so he was a well-known figure here [makes circular motion with hand indicating surrounding area] and down at St. Joseph's around St. Joseph's school because he would take the kids back and forth across Lafayette Street. He was a wonderful man. Really, really, a nice, kind man.

35:36

EDO: So I want to ask a question a bit about the mills. Just quickly. How much of a presence were the mills—the Naumkeag mills—in the life of the community and the Point neighborhood when you were growing up?

RS: I was so little. You have to understand the mills, I believe, closed in '53. I was five years old, and I do remember my mother and father—My mother would work the three to eleven shift and she'd be home with me all day. My father worked seven to three. And my mother would walk me down Dow Street, around the corner down Congress, take a left down Palmer and there used to be a park, which is now a parking lot on Pingree Street. It was a park and we would go into the park and I'd play on the swings and what have you. There was a ball field there and everything. It belonged to the Pequot mills. It was their park for the families. You know, the mills. Cause they had their own housing and everything. I don't know if anybody's told you that.

EDO: No, they haven't.

RS: They had their own houses that they built for mill workers on Prince Street Place, which is off of Congress Street. You just come down the end of Prince Street Place, and climb down a little embankment, and you cross Congress Street, and the mills were right there. They also had

some housing on Dow Street. And the housing is still there. It was four family houses. They were wood frame. And there was two families here [gestures in front of him with two arms], two families there [gestures in same direction but up higher], back yard, and they were stucco. Stucco housing.

But anyway, my mother would bring me down there—between seven and three—my mother would bring me down there at three. My father would come out of the mills and they would, you know, exchange me and exchange pleasantries, and then my mother would go to work and she would work until eleven o'clock because when she came home I was in bed. And my father would make supper for me. But I remember playing down there. But I know—I can remember—I was only five and I remember the worry and the talks in the house. I could tell something was wrong. I can't tell you what they said. But I can remember at the table—both my parents were losing their jobs because the mills were closing. And my father was no spring chicken. As I said, he got married when he was—[he] was thirty-seven when [I] was born. He was born in 1911, and I was born in '48, so what's that make it? About thirty-seven? So my father was, like, forty-five at that point. The only thing he ever knew how to do was a loom fixer. He only had an eighth grade education. My mother did nothing but—she never graduated from high school. She only had an eighth grade education.

And what ended up happening—My father ended up becoming a painter. And my mother ended up working at the old CBS Hytron, which is across from the fire headquarters on Lafayette Street. That big brick building used to be CBS Hightron years ago, and my mother went there. And, of course, we lived in the Point so she just had to walk up, you know, up Dow Street, down Lafayette Street and she could walk to work. We didn't even have a car. We didn't get a car until I was about seven years old. We'd take taxis or walk. You know, it just was a money situation.

Same thing with the TV. We didn't get a TV until about the same time. I was seven or eight years old when we got a TV, and I can distinctly remember the radio and listening to The Shadow on Sunday nights at six o'clock. I can still remember, "Who knows the evil that lurks in the hearts of men? The Shadow knows" or something—[laughs]. You know, I was just a kid but I can remember that.

So, no, I can't tell you what it—how much it—I do know that there were problems in my family but I'm sure it was widespread. I'm sure it was widespread through the French community.

39:06

EDO: Then you mentioned the Boy Scouts and alter servers. So, were those—those were both—Obviously the alter serving was through the church, and we've hear the Boy Scouts—

RS: The Boy Scouts was through the church.

39:17

EDO: Yeah, right, but there was a troop there, and there were troops elsewhere?

RS: Yes. St. Anne's had their own troop. We couldn't join the Protestant troop. Troop twenty-two was the Protestant troop, and I think that was down at the—that was at the—the Salem—Fraternity. The Salem Fraternity, which was next to the old police station. We really—if you were Catholic boys, we weren't supposed to—We weren't supposed to go to the YMCA either but I ended up at the YMCA because my father and mother didn't want me hanging around like when I was ten, eleven years old, out in the street while they were working after school, so they made sure I went to the Y, and you could play pool and swim and all that. But Catholics weren't supposed to go there either. At least—I can remember that.

So, anyway—where the hell were we at? You asked me about—

EDO: The Boy Scouts.

RS: So anyway, what happened was St. Joseph's formed its own scout troop in 1959 or '60. And I remember joining it, and myself, and—They needed to have ten charter members. And that means ten boys that could pass the tenderfoot test [need explanation]. And I was one of the charter members. I, myself, and Andre Therieau [sp?]—Andre Therrieu, Lucien Beaulieu, Richard Gagnon, Paul L'Heureaux—

And Paul L'Heureaux's still around Salem. Paul's—he's in charge of all of the—he's superintended of all the maintenance at the school department. He's done well for himself, actually, Paul did.

We were all charter members of St. Joseph s. And once they got their charter, they really expanded and it became quite a troop. It was the parish troop. We had a chaplain. We had a priest, Father **Joyal** assigned to it. Renee Joyal. He was quite a guy. Real tough guy. He used to like to box with the kids. He could box and slap you around. It wasn't to be mean. It was to—He was a good athlete. He was a guy's guy. A man's man. There was no funny business with him, if you know what I mean. He was a good man. Good role model, too. We had some good priests that were good role models in my day, at least I thought. And just about everybody was an altar boy. There had to be fifty or sixty of us that were altar boys, and in those days, the church ceremonies were very elaborate. And I can—*la chœur*, the choir at St. Joseph's had two double rows of benches that were for the altar boys to sit in. And you were expected to come to services in cassocks. And you used to file out of the sacristy—like they used to have—*le mois de Marie.* They used to have devotions during the month of October and May to the Blessed Mother. And it would consist of the rosary, benediction of the Blessed Sacrament, and divine praises, and then songs, closing songs. But everybody from school had to go and the alter boys all had to go. And of course, you had four altar boys that had to serve the benediction with candles and incense and the whole nine yards. But the rest of the altar boys had to come and you either—You know, if you were an altar boy, you didn't sit out in the church with your class. You came and you had a drawer downstairs with banks of drawers. **You take your *soutane* and you would put your**

soutane* on and your *suplis and go upstairs, and at the given moment they would clap [claps hands] and you'd line up two by two, very military, and you'd walk out two by two with your hands so perfect [holds hands in front of chest in prayer position]. You'd walk out, you'd come in a line, you'd go to the front, you'd genuflect in front of the Blessed Sacrament, and you'd peel off. You'd peel off, and you'd fill those two benches, and you'd sit there for the whole service. And then the last people to process out were the four altar boys with the candles, with the priest. And then the reverse order, you'd go back in. You'd come out of—at the end of the service, you'd come out and you'd genuflect and you'd two by two come from the side, genuflect, walk out. And then the priest, again, would be the last to leave with the altar boys. It was quite an elaborate thing but there was fifty to sixty altar boys.

And every Christmas and Easter Monseigneur would have an envelope that he would give each altar boy with two dollars in it. So you got four dollars a year for being an altar boy, which—1961, 1959, 1962, you know, it was all—

And can you imagine all the guys learning Latin? This is not like you think you learn a few prayers. I mean, you played a significant role in the liturgy, and the Latin, like the prayers before the alter, pre-Vatican II, and you've been back and forth, back and forth—long prayers and responses in Latin. And everybody did it. The toughest prayer though was the [inaudible]. Right now that prayer is, "May the lord accept this sacrifice at your hands for the praise and glory of his name for our welfare." Well, that was all in Latin. For some reason it was a tongue twister. The Latin words were very—[indicates a churning motion with hands], and Monseigneur was a real stickler, again on languages. And he was a stickler on your Latin and your Latin pronunciations. And a lot of guys had a hard time so they would either mumble it and he would get mad, and he would bend over [bends over] as your doing the prayers at the foot of the altar, and he'd say "*Plus fort! Plus fort!*" Louder. And—cause he could tell the guys that were faking it. That really didn't know it or couldn't pronounce the words, and then when he got us in the sacristy after, he would go over it with them. Go over it—syllable-wise—with them. And he would make them repeat it till they could say it and say it right. And it was very—Before mass, in the sacristy with him, it was very educational. It was either questions about religion, questions about what do altar boys never do—and it was all in French. And then, once in a while he'd ask you the name of the Great Lakes, in French. But then he would tell you how to remember it in English. He'd say to you, "Remember the English word 'homes." You know, Huron, Ontario, Michigan, Erie and Superior. That's how come I remember it. [laughs] It was like a learning experience in there with him.

44:43

EDO: So, to ask you one more question about that. Was being an altar server a source of pride?

RS: It was!

44:48

EDO: For the young man and also for the families?

RS: For the families. And everybody wanted one of their sons to be a priest. And there was a ton of young fellows from St. Joseph's and St. Anne's that went on to become priests and sisters. Girls into the sisterhood, the nunnery. A lot of them. I mean, if a mother could have a French Canadian—a boy become a priest, you know, oh, she was a special—I mean, she was talked about. When she went to church, "Oh, that's Father Gagnon's mother. That's Mrs. Gagnon." It was very—you know, it was sort of special if one of your children became a priest or a nun. It was just—It was the same thing with the Irish. My mother would have loved to see me be a priest. I thought that I was going to be a priest, and everybody else thought that I was going to be a priest but it didn't happen [laughs]. I even thought I was gonna be. I had Monseigneur offer to pay for my tuition to seminary but it just—*c'est pas pour moi.* I thought it was and then I went out on my first date, and that was the end of that. [laughs] Once I got to high school and we started to get interested in girl. I said, "This isn't going to work."

45:46

EDO: Did you have friends who [did become priests?]

RS: I had some friends, yeah. A couple of friends. Actually, I don't know of—There were a couple of underclassmen that became priests. I'm trying to think of their names. But I had nobody in my class that went to the seminary. I think I was the one that everybody was banking on and I didn't. But I know there were a lot of French families that had—their sons and daughters went into the clergy or the sisterhoods.

46:20

EB: I was just wondering how you met your wife.

RS: First National. Before I got on the police force I was in college. Again, I worked there from high school, then back, and I was stocking a shelf and she came in and she was a lab tech. She's a MT [medical technician] over at Lynn Hospital, and she's still there except it's now—it's part of North Shore Medical. Anyway, she was coming in with her white socks on and her white uniform. I always liked that [laughs]. And I'm stocking the—I'm stocking the shelves and she wants to know where chocolate chips are I says, "You're looking right at 'em." And I kind of got a glance at her and I said, "Oh, she's kind of cute." Then I saw her—I saw another girl that worked with me talking to her. So when I got done stocking, one of the girls who was ringing the register was talking to her. So when I got done, I'm going back to the stock room. I says, "Hey Linda. Who's that girl?" She says, "That's my sister, Judy." I says, "Oh, really?" I went back after. I said, "Do you think she's going out with anybody?" And she said, "No." And I said, "I think I might give her a call and see if she'd go on a date if I called her." And got the word, so I called her and the rest is history [laughs].

47:25

EDO: Now, is she Franco-American?

RS: She's Polish. She's Polish-Irish. Her mother came—Her mother's father and mother were Polish right from Poland. In fact, they talked with a very heavy Polish accent. Wonderful people, *Dziadek and Babcia.* So we sort of adopted that culture. My kids used to call her *Dziadek,* which is their great grandparents, *Dziadek and Babcia* [sp] because that's Polish for—

47:49

EDO: Are they from Salem?

RS: They were from Lynn. Yeah, so—it's a melting pot.

47:55

EDO: So, you've obviously continued your French, but did you speak French in your home once had a family? Did it continue?

RS: No. The kids all took French in high school because they knew I could help them. But none of them are very good at it. Nope, not at all. And now I'm trying to talk my son Kevin—I keep trying to talk to Olivia [granddaughter] in French and she can say the words back. And this is the time to get her, and I keep saying, "I'll pay for the French lessons. We'll go." But they are not taking me up on the offer. They're more interested in Spanish because that's the language now that seems to be viewed as more important to know. I used to keep telling them, "Well, French is a diplomatic language. It's a cultural language—" But Spanish is really the language you need to know in the workplace today, so I'm not—I'm not being received too well with my ideas of teaching Olivia how to speak French. I know.

EB: I do have to get going but—

EDO: We'll finish up.

EB: Thank you so much.

EDO: We'll just sit a few more minutes and wrap up—

EB: I have to go pick up my daughter.

EDO: And then I'll meet you.

EB: I'll leave this with you, too.

EDO: Can you text me the actual—address?

EB: We're going to Bernard's to interview the Tetrault brothers.

RS: Oh, say hi to Ray. Tell him we were talking. I always talk French to him. Well, I talk French to him but he responds in English. He knows what I'm saying but his French isn't that good. So tell him Bob says, "Are you practicing your French?"

EB: Okay.

RS: Ray Tetrault, another wonderful man.

[EB and EDO have a brief conversation]

EB: [laughs]

EDO: Excellent. All right, well we're gonna go on down there. Okay.

EB: Some of those—

EDO: Exactly, exactly.

EB: Okay, see you later!

RS: A bientôt!

EB: Merci!

RS: Bienvenue.

EDO: Okay, a couple more questions. We have maybe have about ten more minutes or so.

RS: I gotta meet my wife at the Farmer's Market.

EDO: Okay, great.

RS: It's gonna be hot, too. I was hoping she wouldn't go but—

49:44

EDO: So, when you were growing up—or stories that you've heard—were there businesses, places, that were French-Canadian-owned or Franco American or that people frequented because they had that connection?

RS: Yes. If you were French Canadian from the Point you'd try to give your business to another Frenchman, and there was a lot of stores down the Point—grocery stores. We didn't go to the—Well, there was only the First National in Salem believe it or not, when I was growing up, for a supermarket. We went to Audette's Market. Other people went to Tremblay's. The French Canadians traded with their own stores down the Point. At least in the fifties when I was growing up and I know before that they did.

I went to a French barber, Mr. Theriault [sp?]. And there was another French barber, Lavalle [sp?] down on Salem Street. All the French went there. So if you were French, you went there. There was a French mover in Salem, St. Pierre—no relation. When needed to move, you went to Monsieur St. Pierre. We all went to our own undertakers. And there used to be, that I remember, there were three. There was Orville Boucher—the one I was telling you about—who died and somebody took over the parlor—I'll tell you about that later. But there was Boucher. There was Berube and there was Levesque. And those were the three that the French people went to.

The Irish were the same, though. They had their own undertakers and they stuck with 'em.

Insurance companies, the same thing. When my father finally did get a car, and then when I got a car, it was insured through **Chabout** and then **Ouget**. So they did, and the French were a huge population in Salem. They were right up there in numbers with the Irish. So they did support their own. You would go to a French store.

51:15

EDO: And that continued when you had left that neighborhood and you were a grown man yourself? Did you continue that?

RS: No, because by that time a lot of the stores were closing. All those small neighborhood stores had all closed, the grocery stores. The city was just changing. My generation was leaving. Not a lot of people of my generation stayed. They stared to leave for Peabody and Beverly and Danvers and even to other states. So then the community then started to break up for some reason. It all seemed to happen—I thought it happened very quickly. You know, you go in the service in '67, '68—you come back in '70—you can see it change. By '72, '73, the Point was really—It was like a shadow of itself with French people. At that point, a lot of Hispanics had came in. And then as time went on, the French just totally drifted away, and it's more of a Latino community now.

And the church, the same way. They used to say mass in French. When the mass went from Latin to the vernacular, all our masses were in French. And by the 1970s you might have had one mass in French. And then by the time it was 1980, they would only say a mass on a special occasion and for quote unquote the "old timers" in French. Now you can't get a mass said in French. St. Joseph's never said a mass at the end, at all, in French. However, Father Dufour once a year says a mass in French. He said one this Saturday and I was away—otherwise I would have gone. He says the mass in French and people come from Lynn and from Salem to go. Not many. The numbers aren't great, so.

EDO: We've heard people talk about there actually being three—People have told us that there were three French-Canadian, Franco-American neighborhoods. There was The Point, South Salem—making that distinction—and then Castle Hill.

RS: Yeah, I would agree with that.

53:09

EDO: You had talked a bit before, sort of the sense of what the difference was between those groups of people. Were there identifiable differences?

RS: Well, what I think the difference was? [It was] low bush and high bush French. People joke about it. The folks in the Point were more of a working class French, and there was a little bit of a economic or a monetary distinction. The ones that were into businesses or were better educated—and some of the—Actually, I should have said that—there were a couple of French pharmacies: Poussard and Vaillancourt. Vallaincourt, Poussard, Lussier. The people that had made a little bit more money, they moved out to the Loring Avenue area, down by Ocean Avenue, down by the college here. A bunch of them came to the point where they had to have a mission church, St. Theresa's Mission, which was a satellite church of St. Joseph's, on Summit Avenue. And they would have four masses on Sunday, and they had a weekday mass every day. Seven thirty in the morning, they had mass. There was such a demand. That was for the French people who really belonged to St. Joseph's but they had moved up to this side of the city. And then, of course, you had St. Anne's, which is Castle Hill, which had its own distinct parish. St. Theresa's was a mission and it was a church that belonged to St. Joseph's and St. Joseph's staffed it.

EDO: Was it built—?

RS: It's still there now, but it has been turned into something else. It's a wood frame structure. Small church, you know, with a gable—

54:35

EDO: They specifically built it? That structure wasn't there before?

RS: No, they built it for that. And I think it must have been built in the forties right before they tore down the old St. Joseph's. Because when the old St. Joseph's was torn and the new one—the white one—was being constructed, all the funerals and weddings were said or took place at St. Theresa's. And then once St. Joseph's—the new church—was up and running, St. Theresa's stayed—St. Theresa's. My mother and father, when we moved to Linden Street, went to St. Theresa's. I stuck with the old church.

But that only closed in the 1980s. St. Theresa's only shut down—I might be losing track of time but I'm going to say—My father died in '92, and I became chief in '84, and it was still going. I think it closed down around '87, '88. They closed it. They shut it, and they sold the building. The building is still there, very distinguishable .You can tell that it must have been some type of a church but it is used for some other function now. How's that to add that to your repertoire?

EDO: Well, that's great. That's fantastic.

RS: You know where else there was a lot of French Canadians, real quick? After [the] Salem Fire, a bunch of French Canadians moved from Salem to Beverly. And there was a parish over there by the name of—

55:52

EDO: St. Alphonse, maybe?

RS: St. Alphonse. And it burnt down. It burned down around 1967. It was a wood framed structure. I never saw it in downtown Beverly, but I remember Pat Breton [sp?] used to be the pastor over there and he used to be at St. Anne's. And then he built the new St. Alphonse's on the Danvers, Beverly line and, of course, that did close down about five, six years ago and it's now an Anglican church. Christ Church, I think.

EDO: Christ Church.

RS: So there was that French community there.

EDO: So that was a French church?

RS: Yes. St. Alphonse in Beverly. And then, I'll tell you where there was a huge French parish that really rivals St. Joseph's—and again, it's the mills, the shoe industry that drove it. In Lynn, St. Jean Baptiste. And that closed down about fifteen years ago. And that was a big, very big, and they had a very strong French population. And they had their school. They had everything. And I believe they even had a high school. But they were a very strong, vibrant French Parish. You had St. Joseph's, St. Anne's and St. Alphonse's on the North Shore.

EDO: So, in the interest just to keep us on our time—and we are happy to have you back and talk to you more because—you are on our gold standard, up here, for people to talk to.

RS: I hope that I'm a hundred percent accurate because a lot of it is what I've heard—

EDO: Its oral history. It's not about accuracy. We're interested in hearing about what you remember.

RS: And sometimes you hear it one way and then as you tell the story, it gets changed another way.

57:17

EDO: That's part of the process. That's fine.

Social clubs, social establishments for the Franco American community. You had mentioned—We've heard—things we've heard about—if you have anything to say about any of these—the Klondike Club—

RS: That's right.

EDO: Les Canadiens—

RS: Oh my—[laughs]. My father—I used to sit up at the bar and have coke and my father would be drinking there. That was the social club for that part of Salem, on Congress Street. My father would come down. And after work, that's the watering hole. Yes, I used to go in there when he'd be playing pinochle or cards on a Saturday. He'd buy me a bag of chips. Cause the men in those days worked hard during the week, and they'd go down there on Saturdays, and they'd go in there in the morning, and they'd have a few drinks, and they'd play cards. They'd stay there till the afternoon. And then sometimes when my father would come home, depending on the situation, he would take my mother and myself for a dinner—fried fish dinner—down at Amelia's, which was down at the corner of Congress and Palmer Street, which is now that big housing project. The new affordable housing that's not doing too well. Well, there used to be a gas station and a bar there, and a little restaurant. And then after that, he'd take my mother—cause women weren't allowed in Les Canadiens unless they were escorted. And it was only at night, and you had to be escorted, and you had to sit in a booth. You couldn't sit up at the bar. So my father would bring my mother for a highball to Les Canadiens, and I would come and I would have a coke, but we would sit in the booths. But when I would come in off the street playing, if my father was in the booth playing cards, he'd give me the money to go get a coke and a bag of chips. But sometimes he'd be reading the paper and he'd be up at the bar, reading the paper. And he would buy me a coke, and I would sit at the bar on a bar stool, and I would drink the coke with him and—

But they were very strict down there.

58:59

EDO: So what was that place like? Do you remember enough of it to describe [any of it]?

RS: Yeah, well the inside of it was a hockey—**Leo Leclair** was the owner of it. In fact, my grandfather, when he retired from the fire department, was a bartender down there amongst other things [laughs]. It was a hockey—it was Les Canadiens, Les Canadiens [gives French pronunciation and gestures in air with both hands]. They were big hockey fans. And they used to have hockey sticks crossed and hockey stuff all over the place. They used to actually get busses and go into the hockey games at Boston Garden. I never went in. My father would go because they would do a lot of drinking on the bus and everything, and my father didn't want me to go there.

However, they used to go for— However, one time I did go—they were playing for—No, that was a baseball game, but it was when I was in high school and he thought I was old enough to come in then. And he made me sit with him and we had to sit up the front of the bus because he knew a lot of the guys were going to get pretty *chaud.* Pretty—feeling good. So—and I watched the Kings play the Bruins or something. Yeah, I remember that. But that was a big neighborhood bar and that was a gathering spot—Les Canadiens [gives French pronunciation], Les Canadiens, [gives English pronunciation].

1:00:03

EDO: And then was the Kondike Club was a totally different [thing]—?

RS: I'll tell you one more story about the Les Canadiens. My grandfather took my son Kevin—My father took my son Kevin and Brian in there, and when he'd take them out during the day he'd say, "We're going to go to the—" My mother and father had a code word for the Les Canadiens. My mother would call it "the chapel." So when we'd go over in the morning, we'd say, "Where's grampy?" "Oh, he's at the chapel." So one day—well, more than one time, my father would take them out. He would take them to the chapel. And by that time he wasn't drinking much at all. He was just drinking coke himself but he used to like to go in and see the guys, read the paper and put the numbers in [laughs]. He used to play the pool, so he'd take the boys in and it was the chapel, so—The first time my wife and I took Kevin to church, I think he made a comment. He said, "This isn't like grampy's chapel." [laughs]

He was only a little kid, but my father used to take him to Les Canadiens and Brian the same way, and they would call it the chapel. So my father even adopted the name with the kids. "I'm taking you to the chapel."

EDO: Oh, that's fantastic.

RS: Anyway, a little aside.

EDO: No, No, No—that is actually—that's fantastic.

RS: But then the Klondike was a huge French club and they used to run big dances for New Year's. And they used to run regular dances. In fact, as a police officer, I worked the details. That was still in vogue and was still very active when I was a young patrolman. I used to work the details up there.

1:01:26

EDO: And it was specifically or mostly for—?

RS: French Canadians. To be a real—you could be an associate member, but to be a real member—

EDO: So you had to be a member of it?

RS: You had to be a member. It was huge. My grandfather would hang around there during the daytime and sit up on the second floor. And the second floor had these big Palladian windows that overlooked Lafayette Street, and they'd have rocking chairs. And he'd sit there and read his paper, smoke his pipe. All the old French—the old French men. Every once in a while he'd have too much to drink when he decided to start imbibing, and we'd get a phone call, and my father would go up there, and I'd go with him to help get my grandfather down the stairs because the stairs are like this [indicates a very steep slope with arm and hands]. And there must have been about twenty-five or thirty of them. It wasn't your normal thirteen. It was a very dangerous and steep set of marble stairs, well worn. And I can remember going up, getting my grandfather with my father and, you know, walking him home to—cause he lived right across from us on the corner—Well, the last house they had was on the corner of Salem and Dow, right across from where we were living. And we'd get him up to the second floor there and my grandmother would get mad, and she'd make him sit out on the porch in his rocking chair, and wouldn't let him in until she thought he was okay to come in the house. [laughs]

1:02:35

EDO: Do you know—do you happen to know if that club in part was because people weren't being allowed to join other clubs?

RS: [face and body shrug] I don't know. I think all the ethnic groups—The Polish had their own club, the Flacons. St. Joe's [St. Joseph's Hall, a Polish social Hall on Derby Street], The Falcons. The French had that. The Italians had their club, which is still down on—across from John Walsh's. No, and the Irish had theirs, the AOH [Ancient Order of the Hibernians]. I don't think—I think it was more—they wanted to be with each other. They were comfortable. There were sometimes language barriers among certain members that didn't speak English well. 'Cause a lot of people even when I was growing up still spoke English with a very heavy accent. You know, real—It's probably derogatory but we used to say—Canuck accent.

EDO: Well, I think we're going to wrap this session of our chat up. But you've got some wonderful stories, and you have a great memory, and you have a really unique perspective on the city, which is fantastic. We can't thank you enough.