

[M. Henry Lemay]

Polish of Manchester [X?] [several?] Choppy incomplete interviews greek mother interesting material but choppy as some form mother some from daughter - Reverse * [?] use "if needed [Lemay?] - good but short *

ORIGINAL MSS. OR FIELD NOTES (Check one)

PUB. Living Lore in New England

(New Hampshire)

TITLE M. Henri [Lemay?] - (French)

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REMINISCENCES OF M. HENRI [LEMAY?]

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By Victoria Langlois

M. Henri [Lemay?] in seventy-three years old. He is in good health and was active in business until two years ago when he was ill during the entire winter. Now he was retired and has sold his interests in his jewelry store to his brother. He seemed glad to answer my questions and to tell me about "old times."

Last year he spent the winter in Florida. He says it is very beautiful but makes people feel lazy, as if they were on a perpetual vacation. Canada is too cold, he says, and Florida too warm, and he likes New Hampshire the best of all.

"When I was young," M. Lemay begins, "I wanted to be a [pilote?] branche."

From my own girlhood spent in Canada I know this to be a pilot who is stationed at the head of the St. Lawrence Gulf and, as a transatlantic steamer comes in, takes the helm and guides the ship up the St. Lawrence River to Quebec and Montreal. Each man, so engaged, must follow a complete and special course in seamanship before reaching the rank of [pilote?] branche. The [pilots?] are licensed by the government and are authorized to do their work by the several [maritime?] companies of Canada.

"In the fall of 1881, I started from [Deschambean?] on the St. Lawrence River to carry a load of hay and grain to Lake Champlain," M. [Lemay?] continues.

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"We went as far as Whitehall and then my brother, Tobie, and I decided to take the railroad train for Manchester where we knew we could find work in the mills. I had no intention of staying here. Yet I remained for twenty years before I even went back to my old home for a visit.

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"I was sixteen and Tobie eighteen years old when we arrived in New Hampshire. How lonesome we were at first! But soon we began to get acquainted with French-speaking people and, little by little, we became accustomed to our now surroundings.

"The Manchester population was made up of Yankees, Irish and French at the time and there were no Greeks, Jews or [Poles?] in the city.

"Oh, yes, we went to work in the mills. They were the big source of industrial life. At first I earned seventy-five cents a day and my brother fifty cents and, though you may not believe it, we lived frugally but decently on these wages. You see we could buy good steak for twenty-five cents; chicken cost twelve cents a pound; a soup bone with much meat on it was only four cents a pound; and eggs were three dozens for a quarter of a dollar! No meat came from the west and there were four or five slaughter-houses in the outskirts of the city.

"Two or three times a week, cattle going to the Brighton stockyards were driven down Elm Street and men were hired to stand at the corners of the side streets to keep the animals in line. All the public parks and private properties on the route were surrounded with iron or wooden fences to protect them from straying cattle.

"Except for an oil lantern or a small gas light here and there, the streets were not lighted at night. I remember very well that I bought a pretty little kerosene oil lantern to carry on my arm. How bright and shiny it was! And it was very handy to go home after an evening when I 3 aller voir [les?] filles (spend an evening with the girls)," M. [Lemay?], with a twinkle in his very blue eyes, added.

"More than once I made a hit with this little lantern when I brought the girls home after a [soiree dansante?], where we danced the cotillion and square dances.

"Oh, yes, the parents objected more or less about letting young people go dancing. M. [le Cure?] was very much against it; but----we arranged to go just the same! The girls told

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their mothers about it only the day after, you see! But no harm was done. We were not as 'excited' as the young of nowadays, but don't forget that we were hard at work from six o'clock in the morning until six o'clock at night!

"We French people kept together and made our own good times. Every Sunday evening some five or six people assembled under one roof, living up to the old saying, Les amis de nos amis sont nos amis. They were pleasant, those meetings.

"You ask how we French were accepted in Manchester. Oh, yes, we must admit that the Yankees and Irish did not like us. No, they did not like us at all! They appeared to bitterly resent our coming here." M. Lemay laughed a bit here. "Not more than twenty years ago a good friend of mine, a genuine old Yankee with whom I have had frequent business dealings and political contacts then and whom I always see with pleasure now, said to me: 'I like you, Henry! You're a good fellow! Not exactly like the other Frenchmen I have known here! Are you sure you're pure French?' I assured him that every drop of my blood was of French extraction.

"After a few years in the mills, I began to grow dissatisfied and felt that I should learn some kind of trade. By this time my parents, two sisters and a younger brother had followed Tobie and me here. We lived in a block where there were six other French families and in our few spare hours we had a gay time together. We all worked hard but lived comfortably.

"The girls earned from fifty to seventy-five cents a day. Each had her 'best dress' made of fine wool and trimmed with bits of velvet, silk or lace for Sunday and she always managed a new hat for every other season. Girls wore very high boots then and I remember that once when I had a job in a shoestore I sold a pair of shoes with twenty buttons to a young lady one Saturday night!

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"All the time I was looking about for a trade to follow and finally I hit upon the idea of becoming a clock-maker. That was a good move on my part for I came to like the work, and, having a flair for it, began to make a good living.

"I now became interested in politics and occupied minor posts which made me aware of the importance of civic institutions. I became a citizen in 1887 and have been active in the associations which take care of the naturalization of newcomers. Now they come no more from Canada for the government has awakened to its mistake of allowing so many French-Canadians to become citizens of the United States.

"I bought this house about thirty years ago, when Webster School was laid, a man named Martin bought several houses which had been built around there right after the Civil War and which were inhabited by veterans. He made cellars and dug wells on this street and the houses were then transported and set upon then without [nishap?]. You can realize how old these houses are if you look at the next one on the right side.--- It is just an it was then.

"I entirely renovated the inside of my house and installed plumbing and central heating. The well in the cellar has been filled up; my wife was always afraid that I'd fall into it. The outside has been refaced in crushed stone; but is still the same old house."