

**MILL WORKERS ORAL HISTORY PROJECT:  
LEWISTON-AUBURN, MAINE**

**Real Fournier**  
(Interviewer: Andrea L'Hommedieu)

**MWOH# 042**  
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**Andrea L'Hommedieu:** This is an interview with Real Fournier at his home at Oxford Street in Little Canada, in Lewiston, Maine, on June 27th, the year 2006. This is Andrea L'Hommedieu, and I also have with me today Rachel Desgrosseilliers who is director of the Museum L-A. Real, could you start just by saying your full name?

**Real Fournier:** My full name? Real Fournier.

**AL:** And how do you spell your name?

**RF:** R-E-A-L.

**AL:** And Fournier is?

**RF:** F-O-U-R-N-I-E-R.

**AL:** And where were you born?

**RF:** On Oxford Street.

**AL:** Right here in Little Canada. And what is your birth date?

**RF:** October 24th, 1926.

**AL:** And so, did you grow up in Little Canada?

**RF:** No, on Lincoln Street, right across the street.

**AL:** And what was it like in this area when you were a kid, in terms of social activities?

**RF:** (*Unintelligible phrase*), we used to play hide-and-seek, and we were very good people to help each other.

**AL:** And so if you look at today, the neighborhood today, and the neighborhood as it

was when you grew up, what are some of the changes that you've seen?

**RF:** A lot of change, people, people have change a lot. They don't help each other. If you're having a problem, they look at you and they laugh, that's all. You know?

**AL:** And what were your parents' names?

**RF:** Joseph Fournier.

**AL:** And your Mom?

**RF:** Hinse, Rose Hinse.

**AL:** Hinse? How do you spell that?

**RF:** H-I-N-S-E.

**AL:** And were they from Lewiston, or had they come from Canada?

**RF:** My father was from Canada. My mother come, she's Scotch.

**AL:** And was she born here?

**RF:** No, no-no.

**AL:** So she came from Scotland.

**RF:** Yeah, yeah.

**AL:** And how many children were there in your family?

**RF:** We were four sisters, and one brother. I'm the brother.

**AL:** Now, how did you survive with four sisters?

**RF:** Well, I mind my own business after all, but they all work at the Bates Mill.

**AL:** They did.

**RF:** Yup.

**AL:** And what kind of jobs did they have at the mill?

**RF:** Well, one of my sister was a weaver, the other one work at, two work at the cloth

room, in the cloth room, and the others working in the winding department, and that's it.

**AL:** And did either of your parents work at the mill?

**RF:** My father.

**AL:** What did he do?

**RF:** He did the, well, -

**Rachel D:** Say it in French, *q'est qu'il faisait?*

**RF:** (French phrase), we used to call that female and a male piece of wood, you know, the piece of wood was (*unintelligible word*) in the female, that's the way we used to call it, go in the spooler, about that big, see, and it used to go in the spooler, the spool room, for the spool room.

**RD:** Yeah, okay, to make it turn?

**RF:** Yeah.

**RD:** Okay, yeah.

**RF:** And me, I was taking the spool all, one lot was 280 pieces, you know, of spool. Then I used to take it to the dye house. Well, of course they used to give me a ticket, ten, two five, or ten single, of those, you know. I was working, if it was a ten single, well I was taking it to the dye house. But I had a good job. It didn't pay too much, but (*unintelligible phrase*), maybe I work four hours or eight hours, oh yeah.

**RD:** When did you start working at the mill? Was that your first job?

**RF:** No, my first job was in the Androscoggin. The super was, I don't remember, I don't remember.

**AL:** How old were you?

**RF:** How old am I?

**AL:** No, how old were you when you first worked in the mill?

**RF:** About eighteen, eighteen. But when I work at the Androscoggin, oh, it was my first job but, (*unintelligible word*) I was crying, I said, I was far from home. But (*unintelligible phrase*) I used to run and go see my mother, we used to live on Lincoln Street, so. But I gave it up, and then I have a job at the Bates Mill, which my father was

working there so I got a job through him.

**RD:** Through your dad.

**RF:** Yes, through my dad, in the winding department.

**RD:** So you started in the winding department.

**RF:** Yeah, and I stayed there.

**RD:** All sixteen years?

**RF:** Hm-hmm.

**AL:** Did you work some with your dad?

**RF:** Well, I was working, yes, with my father in the winding department, at night.

**AL:** Third shift?

**RF:** Second shift.

**AL:** Second shift, yup, three to eleven?

**RF:** No, three-thirty to twelve at that time. Then they change it from three to eleven. That's where I used to go swimming.

**AL:** So did your dad show you, did he sort of teach you the job?

**RF:** Well, it wasn't a trade, it was very simple, very simple.

**AL:** Did he talk about the old days when he first started, how the mill was different?

**RF:** No, because in the summer time he was a carpenter, see, and in winter time he was working, that was his first winter that he got the job there, so I got the job, too, you know.

**AL:** What were some, or who were some of the people that you remember from your time at the mill? Anyone maybe that we can't talk to that you remember?

**RF:** Well, I do remember, but a lot of it, they, as you said, they're all dead.

**AL:** Yeah, and so it's important to talk about them, it's the only way to capture who they were, and their jobs.

**RF:** Yeah, yeah, oh, I can name you, but, don't name me, I'm close to the cemetery myself.

**AL:** Were there any supervisors that you remember?

**RF:** Yes, Dick Bergeron was the overseer, and Larue Pelletier was my boss. But they're all dead, I mean, Larue Pelletier used to live on Lincoln Street, too, *la gros famille, les Pelletier*.

**RD:** So it seems that a lot of the people that lived down here in Little Canada and Lincoln Street worked in the mills, right?

**RF:** Yes, most everybody.

**RD:** Most everybody did. So most everybody also went to St. Mary's church then, it was the parish.

**RF:** Yes, oh yeah, St. Mary's church, yeah, yeah.

**RD:** Did you, were you working at the mills during the war?

**RF:** Yes, WWII, yes, yes.

**RD:** Was there anything different that happened in the mills during the war?

**RF:** Well, they didn't want to give us a raise. It was wartime. When the war finish, the CIO, they rub up the buck, they wanted a raise, you know. So we picket, you know, that was my fun, I was young, and we used to go to the Jacques Cartier Hall, yeah, that's where the office of the CIO was.

**RD:** Oh, I didn't realize that, yeah.

**RF:** Oh yes, they had the tenth floor, they had five or six office there. And they used to serve us doughnut and coffee. And then when the war ended, too, we parade, V-Day there, V-, yeah? (*Unintelligible phrase*).

**RD:** Yeah, because you were still young then.

**RF:** Yes, oh yeah, oh yeah, oh yeah.

**AL:** Do you recall any strikes at the mill?

**RF:** Yes, well, after the second war we were, we strike. That's why they were serving us doughnut.

**AL:** Right, and how was that strike resolved, do you remember?

**RF:** Well, we won the case, of course. We were working almost for nothing, but minimum, you know, we were happy, and then we got the strike. Oh yeah, I think we strike about a month.

**RD:** How did people survive during the strike, because you weren't making any money, how -?

**RF:** The CIO was helping them.

**RD:** The CIO helped the people survive.

**RF:** Yeah, yeah, yeah. Not the single men, but the family one.

**RD:** The families. So the single men didn't get any help.

**RF:** No, no, well I was working part time, you know, no problem. No problem. At that time, see, we had the St. Mary's, we had the St., the Cadet of St. Mary's. Remember the St. Mary's Cadet? So we have a skating rink, and we used to make ice at two o'clock in the morning, after the public skating.

**RD:** So you kept busy that way.

**RF:** Yeah, we didn't pay a cent to skate, so.

**RD:** So you did okay.

**RF:** Yes, yes.

**RD:** Good. Now the trains I know go by on Lincoln, used to go by in back of Lincoln Street. Did you ever play around the train tracks and stuff?

**RF:** Oh, once in a while, yes, once in a while we used to play, but.

**RD:** Wasn't it a good train for the hobos, do you remember that?

**RF:** Say that again?

**RD:** Wasn't it a good train track for the hobos, didn't they used to stop here sometimes under the tracks?

**RF:** No, no.

**RD:** No? That must have been later.

**RF:** Later probably, because then -

**AL:** Or earlier, during the Depression?

**RD:** Well, I remember it, playing, and my parents used to, I used to go with Maurice Dutil.

**RF:** Yeah, Maurice.

**RD:** Maurice, we used to go because the hobos would come off the train and there was a space there that they would build their fire. And we'd go sit with them and listen to their stories. But that was when -

**RF:** It must have been after.

**RD:** That was in the fifties, mid fifties.

**RF:** Because Maurice is younger than me, much younger than me.

**RD:** Yeah, that's right, yeah, so it must have been, that must have been -

**RF:** Roger, and he was at the Marcotte Home.

**RD:** So you didn't have anything like that, so the trains didn't really affect your lives, no.

**RF:** No, no, no.

**RD:** Okay.

**AL:** Do you remember Fred Lebel?

**RF:** Yeah, Fred, yeah, he used to live on Cedar Street, that big block there, before crossing the bridge. Now he's making bedspread.

**RD:** He still is, yup, he still is.

**RF:** He still is, yeah, yeah.

**RD:** Making beautiful ones.

**RF:** And his wife, when she was single she used to work in the office.

**RD:** Yes, yeah. Now, did you belong to any organizations when you were working at the mills?

**RF:** Well, in the church.

**RD:** Anywheres.

**RF:** Well, Larry Charest used to be the sport director for the Bates Mill, and he used to make a mini show once a year, raising money, you know. And I used to sing in the Bates, the mini show. And after that, well, they used to throw us a party.

**RD:** And didn't you, and I think you still, aren't you, don't you still belong to Jacques Cartier?

**RF:** Yes, oh yeah.

**RD:** Can you tell us a little bit about what, what was the Jacques Cartier Club?

**RF:** Well, it was a snowshoe club.

**RD:** It was a snowshoe club.

**AL:** And what does that mean?

**RF:** Now it's Maurice Dutil's wife, she's the president.

**RD:** Yes, I know.

**RF:** *(Unintelligible phrase).*

**RD:** And I see you there sometimes, so.

**RF:** And it's a beautiful club. They meet, and there's no -

**RD:** They get along.

**RF:** It's not like the Montagnard.

**RD:** What, the Montagnard is different?

**RF:** Oh yeah. Now there's no more, but it was, you know, dirty.



**AL:** But what is a snowshoe club, what does it do?

**RF:** Well, they meet, they meet together. If there's the snowshoe convention, they meet together, and they go to clubs, to one club to another and they talk, and they have a few drinks. And there's some run on snowshoes.

**RD:** They have races and all -

**RF:** Yeah, races. Me, I used to race, I used to be the champion.

**RD:** You used to be the snowshoe champion.

**RF:** Yeah-yeah-yeah, yeah.

**RD:** Do you remember what years about that was?

**RF:** Oh, maybe I was twenty-five.

**AL:** So in the fifties.

**RD:** In the fifties?

**RF:** They haven't got, they haven't beaten my record yet.

**RD:** Really?

**RF:** Three miles, I still, three miles in twenty-eight minutes.

**RD:** Wow, on snowshoes.

**RF:** On snowshoes.

**RD:** And you were running for who, the Jacques Cartier?

**RF:** The Jacques Cartier, yup.

**RD:** And the Montagnard, was that another snowshoe club?

**RF:** Yes, it was.

**RD:** Okay.

**RF:** Yeah, but you know who was the president, and he was (*unintelligible word*), he came down one time and he ask me, he said, I'll buy the Chalet, you know, we were

small. So when he closed, you know they closed down then, so I went to see him, I said, we're still in business. Oh yeah, he, that's my fault.

**RD:** Now, the Pastime that's in front of St. Mary's church now, what is that, was that a snowshoe club?

**RF:** No, it used to be.

**RD:** It used to be.

**RF:** It used to be.

**RD:** Okay, because that's still there.

**RF:** Oh yes, oh yes, oh yes.

**RD:** So what is it now?

**RF:** It's, the Pastime, it's a regular club, it's a regular club. I've been in that club fifty years.

**RD:** So you still belong to the Pastime, too?

**RF:** Hm-hmm, and I'm honorary member there, too, like the Jacques Cartier.

**RD:** And what types of things do they do?

**RF:** On Monday night in winter they play cribbage, and on Thursday they play pool, there's a tournament. Last Sunday there was a tournament, you know, they play, let's say at five dollars apiece, and whoever won got everything. And on Friday night they got the winner take all, and they got, they have good activities.

**RD:** Do you belong to any other organizations?

**RF:** No.

**RD:** No, that's enough?

**RF:** That's enough.

**RD:** Do you still have your snowshoes?

**RF:** No, I sold it.

**RD:** You sold them.

**RF:** I sold it.

**RD:** The champion snowshoes.

**RF:** Oh well, but. I just got, I've got pictures of all my trophies and so on now.

**RD:** That's wonderful. We ought to try to get some copies of those pictures, so that we can put that with your interview. With your trophies and stuff. So when you go through your pictures, let me know and I'll pick them up and we'll make some copies. Yeah? That would go good with this.

**RF:** So, I used to practice at the Bates Mill, they had an open floor, the fourth floor, there was nothing, so I used to go practice there, run.

**RD:** Run, well that's good. You did that on your lunch hour?

**RF:** No-no-no-no-no. I was working four hours out of eight hours (*unintelligible phrase*).

**AL:** Did your parents, either of your parents have brothers or sisters or parents that lived nearby? So they had come here and started their family.

**RF:** No, I only had my one cousin, she was a nurse for the school, Hinse. Maybe you -?

**RD:** Oh yeah, I remember her, yeah.

**AL:** Now, because your mom was Scottish and your father was French, and when she cooked the meals in the home, did you get both French and Scottish food?

**RF:** No-no-no, no, my mother, she was a good cook, and she had a temper, too. (*unintelligible phrase*), they have a temper, those people. But she was very good hearted. Oh yes, oh yes, I miss her. And they got married, they went out two weeks and they got married.

**RD:** Oh, love at first sight.

**RF:** I don't know if it's love at first sight, but they, we celebrated fifty years (*unintelligible phrase*) together. Now you don't see that today.

**RD:** How did you meet your wife?

**RF:** In Purgatory.

**RD:** In Purgatory? That's a new one, I haven't heard that one yet.

**RF:** This is a dance hall, in Litchfield.

**RD:** I was trying to think back in my Catholic catechism to see where that would fit in.

**RF:** No, in summer time it used, another dance hall a couple miles further than the Purgatory, and it used to be called the Whippoorwill, and there were telephone operators there, there was a big crowd. People from Augusta, Lewiston, and Gardiner.

**RD:** Would come.

**RF:** And we used to go dancing there.

**RD:** And that's where you met your wife, in Purgatory. That's great, that's fun.

**RF:** Yeah, yeah, she's (*unintelligible word*) now.

**RD:** Did you have any children?

**RF:** One daughter I adopted, I adopted, she was three weeks old. In Biddeford Pool, with the nuns.

**RD:** Yeah, okay, yeah, I remember. Good for you.

**RF:** And she's, what, thirty-seven today. Because we got married old, so the nuns, there were, they had a long list. But the fact we were old, we -

**RD:** Got ahead of the list.

**RF:** Yeah, the head of the list. Because once you adopt the first one, there was no problem if you adopt a second one. But they had a certain age we had to, so, they had-

**RD:** Oh yeah, good for you, yeah, good for you.

**RF:** Now she works at Lee Oldsmobile. She used to work for Bob Couturier.

**RD:** Ah, *oui*, the lawyer.

**RF:** Yeah, the lawyer, she worked for seven years. But this, good money but no insurance, so.

**RD:** Oh yeah, it's a big thing today.

**RF:** That's, at Lee they got the insurance, so that's the main thing. Because she liked the job for Bob, oh yeah, she was the first one.

**RD:** Was there a difference between the women working in the mills and the men? Were there certain jobs that were just for the women, that you noticed? Or did anybody do anything? Did the women have a harder time to get hired than the men?

**RF:** No. And women could, my job, a woman was making my job (*unintelligible phrase*).

**RD:** Yeah? So there wasn't much difference.

**RF:** There wasn't much different. And during the wartime, we used to doff, you know, doffers? I did that.

**RD:** Oh, you did that.

**RF:** On, just on Sunday, because double time and a half, eh? Because the, that was not my job, but I knew, you know, I had so many hours that I was doing anything. So really -

**AL:** Do you remember the hockey team?

**RF:** Yeah, the hockey team (*unintelligible word*)?

**AL:** Yeah, well what do you remember about the hockey team? Did you watch any of the games, or participate?

**RF:** Well, to be truthful, it was who you know. You know, I used to play hockey, and they went oversea and (*unintelligible phrase*) it was Larry Charest's brother-in-law. So, at that time it took a lot of money for food, so I didn't go, you know. But I remember the hockey team, I remember they went oversea and they lost every game but they had a ball.

**AL:** And do you recall the picnics that the mill sponsored?

**RF:** Oh yeah, yeah, the picnic. Well, they had the picnic in the Whippoorwill.

**RD:** Oh, they did?

**RF:** Yeah, the (*unintelligible word*).

**RD:** Out in Litchfield.

**RF:** That's right.

**AL:** Was it in the summer?

**RF:** Yes, they had a picnic, yeah. Oh yeah, I remember -

**RD:** We have a picture of 1937, I believe, that's, it's a big picture of the mill picnic, and we're trying to figure out where it was held.

**RF:** Are you talking about the -

**RD:** Nineteen thirty-seven, that's earlier than you.

**RF:** Are we talking the Bates Mill picnic, or the union?

**RD:** The Bates Mill.

**RF:** The Bates Mill.

**RD:** You're talking about, the union picnic used to be at, okay, so they were different.

**RF:** Yeah, all, there was, well, all the one that was in the union they were giving free beer, free drink, food and so on, that was a big picnic.

**RD:** That was the union picnic.

**RF:** Yeah.

**RD:** And then the mills gave one, too, right?

**RF:** That I'm not sure.

**AL:** I'm wondering if they're one and the same. It sounds like the description of the mill picnic. That would be interesting to find out.

**RF:** That I don't remember.

**RD:** Did you miss the mills when you left it?

**RF:** Well, yes, but when I left the mill I went to work for myself, you know. So, when you stop, you don't have much of that. So I put in a long, long hours, but I made good, did good. And I didn't think too much of the Bates Mill because I was too busy, too

busy.

**AL:** If you think back about your time working in the mill, what sticks out in your mind as things that you liked about it?

**RF:** What I like about it? The people.

**AL:** The people.

**RF:** The people. Yeah, we were talking and, you know, yeah.

**AL:** It was a friendly atmosphere?

**RF:** A friendly atmosphere. Those were the golden days.

**RD:** Yeah, that's what, when we had the reunion, that seemed to be what the people felt, too, that those were the golden days.

**RF:** Now, well, now today, you don't dare to talk to the one that lives at the first floor. You, you know, it's different.

**RD:** What about when you were living here in Little Canada? My uncle told me that sometimes on the weekends, the people would go outside and they'd play their violins, or they'd get together and have a good time. Do you remember any of that?

**RF:** No, really, on, I used to live on Lincoln Street at that time.

**RD:** Yeah, so, okay, that's different, yeah.

**RF:** But the neighbors, we used to talk to each other, you know, everybody was friendly. And I remember when I was going to school, there was one woman, she was making, baking a cake and she needed a bowl of sugar, you know. And she said to, she lived on the second or the third floor, that I don't remember. Anyway, I need a cup of sugar. I look, and gave her a cup of sugar. See, it proves that people really helped each other. You don't, you can't do that today.

**RD:** Yeah, big change.

**RF:** A big change, a big change.

**RD:** That really bothers you, doesn't it, because you're not used to that, right? You're always used to helping each other.

**RF:** That's right. Then, you know, my whole life I used to bring some wood for four

old maid, in back. I was getting a quarter a week. And my mother said, you help these people, she said, you don't need any money, she said. And I got a cut at fifteen cents, so I was working for a dime a week.

**RD:** But that's how good hearted your mom was.

**RF:** Yeah, oh yeah, oh yeah, she was very good hearted.

**RD:** But see, that's why she taught you that helping others is important in life, right?

**RF:** Yeah, yeah, and now she's -

**RD:** Can I ask a, after the war was there a big change when the soldiers that worked at the mills came back, did they come back different?

**RF:** Well, I remember one. He was shell-shocked. And there was a woman called, her name was Cecile, that was her first name, and once in a while he used to take her arm and bite her. He was shell-shocked; there was quite a few like that.

**AL:** Did some people lose their jobs when the soldiers came back? Did the soldiers get their jobs back?

**RF:** Yeah, I guess they got their job, but I don't know, I don't know that. In my department was mostly women, you know, so really in other department I really don't know.

**AL:** Is there anything that I haven't asked you that sticks out in your mind as important to add to the interview today?

**RF:** I'm not following you.

**AL:** Okay, I'm asking if there's anything that I haven't asked you that you want to talk about regarding the mills, or your family?

**RF:** Well, you covered it all.

**RD:** Monsieur Fournier, how about, like how did religion work in the families? Was it important to the families, like the parishes, the connection with the parishes and stuff? Was that strong?

**RF:** I'm sorry, you -

**RD:** Okay, the parishes, St. Mary's parish, was that important in people's lives?



**RF:** Yes, (*French phrase*), Pomerleau. He was very, he used to pay, once a week we used to go swimming at the Y, between certain hours, let's say between one and three, but we were young, eh, hey, we went to the Y for nothing, he used to pay. He was a good, a good priest, a very good priest. And so was the others, but I mean that's, that I remember.

**RD:** So it was important for people to go to church on Sunday?

**RF:** Oh yes, yeah, yeah, yes, yes.

**RD:** And did the church have activities that you participated in, too, also, or?

**RF:** Well, no, no, I was too young, you know, to participate. But *j'étais dans la* (*unintelligible word*) *Sacre Cœur*.

**RD:** You did belong to (*unintelligible word*) *Sacre Cœur*.

**RF:** Yes, because I was, because I was tall I was holding the, I don't how to say it in English, *la bannière*.

**RD:** *La bannière*, yeah.

**RF:** Because I was tall, you know.

**RD:** Yeah, the flag, the -

**RF:** And there used to be a retreat, a retreat, you know, just for men, and they would have a retreat for women.

**RD:** Oh, they didn't go together.

**RF:** No, they didn't go together.

**RD:** So there was a retreat for each.

**RF:** We were men and boys, you know, and the same thing with women and girls.

**RD:** And it was full, people went.

**RF:** Yeah.

**RD:** That's changed a little today, isn't it. Yeah. That's a big change, because today the churches, even the churches on Sunday are not full.

**RF:** What can we do?

**AL:** Great, thank you very much for your time.

**RF:** Well, I hope I did something to help you out.

**RD:** Oh, you sure did, you sure did.

*End of Interview*

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