

# Tape Transcript

**Title:** Lenard Pambrun

**Media:** DAT

**Interviewer:** John Leclair

## Text

**Lenard:** My name is Lenard Pambrun and I was born in St. Laurent, nine miles from Duck Lake and I was raised on a farm.

**John:** What were your grandparents' names?

**Lenard:** My dad's side was Fred Pambrun and my mother was Rosalie Laviolette.

**John:** Where did they come from?

**Lenard:** (Inaudible) That's where he was raised and then he come up here and he married mom, and mom was from the farm in St. Laurent. She was a daughter of Charlie Laviolette and Maria Compte.

**John:** How large was your family?

**Lenard:** My whole family? There's four of us, two girls, two boys.

**John:** Did every one of them have their own home?

**Lenard:** Pretty well, yeah, after we got out of school.

**John:** Was it log houses?

**Lenard:** Yes, it was a log house. If you go back to see that log house there - the picture of that log house (second picture) that's the house I was born and raised in. Hopefully you can get a picture of it so you can take it home if you want.

**John:** Is it still up?

**Lenard:** They burnt it last summer.

**John:** Where was this house at?

**Lenard:** St. Laurent - one mile and a half north of the ferry along the river road.

**John:** That's quite a ways from town.

**Lenard:** Yes, nine miles from Duck Lake.

**John:** What kind of heat did you have there? Wood?

**Lenard:** We had wood stoves. It was a log heater - big log heater - standing straight up - log stove.

**John:** No running water, electricity?

**Lenard:** The only water we ran for was down at the river.

**John:** What kind of furniture did you have? Did your dad make it?

**Lenard:** Most of it he made. My grandfather made it and we used to use coal oil lamps and we, when we'd go to the barn we had to use a lantern - coal oil.

**John:** How did your family make a living?

**Lenard:** Well, my dad left when I was seven years old and then we stayed with mother and my grandfather, her dad, on the farm. And then my grandfather all at once when he turned 70, he got an Old Age Pension of \$17. And that really helped us because we was living more or less off the land. Rabbits, geese, prairie chickens, partridges.

**John:** So they made their living by hunting? Trapping? Cutting firewood logs? Did they haul the stuff to town?

**Lenard:** The odd load of wood. I used to take that to town. I was nine years old - drive the team to town. We used to get a dollar a load. And your load had to be

three and a half feet high and the width of the bulk (inaudible) unless it was too long, then you had to cut it and load it up shorter.

**John:** Was there a lot of work around there?

**Lenard:** There was no work at all, no place.

**John:** So you had to go to other places to work?

**Lenard:** That's right. That's why I took off so young. I took off when I was 13 years old and I went threshing on a threshing crew with a team of horses. Three dollars a day with a team.

**John:** Did you have a garden on the farm?

**Lenard:** Oh yes, my mother used to make big gardens. In fact, she had one of the biggest gardens around. Some of the neighbours had some gardens - just a few little things but never as big as mother's. Mother's was a couple of acres.

**John:** And you had animals?

**Lenard:** Yes, we had six, seven head of cows that we used to milk winter and summer. When they'd go dry and we always had another one to replace it. And we used to put our cream in a pan because we didn't have no cream separators so we put our cream in a pan in the well house and leave it sit overnight and then skim it in the morning and then feed the pigs with the milk and keep the cream for the table and make butter. And we used to sell butter in Duck Lake - a pound of butter for eight cents—12 cents was the highest.

**John:** You said that you went to school?

**Lenard:** Yes, I went to school at Four (inaudible) School at St. Laurent - it's a country school.

**John:** How far was it from home?

**Lenard:** About five miles and we used to walk it till the school burnt down. And when the school burnt down, they rebuilt the school but down the hill along the river, which was only about two and a half miles from home.

**John:** Can you read and write now?

**Lenard:** I can read and write some.

**John:** How long did you go to school? What grade did you go to?

**Lenard:** Grade 8. I used to tell everybody I was in grade 2 but I was in grade 8, but a country school.

**John:** Was there a consciousness of Métis history in your family? Like did you talk about the Métis?

**Lenard:** No, we never talked about the Métis. The only thing that I heard old people talk - when old man Fleury (inaudible) he was on the Dumont Council and the Riel Council and when they'd get together with my grandfather, which my grandfather Charlie Laviolette was an ex-RCMP (inaudible) and they'd get together and they'd talk but they wouldn't talk too much because they were scared to get punished. Because that was already after the rebellion.

**John:** So there was lots of socializing like dances in the schools or in the houses?

**Lenard:** Well, there was some in the schools, in round the 24<sup>th</sup> of December they had a school dance and to get a few dollars, we didn't pay very much to go in, I think it was only five cents. But at that time 25 cents was lots.

**John:** Was it mixed or was there just Métis?

**Lenard:** They were all mixed, mostly Métis around there but when they had socials like that sometimes there was white people coming in because they enjoyed it, to see everything. And there was some Indians that happened to be in the area

**John:** Do you know of any Métis dances, wagons, songs, stories, Métis hunts you can describe?

**Lenard:** There was lots of hunts, especially before my time when I was just a kid. I remember there was Gauthier - John from one house, he used to stop in at home and we had two good dogs that were broke to the sleigh and he used to come there

and with three or four dogs and he took our dogs up and he'd go and hunt way down in Candle lake with them dogs, and he'd come back, he'd kill an elk or something and he'd come back you know and he'd give all of us a quarter of meat. Yeah, he left our dogs at home, but then we used to hook up on a cutter or sleigh and we'd take him home with his meat and his dogs to one house.

**John:** Did the Métis that you remember, did they dress in a special way?

**Lenard:** The Métis that I remember, they dressed with whatever they had, and a lot of them were home made clothes. Especially the women made their own dresses. But they were down to the ankles. And the older women they always used to have black dresses down to the ankles.

**John:** What was spoken back home?

**Lenard:** At home, Michif, real Michif, French, English and Cree and they used to talk Sioux but I never could catch on too much with Sioux but I caught on with Cree.

**John:** When you were younger did you have to go to Church?

**Lenard:** Oh yes, every Sunday we had to walk across the river and come to church and I used to make fire in the St. Laurent church, the log church that was built there, the first log church.

**John:** Oh yeah, you were telling me about that. I don't remember what you said about who owned the land there.

**Lenard:** (inaudible) used to own that. That's this old fellow and when they got the nuns there they put up a sort of convent and when the rebellion broke out or the uprising broke out they went to work and they all moved to Batoche.

**John:** Why was that?

**Lenard:** Well, they were scared to stay and get into trouble, eh, somebody kill them or something. So they more or less got away up there for protection, which Riel was up there at that time. I don't remember it because I wasn't born at that time. I remember the old people talking about.

**John:** What year were you born?

**Lenard:** Me? I was born in 1928, 9<sup>th</sup> of October.

**John:** What year was your Dad born?

**Lenard:** Oh boy, my dad he was 98 when he died but, I think 1901 or 1900 he was born

**John:** And you were born in?

**Lenard:** In Eagle Hills, south west of Battleford.

**John:** Did the Métis feel it was necessary to hide your Indian ancestry?

**Lenard:** Yes, they didn't feel necessary to hide it but, they felt that after the rebellion nobody would talk about the rebellion or the uprising or whatever you call it because they were scared to get punished and there was some scouts that stayed back and they were the ones that was accusing our people of doing all kinds of things, they'd even burn the houses. And they tell people to do this or do that and then you see, everybody lived off the land, you could shoot ducks in summertime you know, but when them guys were around you had to hide and then they passed a law that you couldn't hunt ducks anymore. You couldn't hunt deer, you had to buy a permit. I remember that when that started and I remember this forest reserve that's right next to me here, I remember when they had signs up "NO HUNTING. GAME PRESERVE." That's what they used to have on signs. And then if you'd get on there, they'd search you, they'd see that you didn't have a gun or anything.

**John:** Was there close ties kept with your relatives, Métis relatives? Were you close to them?

**Lenard:** I was pretty close to the whole works of them, yes, except the ones from Battleford but the ones around here, it was all friendly.

**John:** Was there any Métis that you know of that refuse to admit they were Métis?

**Lenard:** Oh yes, lots of them.

**John:** Why is that, I wonder?

**Lenard:** Because they were scared if they admitted they were Métis, they had something to do with Riel and they'd get in trouble and that's what they were scared. You see, when this first started, all it started about is the surveying, when they started to survey, they started to survey quarters, 160 acres square but then the river was crooked so a lot of them, they couldn't make the whole quarter eh, because some of it would be in the river. And then when that happened another thing that did happen was if you got married, you fall in love and say well we'll make a shack here for you, make a house for you, which was called shacks, and you stay there to help you out. But then sometimes it ended up that there was two or three houses on one quarter so then when the second survey come they made them river lots instead of making it in quarters they come and made river lots which was 17 chains wide and 2 ½ miles long. It all depended on the bend of the river. So some of them had a fraction on the end of their land which they could buy, cheap I guess at that time.

**John:** Against the river?

**Lenard:** Yeah, against the river but 2 miles from the river up, eh. You see, and it takes 8 river lots of 17 chains to make a mile wide, you know.

**John:** Okay, these people that didn't want to admit they were Métis, you know, were they any better off?

**Lenard:** They were no better off but, the trouble was that a lot of them they didn't look at each other just on account they wanted to be white.

**John:** Did they act like or suck up to whites to get more status?

**Lenard:** Well, that's what they done, they sucked up to whites to get more help, but which didn't turn out that way.

**John:** Oh yeah. Was there open discrimination or hostility towards Métis people?

**Lenard:** There was a lot of it, an awful lot of it. I remember if a Métis went to town, even myself when I grew up, we'd get to town and a lot of white people, French people or whatever, they'd see you and call you a Goddam half-breed or damn Michif they'd say and then it was a fight. It was all right to call you Michif but that was an insult anyway. So, we'd fight back and that's why a lot of us got in trouble like that.

**John:** When you went to work were you paid the same wages as others?

**Lenard:** Yes, all the crew was paid the same wages and the first time, like I told you, the first time I went to work I was 13 years old, I went with a team. I got three dollars a day and you had to do the same loads as the next guy and I used to (inaudible) out and my hands were so full of blisters and swelled up that I couldn't even bend to hold my fork in the morning.

**John:** Holy smokes. Were you ever refused a job because you were a Métis?

**Lenard:** Yes.

**John:** Really?

**Lenard:** Yes.

**John:** What kind of job?

**Lenard:** It was a bush job and this guy was hired, it was actually (inaudible) that was hiring. And I went to work and I asked if I could get a contract from them to cut cords with them. They were paying decent wages then and it was \$5.00 or \$6.00 a cord but you had to haul it to the station and when they found out I was a Métis. "No." But then when I talked French, I turned around and I happened to talk French so somebody that had come in there that I knew they said, "Well, how come you talk French?" Well, I said, "I can talk in three languages." I said, "I can talk French, English and Cree. What else do you want me to do?" I said. "Talk Ukrainian?" And he looked at me a while he said, "Just a minute." And he went back in the office to

talk to some other big shot and he said, "You've got a contract of 35 cords." They gave me 35 cords but they had to be hauled to the logging site and I done it in two weeks, but I had another guy helping me. Done it in two weeks and we collected, I think it was \$5.50 a cord which was damn good money at that time. And they had to (inaudible) the wood before they paid me.

**John:** When you went to a store did they refuse to serve you because you were a Métis?

**Lenard:** No, because the store keepers that were in Duck Lake at that time was (inaudible). And they tried to help a lot of Métis. Sometimes you couldn't sell, you would go to the woods you'd ask them and he'd say, "Well, go there, go there," and then they'd call back, you couldn't sell it. You'd tell him, "Well, you ordered the wood, why didn't you buy it?" Well, or else take my team, go and sell it. And he'd say, "Well, okay, then I ordered it right there okay I'll pay for it." But instead he'd give you, one dollar of wood, he pay you seventy-five cents a cord in the store. You had to take it to the store. But in them days you could buy a pair of pants for ninety-five cents.

**John:** Were there any Métis that you know of that were refused relief on white skin?

**Lenard:** Oh yeah, there were lots of them. Even myself, I had applied, I had applied for relief and I couldn't get no help. And then later years, that's not all that long ago, maybe 30 years ago, maybe a little more, they were giving cans, cases of spork, and I tried to get some and I couldn't get any, no. And I wasn't poor enough and you know what they told me when I tried to get welfare? They told me, "Sell your truck." I had an old half ton truck and they said, "Sell your truck, you eat that."

**John:** You lived in Duck Lake for a little while?

**Lenard:** Yes.

**John:** And did the town officials ever try to get you to move or try to force you out?

**Lenard:** They didn't force me out. They didn't try to force me out. But, you couldn't work with them. I remember I went one time, I had got the first power saw around here and I had it in town too, it was a big heavy thing. And the mayor wanted to knock some wood down and he had his dad working on it and when he found out I had a power saw he wanted me to go and knock it down. And I said, "Okay, you pay me so much" and I said, "I need gas and oil for my power saw." Okay, but then I started cutting after the second day I had cut a bunch and he come up there and he says, "You're doing it too fast." He says, "We can't take you, we have to let you go." And they only paid me half of what they said they were gonna pay me.

**John:** Was there any feeling that Métis should marry Métis, and if so, did they? Were Métis women encouraged to marry white men?

**Lenard:** A lot of them were encouraged to marry white men but the Métis themselves, they didn't care what they married as long as it was a woman I guess.

**John:** And a good cook?

**Lenard:** Yeah.

**John:** And Métis men married only Métis women?

**Lenard:** No, they married whites too quite a bit, quite a few of them.

**John:** And did you have friendly relations with the white neighbours?

**Lenard:** Some of them, yes. Not all of them.

**John:** And did you buy and sell things with white neighbours? Property, (inaudible) fire wood, etc.

**Lenard:** Yes, we did.

**John:** Was it possible to see a doctor if you had no money?

**Lenard:** Well, I was always lucky for that. I always seen a doctor whenever I wanted to or really needed it, but then you had to pay them after.

**John:** And what kind of medical care did the Métis receive? Was it the same as the whites?

**Lenard:** I guess so because a lot of us were here, but then a lot of that too is, it all depends what a person had because there are a lot of our older people, like my grandmother and even my mother, they used to make their own medicine.

**John:** Do you remember any of it?

**Lenard:** Well, I remember one, a favourite one was the choke cherry bushes. In the early months you'd dig them out, take the roots and you'd cut the roots up and scrape them and you'd boil the bark, that bark from the root. And, that was awful good to stop diarrhea. It used to plug you tight.

**John:** Okay, I want to ask you a little about World War I. Do you have family?

**Lenard:** My dad joined 1914 war, whatever you call it, he joined up but he was under age and he got caught overseas because his older brother had joined the army and he thought he'd join too so he lied about his age to get in. And when they caught him overseas, when they found out overseas, they transferred him back to Winnipeg. He was 16 years old. And then they hired him in Winnipeg to break horses for the army.

**John:** What was the family living on when that happened?

**Lenard:** Well, they were living off the land, most of them.

**John:** Well, did any thing occur in the family after World War I, and because of the war?

**Lenard:** I don't know. I never did look into it and I was pretty young and I wasn't interested in too much history at that time.

**John:** And how old were you when the depression hit? You must have been fairly young?

**Lenard:** I was 12.

**John:** 1932.

**Lenard:** In 1932 I was too young. I was only about 4 or 5 years old then. Then I remember dad cutting a load of wooden pickets and I would sharpen them and he'd sell them for ten cents a piece, sharpened, but he had to haul them way out to Smuts, about 35 or 40 miles from town.

**John:** Where's that at?

**Lenard:** Smuts? It's the other side of Gabriel Bridge but way east of Gabriel Bridge. Alvena and then Smuts.

**John:** Towards Fish Creek over there?

**Lenard:** Yeah, but further east.

**John:** Did you have to work to help your family?

**Lenard:** Oh yes, yes I did. If you was 4 or 5 years old and you could milk a cow they'd teach you how to milk a cow, or help clean the barn, or help feed or even cut a hole in the river so as the cattle and pig can drink in the winter time.

**John:** You didn't move away during the depression?

**Lenard:** No, I stayed home. I had to stay home to help until I was 13, well, during the war I took off and worked.

**John:** What did you use for transportation? Horses mostly?

**Lenard:** Horses, we did. We had never seen a bike. We didn't know what a bike was.

**John:** Did you know anything about the Saskatchewan Métis Society in 1933?

**Lenard:** No, I didn't. I heard about the Métis but it wasn't spoken of around here.

**John:** Did the election of the CCF government affect you in any way?

**Lenard:** Yes, it did. It really helped us. When Diefenbaker got in.

**John:** No, CCF, what was his name? St. Laurent, is it?

**Lenard:** St. Laurent. I don't know, I was too young for that but I know when Diefenbaker got in.

**John:** He was a Conservative.

**Lenard:** Yeah, we had a lot of help from him.

**John:** And World War II, how old were you? 1942.

**Lenard:** '42 - I wasn't in World War II. I was 13, 14.

**John:** You were too young for the war then?

**Lenard:** Yeah. But they had to have somebody to keep the girls happy here anyways.

**John:** And who were the people that you looked up to? That you got your ideas from?

**Lenard:** My grandfather, Charlie Laviolette, (inaudible) Fleury, his son Pascal, and the older people (inaudible). We used to know them all and we used to listen to their stories. Sometimes they had damned good stories and sometimes you had to watch yourself because sometimes them old people used to play jokes on you too, eh, and I suppose they'd play jokes on each other. I guess that's where I learnt that too.

**John:** Tell me a little bit about the Red River jig. Where did you first see it done?

**Lenard:** I seen it done when I was 8, 9 years old. (inaudible) Fleury used to dance the Red River jig and he used to teach us. There was myself and two of his grandchildren, Juliette Fleury, she was Juliette Fortin after, and Ernest Fleury. And Ernest Fleury can still dance it.

**John:** Oh, he's still alive?

**Lenard:** Yeah. He's in Duck Lake but he's pretty stiff - he's like me. I know a lot of them asked him to go dancing and he wouldn't even try it.

**John:** Do you think if I took you over there you could convince him to?

**Lenard:** I don't think he would.

**John:** You were a dance champion.

**Lenard:** At one time yes.

**John:** Describe the Red River jig for me. What it was for - it was a competition dance, I know, but how was it danced? How far where the feet off the floor? How was it done?

**Lenard:** I don't think they looked at how the feet were off the floor. What they really looked at is to listen to the music and the one that could hold time better or where they placed their feet. (Example of beat) And if you could do that and make different steps, of course, and keep up.

**John:** Did you ever hear of anybody putting a saucer on his head with a glass of water on it and dancing a Red River jig?

**Lenard:** I never heard about a saucer on the head but I seen a glass with water in on top of the head and dance a jig and the one's that didn't spill hardly any or whatever, didn't fall off - all depends on the steps they made too, he'd be the winner. That's the way they used to judge them at one time.

**John:** Can you imagine nowadays?

**Lenard:** Nowadays a glass of water wouldn't stay there two minutes (laughing).

**John:** My dad used to tell me that at a competition dance, sometimes when there was a tie, they'd force somebody to have a glass of water or a shot glass on a saucer.

**Lenard:** I never seen it on a saucer, but I seen it on their heads.

**John:** But he said it was the only way they could break a tie sometimes. Did you ever try it?

**Lenard:** No. I never tried that. I had a glass in my hand, but it wasn't always water. A lot of times it was wine or whiskey.

**John:** Would you consider teaching kids to dance? Even one step at a time?

**Lenard:** I can hardly walk so it would be fairly hard for me to teach them.

**John:** If you see a good jigger now could you tell the difference between a good one?

**Lenard:** Oh yes.

**John:** How though?

**Lenard:** You just watch and if they don't jump very high and you just hear their feet keeping time with the music. That's a winner there. But if they jumped and had their feet about two feet off the ground, that's tap dancing.

**John:** I think I've got enough for now. You've got some old pictures?

**Lenard:** I've got these here. You can have a few. You can get the house that I was raised in there. This is my great aunt, I guess, (inaudible). I've got a pen but I can't write their names—I don't even know how to say their names. Because they only had nicknames. But this one here I know - it's in the back. And you see mother here, well, I don't know, you want a picture, I don't know which one you want.

**John:** It's mostly family pictures and artifacts - whatever - that once belonged to you that you used to use for tools or moccasins or mitts or anything.

End of interview.