

[Personal History of Alex Lavoie]

ORIGINAL MSS. OR FIELD NOTES (Check one)

PUB. Living Lore in New England

(Maine)

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COMMENTS

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PERSONAL HISTORY OF ALEX LAVOIE, FRENCH CANADIAN

Alex Lavoie knows a lot about the old French customs and enjoys talking about them. He is about 47 years old and just now is working on a WPA road project. Leblanc is a French Canadian who came to Old Town in 1908 and he is about the same age as Lavoie. Both of them worked for a long time in the woolen mill - Lavoie as a spinner, and Leblanc as

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a weaver. They probably would be there now if the mill had not closed. I've worked with Lavoie - or Leavitt - in the woods, on the boom, in the woolen mill and on a road project. He is a very good worker but slow acting. Gene Mann, the Boss on the boom, used to say when he saw Alex strolling down to work in the morning at the end of a long line, "Well, they must be all out of the bunk house - here is Alex." He married an American girl who was converted to the Catholic faith. The couple have two children.

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THE LIFE OF ALEX LAVOIE, FRENCH CANADIAN

(As Told By Himself To Robert F. Grady)

Alex Lavoie had professed an interest in the work I was doing, when I met him in Lablanc's store, and I had mentioned to him that Father Ouellette, whom I had just interviewed, couldn't tell me the name of the pastor of St. Josephs, in Old Town. Alex: "I can tell you that. It was Father Nicoli. R. G.: "How did you know that?" Alex: "My grandmother told me. It would be hard to prove it, I suppose, if they have no records of that time at the church, but go down to the cemetery and you'll find graves there of the three priests who died while they were in charge of this parish. The graves are all in the church lot - Father Lavadier, Father Trudel, and Father Nicoli. Nicoli was buried in another lot, but the coffin was transferred. You'll find his name on one of the monuments." R.G.: "Father Ouellette said that Bapst was here before Trudel." Alex: "He was, and he was here before Nicoli, but Bapst wasn't a resident priest and Nicoli was. Bapst went from one town to another on a kind of route. Nicoli died about the year Father Trudel came here - 1880."

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(Essay No. 9 caught Alex' eye) Alex: It's too bad old Zeb (an uncle of his) isn't alive. He knew a lot about this stuff. (magic, ghosts, superstitions) I remember a story they used to tell about a time when there was an epidemic of black cholera over on the island (French Island). There was an old covered wooden bridge that ran across the river at that time, and guards had been stationed at this end of the bridge to prevent any one from crossing in either direction.

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The Maine Central bridge wasn't there then so the only way to get to the island - unless you had a boat - was to cross by the wooden bridge.

"In some way the priest got over there, but the guards said he hadn't gone across the bridge. He gave dying people extreme unction - the last sacraments, you know. He worked there until the danger was past and then he appeared on this side again. The guards said they didn't see him cross the bridge in either direction. The old people said he walked across the water to get back and forth, but, of course nobody would believe such a yarn as that now.

"If you have to write anything about the schools, be sure to say something about that time Fatty Cyr went to night school. It was about ten years ago and they were having night school over in the French Island school. Fatty was on the police force then. It had been going along for a couple of months and the teacher decided to find out how much they knew or had learned. She wrote some names and things on the black board.

"What's this word, Mr. Cote?" she says pointing to the first word.

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“That's my name - Cote.”

“Correct. Mr. Moreau, what is this word?”

“M-o-r-e-a-u. That's my name, Moreau.” “Right.”

“Mr. Cyr,” pointing to the word cat. “Tell me what this is.”

Fatty looked at the word for about a minute. “I suppose it's my name,” he said finally, “but I can't seem to make it out.”