

Contacts: Cecilia Metusic (Rondeau)
Hermine Paquin (Rondeau)
Tom and Ruth Rondeau*
Felix and Jeanette Rondeau *
Isabelle Rondeau

Address: Cable, Wisconsin

Ethnic Group: French

Fieldworkers: Matthew Gallmann
Robert Savignac

Date: Sunday, March 25, 1979

*Tom and Felix are actually the informants in my view. Ruth and Jeannette are not French and were seemingly never involved in the oral tradition ~~discussed in this interview.~~

Robert and I left Ashland at about 9:30 a.m. and arrived in Cable at about 10:30 a.m. We decided to keep a few things in mind during this interview: 1) family background, 2) entertainment, 3) occupation, and 4) the family background work done by Felix.

Felix had apparently traced the family roots back to France. Robert and I were interested in his work in this area.

We were greeted warmly when we walked into Cecilia Metusic's home. I was happy to see the folks I already knew and the folks I was about to meet. We were sitting in a room in Cecilia's house that is a kind of sitting room. There is a game table in the middle of the room and many games on the shelves. There are also many polished stones and craftwork made out of rocks and polished stones. Cecilia and her late husband Joe Metusic had a rock shop years ago and Cecilia has many rock crafts leftover from those days.

My past fieldnotes on the Rondeau family are of poor quality and do not include material on physical appearance and background of family thus I will be including primary background material in these fieldnotes. I felt that this meeting was a very fine opportunity to survey the Rondeau family. We covered a lot of different topics in our discussions. But there were too

many exciting, energetic people present to go in depth on any one person's history or perspectives, nor could we remain on one topic for a very long amount of time. Thus the fieldnotes will contain small amounts of information on many different topics.

Hermine Paquin is the oldest living of the sixteen Rondeau children at 86 years of age. She is a small hunched over lady with a lot of energy and personality. She is full of history and seems to remember dates and incidents very well. She is redheaded as is Cecilia, Tom and Felix.

I believe that Tom is next in age to Hermine. He has had a few strokes and has trouble speaking as well as remembering details. Tom is tall and white haired and appears to have had a good build when he was younger.

Felix and Tom look very similar though Felix is younger and sharper than Tom. Felix has recently suffered from a stomach disease but he didn't really show any obvious signs of a sickly man.

Cecilia is a very energetic woman with a sense of humor and a very young appearance. She is about 5'5".

Isabelle is about Cecilia's height. She was fairly quiet but did occasionally interject into the conversation. She has grey-black hair and she wears glasses. She lives alone and I don't think she ever married.

Our conversation began by Robert and I describing Northland College and our present living situations. Felix was very interested in the French Canadian Robert. We spent some time talking about St. Boniface and French Canadians. We also talked about the singing group "The Voyageurs" which Bob and I are both members of.

Bob asked Isabelle if Felix and Jeanette picked her up on the way to Cable. She said yes they did and they also picked up Hermine on the way.

Bob asked how many kids were in the Rondeau family. Felix said that they were a family of sixteen children. Isabelle exclaimed that she was the "black one" of the family. That is to say that she was the only Rondeau present who didn't have red hair. Apparently, half of the Rondeau children of the

generation in discussion had red hair and the other half had black hair. Half of the children were boys and the other half were girls.

Felix explained why there are redheaded Frenchmen. He said that the Rondeaus are from the Normandy area. Around 900-1000 A.D. the Vikings invaded Europe and consequently Normandy. Thus the red hair. He also went into more detail about the Viking's exploits.

Isabelle commented that she had "read some books about that".

(The day was overwhelming and I'm finding it hard to state the events of our meeting chronologically. Thus I'm going to share the information I have in a haphazard way).

Felix said that he didn't speak French very well but he disproved himself when him and Robert began conversation. They were talking about the differences between European French and Canadian French. The rest of us sat by listening. I don't understand French and was trying to pick up what I could about the conversation. Ruth and Jeanette were sitting by wondering what the conversation was about.

Isabelle interjected and Felix told her that she didn't know what she was talking about. I had figured out what they were talking about and so I mentioned that the Acadian French also spoke a different dialect of French.

Cecilia supplied us with orange juice that contained a touch of gin.

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The Rondeaus all began to express some excitement about wanting Robert and I to sing some songs.

Before Robert and I began singing Felix chanted out a verse of a Voyageur song that no one in the Rondeau family can remember except for the first verse and the tune. Tom seems to remember some other lines to the song but can't get a verse together. Robert had never heard the song. I mentioned that maybe we could find the song in the Canadian archives or the folksong archives at the Library of Congress. Robert mentioned a book about the songs

of Manitoba and he said he would try and find out whether or not the song was in that book.

Cecilia and Felix asked us if we could sing En Roulant Ma Boule Roulant. We sang some verses from the version that we sing in Voyageurs (the singing group). Robert explained that there are 97 versions of this song and then he sang another version of the song.

Cecilia and Felix were singing along on the first version we sang. They had an album of Voyageur songs which also had a word sheet. One of these songs on the album was Ce Laviron which Cecilia said was one of her favorite songs. Robert and I sang this song for them and they enjoyed it.

I stepped out of the room to go to the bathroom and by the time I came back into the room Cecilia declared that we could continue to sing and talk later but now it was time to eat.

We all assembled at the dining room table. Robert and I offered to help serve the food but Cecilia said that we should just sit down.

Pancakes, eggs, ham, coffee, tea, cranberry jelly, butter and syrup made up the meal. Cecilia kept bringing in platters of food and all of us began to eat. Robert and Felix began to talk about differences in their French. We also began to talk about sayings. Felix came up with a French saying that translated out to "He farts higher than his asshole." This saying was used if someone was "putting on the style" of flaunting riches they didn't really have.

Another saying that came up was one that was used on a cold night. It amounted to, "I wouldn't want to be sitting on the roof dressed only in a harness". That was Felix's interpretation of that saying. Hermine said that she heard her mother always say, "I wouldn't want to be sitting on a gate dressed only in a harness".

The conversation came around to talking about the Rondaau's deceased brother Isadore. Isadore was apparently quite a handyman. Tom told the story of how him and Isadore walked a couple of miles to cut down a maple tree which Isadore used for the back of the third fiddle he had made. Tom said they cut

it down about four feet from the ground and then they cut into it vertically to get a suitable section of the tree. Tom didn't know how long Isadore let the wood dry.

Felix made some statements about the quality of these homemade fiddles. He said that they were "nothing great" but they were still nice. I think he was comparing his brother's homemade fiddle to a Stradivarius!

Robert asked if any of these fiddles were still around. Everyone thought about it but came up with a blank. Felix said he had one of them when he lived in Hayward but it has since been lost. Then Felix said that he wished he had built a big building when he was young to hold all the belongings of his family that have been thrown out. Hermine said that they would be millionaires if they had kept all of their heirlooms.

Then Isabelle asked Felix about their mother's gold wedding band. Felix said that he lost it cleaning a deer. Tom said that "mother gave that wedding band to you so you could give it to me!" Then Felix said, "well then I had no intention of giving it to you because I only remember that she gave it to me!" They started arguing about this point and the Cecilia said that it was nice to see the men arguing for once because Hermine, Isabelle and herself had been arguing all weekend. *We all laughed for it was all good-humored.*

The table was now being cleared and Felix went into the living room and began playing around with my fiddle. Jeanette, Ruth, Isabell and Cecilia cleared the table.

I asked Tom about his life in the logging camps. He said that he worked at one logging camp when he was young for about nine years. I asked him if there was any singing in the camps. He said that they never sang in the camp where he was working. Then he told us that the men weren't even allowed to talk while they were eating. If anyone talked the cook would come out with a big knife and threaten the offender.

After it seemed as if Tom didn't want to talk of the lumbering camps any-

more we began talking with Hermine. She told us that one of the local newspapers wants to write an article on the work Robert and I were doing with Hermine. The newspaper is also interested in Voyageur history.

We all went back into the sitting room talking once again. Isabelle started talking about plants they used to eat when they were kids. The conversation went into medicinal uses of plants and food uses of plants. I neglected to catch all of the details.

We sang some more songs. That is Hermine sang some songs Bob and I have recorded from her. Bob and I sang some Voyageur songs as well as some logging songs such as Logger's Alphabet and The Frozen Logger. Felix and Cecilia sang out of Felix's song book Abdul the Bulbul Amir and Down on the Farm. Felix, Cecilia, and Hermine all have song books that they printed or typed themselves of songs they have collected over the years simply because they enjoyed the songs.

I asked Hermine about dance music in the Georgetown settlement. I had asked everyone about this earlier but they all said Hermine would know. Hermine said that fiddles, mouth organs and piano(es) were the instruments that people had at the Georgetown settlement.

Hermine told us she remembered alot of stories. Earlier in the day she told Robert that as a girl of 5 years old her and her sister used to sit at the window of their log cabin and watch for fishing flags to go down. You see her father would set up around 50 fishing lures through the ice with flags attached to them. When enough flags went down Hermine would tell her mother. Her mother would take the fish out of the water and they would freeze. When father came home at night he would drive a sled down to the ice and pick up all of the fish.

Another story she told was of the families relationship with the Indians. "Mother was always scared of Indians", said Hermine. The Indians would always walk by the Rondeau's cabin with their papooses and other things.

One time two Indian women stopped by the house. Hermine could describe these women. "One was tall and beautiful and dark and had an attractiveness. The other woman was older and smaller". The women had a baby that was born on the way to wherever they were headed. "They only spoke Indian", said Hermine. But they motioned that they wanted to wash and clothe the baby. Hermine's mother let them in and washed and clothed the baby. She made tea for the Indian women and apparently many friendly gestures were initiated. After this time I guess her mother felt a little better about the Indians.

By this time we were all tired from a long day. It was now about 4:00. Felix invited us up to his cabin in the North. It was a warm goodbye.

I felt that this was a fair opportunity to survey what kinds of material the Rondeau's have to offer. I would never attempt to document a meeting with that many people present. There was too much multiple stimulus. We have to take each of these people one at a time in and of themselves. I believe that Hermine is an excellent source of history as her memory is sharp and her enthusiasm high.

Robert dominated the role of interviewer. The Rondeau's really enjoy being with him and speaking French. The highpoint of the day was when Felix said that people should sing more when they get together. "It's fun, wholesome, and entertaining."

I apologize for bad fieldnotes. I tried to take in too much information.

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I have to learn that I have a limit of how much information I can retain.

Robert and I drove home and ate dinner together at my house. We were both happy and excited but also worn out and tired.

EXTRA NOTES

1. Felix told us a story about a salesman that once tried to get him involved with putting money into some type of deal involving the Kensington Ruin Stone in Minnesota. He explained that most salesmen had to go through his secretary before they talked with him thus avoiding wasting time with unnecessary salespeople. But this salesman got through to him directly which instantly annoyed Felix. Well, Felix let this guy go through his sales pitch and then Felix told him about the Viking invasions into France around 1000 A.D. Then Felix told this guy that he'd had enough trouble with the Norwegians 900 years ago and he didn't want to bother with their Ruin Stone now.
2. I played Billy Cheatum on the fiddle while Robert accompanied me on spoons. They seem to have enjoyed the music but I believe he liked the singing better. After I was done playing Felix came over and asked if he could "look at my fiddle". Then he started to play Finlandia on the fiddle. He claimed that he hadn't played the fiddle for ten years. Then he played some other songs. He was using vibrato and bowing fairly clean ~~holes~~ notes although his intonation was not exactly accurate all the time. He gave me back the fiddle and said he was "sorry for imposing". I wasn't quite sure what he was sorry about.
3. Hermine mentioned at some point in the brunch conversation that she had pictures of all the log cabins that their family owned. Then Isabelle mentioned that she was born in a log cabin and that they (the Rondeau's) were real pioneers.