

The following transcript of
Joseph “Fred” Pilotte’s interview

on

Memories and Music

(broadcast between 1974-1976)

was created by the Sudbury Public
Library as part of a

Summer Canada Project

in 1982.

SUDBURY PUBLIC LIBRARY

"MEMORIES AND MUSIC"
INCO LTD.
CIGM FM

ORAL HISTORY PROGRAM

INTERVIEWEE: Fred Pilotte TRANSCRIBER: Bonnie Savage
POSITION: TAPE NUMBER: 056

DATE: DATE OF TRAN: July 1982
INTERVIEWER: Dan MacMillan SUMMER CANADA PROJECT

THEME:

D.M. And now friends we've got another guest on Memories and Music. A most interesting gentlemen. I think you'll find his story most interesting. He's, after talking to him, I think we'd have to call him a free enterpriser because he's pretty much done what he wanted to do through life. If he wanted to try something, he tryed it, but we'll let you let him tell his own story. His name is Fred Pilotte. Now when did you retire from Inco Mr. Pilotte?

F.P. '73. 1973.

D.M. And how many years service had you by that time?

F.P. Twenty-two and a half years.

D.M. Now actually you had worked longer ~~fer~~ than that for Inco but you had broken your service right?

F.P. That's right.

D.M. O.K., well now, let's start now somewhere near the beginning. Where are you from? Where were you born?

F.P. I was born in Garson.

D.M. Well that's not too far away, and what date and what year?

F.P. July the fourth, 1918.

D.M. So when you celebrate your birthday, the Americans they all celebrate it for you too eh?

F.P. That is right. () day.

D.M. ha ha ha. Now you would, your father also was with Inco was he at that time? Working at Inco from Garson?

F.P. Yes he did work at one time.

D.M. Oh I see but he, he didn't stay with Inco. He left.
Is that correct?

F.P. That's correct. He left Inco and went farming.

D.M. Well that would be an interesting experiment. Where did he go?

F.P. In Wahnapatae.

D.M. Ah ha. Now had he been a farmer at some time rather. Did he think that he was going to get rich farming or what was the story here?

F.P. Well his dad did have a farm at Garson at that time.

D.M. So your father took off and went to the farm to try it out eh?

F.P. Yes he did.

D.M. Well now, how old were you when he went farming?

F.P. I was just a kid.

D.M. Four or five years old? Or ten or twelve or....

F.P. Maybe a couple of months old, a couple of years old, pardon me.

D.M. Just a couple of years old. You don't remember too much about going to the farm then eh?

F.P. No I don't really.

D.M. ha ha ha, I can imagine not. But then you would then grow up on the farm then at Garson would you?

F.P. No, I grew up on the farm in Wahnapatae.

D.M. In Wahnapatae rather. Excuse me, yeah. Mixed farming? Milking cows and all that?

F.P. That's right.

D.M. Would you, your a country boy then eh? Like they say? Inco likes to hire country boys. Is that correct?

F.P. That's right.

D.M. What did you do? Go to school in a country school in Garson, or Wahnapatae country.

F.P. A country school in Wahnapatae.

D.M. Now it seems to me Fred, you told me that things were working out not too badly on the farm in Wahnapatae but your mother got sick. Is that correct?

F.P. That is correct. She took a stroke and never recovered.

D.M. Oh. So that would be tough, and how many children would there be then?

F.P. There was eight children.

D.M. So here was your father trying to farm at Wahnapatae with his wife in effect gone, not able to help him, and eight children you said eh?

F.P. That is correct.

D.M. So, you then, how old were you at this point?

F.P. Twelve or thirteen.

D.M. Oh I see, so, so you then, a lot of this responsibility before, you went to work then did you? Did you stay on the farm or did you get a job on the highways or something then?

F.P. No, I got a job on the highways at that time.

D.M. Wonderful. Where was this camp.

F.P. At Wahnapatae.

D.M. Not at Wahnapatae, but close there eh?

F.P. Just about where Wahnapatae Lumber is situated right now.

D.M. As you were getting for the broadcast here now, you told me something I found interesting, that they changed ~~gangs~~ gangs every week 'cause they were trying to spread the work around. Is that correct?

F.P. Yes. They used to change gangs every week. Different bus loads and stuff.

D.M. Well that's fair enough. You can't complain about that eh? Now tell me something about the men that you met there. The fellows off the freights and so on. This, these were tough years now mind you. This was, we're talking now what, the very early '30's are we?

F.P. That's right.

- D.M. Tell me something about the fellows that would work on the gang there.
- F.P. Well I saw as many as fifty guys get off the freight and who hadn't eaten for about three days and join in the meal time hours with the rest of the boys. We let them in, and by the time we come to the tail end of the gang, the cook was all excited. He couldn't figure out what happened. The men had ate so much.
- D.M. Yes, yes, but I don't know, men were a little kinder to their fellow men I think back in those days. Now, how long did you stay with the camp?
- F.P. A couple of years.
- D.M. mmhh. In the meantime, how about the family. They were living off the land back home. Is that correct?
- F.P. That's correct.
- D.M. ~~On what? Was~~ What, on was it mixed farming? Did they....
- F.P. Yes, it was mixed farming. We had cattle and mixed, mixture of everything.
- D.M. Now, but you didn't stay indefinitely with this road gang or this, you got another job. What was that? Was it with the national, you were driving a truck or something then.
- F.P. Yes, I went to work for National Haulage Construction Company.
- D.M. Where were you, where were you working from then?
- F.P. I worked in Wahnapatatae. They had a construction going on there from Wahnapatatae to Coniston.
- D.M. But did you now wind up driving a truck down in Toronto?
- F.P. Yes. It was a little transport hauling coal ~~for-er-~~ to Port Credit.
- D.M. To Port Credit from Toronto?
- F.P. From Toronto yes.
- D.M. So you wouldn't make a lot of money, but you'd make a few dollars? *eh?*
- F.P. Yes, it was a treat.

- D.M. And you'd get a few dollars home too maybe eh?
- F.P. Yes we did.
- D.M. Now, how long did you stay at that?
- F.P. About two years.
- D.M. Well you didn't ~~stay~~ over-stay your welcome. We've got you two or three years on the road gang and two or three years working ~~for~~ with a truck. So then, I think this takes us to ~~about~~ around 1939. Did you not join Inco about that time?
- F.P. Yes I did. I joined Inco about '39.
- D.M. What, did you hear about a job or something?
- F.P. Yes, there was openings. I heard about it and I went on, and hired on.
- D.M. O.K., now what were your, what was your first job here?
- F.P. My first job was working in the Orford Building on the salt cake ~~on~~ cars.
- D.M. That wasn't too easy eh?
- F.P. It was not an easy job by any means.
- D.M. Well tell us about, more about it. What were ~~you~~ you doing there? Breaking () and so on.
- F.P. We were breaking salt cakes with sludge hammers and drills. Somebody holding the drills and knock it in the grizzlies into the cars down below.
- D.M. O.K., ~~Fred~~ but you were a farm boy. You had worked before, and you could ~~take~~ take that eh? So, also about this time, did you not meet somebody, Jack Bennet. Is that, was that the fellow you met?
- F.P. Yes. That was a personal friend of mine, Jack Bennet.
- D.M. He was later ~~he~~ killed at () you were telling me.
- F.P. He was killed on a jet ~~rede~~ raid.
- D.M. O.K., so now the war is on about now, and you and a bunch of the boys got into the old Coulson Hotel and one night, six of you made ~~an~~ made a decision. What was that?

F.P. Yes, we joined the army, the six of us on that same night.

D.M. That sounds, I think that's happened from a lot of hotels across the country and what was, did you get involved with a, what were some of the training camps that you went to?

F.P. It was in Simcoe, and Toronto, and Camp Burden.

D.M. But I happen to know Fred, that you got a compassion discharge because, what was it, your father became sick too?

Sounds like this
F.P. Yes, my father became sick with, he got cancer of the (prostate) gland.

D.M. So here's your mother....

F.P. And my mother was....

D.M.helpless I guess eh?

F.P.yes.

D.M. And your father, so you've got what, seven younger
A brothers and sisters at home. Is that right?

F.P. That's right.

D.M. Well I can understand that. So, you went back then to the farm at Wahnapatae right? Or did you join the M.P., the O.P.D. or something around about this time?

F.P. Yes, I joined the O.P.P.

D.M. Well you wouldn't get rich, but you'd have a few dollars to help out at home with the O.P.P. How long did you stay with them sir?

F.P. Around a year I suppose.

D.M. And then, and this I find interesting, you heard of another job at Burwash right?

F.P. That's right.

D.M. Doing what?

F.P. A guard.

D.M. Well now, why would a fellow become a security guard? You wanted to try it out? Is it steady hours or what was it?

- F.P. No, I was interested in seeing what it was like inside the prison walls and the attitudes of the prisoners and etc.
- D.M. Well that's fair enough. So now we've had you on a road gang, driving a truck, O.P.P., and we now we have you with a security guard at Burwash. Now, recently we've heard a lot about guards beating up prisoners and prisoners beating up guards and all ~~that~~ that business out in Vancouver awhile ago, here we've got a chance now to talk to somebody who knows something about it. Now, how did you find it now? What's your theory about being a security guard at a prison or reformatory?
- F.P. I ~~fund~~ found it to be a fifty-fifty affair. You'd have to use the men, you know what I mean, both ways.
- D.M. In other words you played fair with them I guess eh?
- F.P. More or less.
- D.M. I think so. They are men. Just because they're behind the bars that down's't....
- F.P. ~~H~~ Doesn't....
- D.M.change too much, although I suppose there are some pretty....
- F.P. Theye are some hard ones.
- D.M. Right. A point you made to me as we were talking about it, is that one, if you would like, would ask a small favour, and then if you gave it to him, then every other inmate in the place would figure he was entitled to it. ~~eh~~ Is that right?
- F.P. Yeah, that's correct.
- D.M. So what did you do? You just had to use a lot of judgement eh?
- F.P. You had to use your own judgement and try and work it out the best way you could to, so it would be in the satisfactory for most of them....
- D.M. Um....
- F.P.to keep from harming you.
- D.M. How many men would you be in charge of? Would you be in charge of like a road gangs or a working gangs or anything like that?

- F.P. ~~I was in charge~~ I had what they call the big gang and I had as high as fifty men working for me in the bush.
- D.M. It wouldn't be easy looking after fifty men. If all those fifty decided to take off or take after you, you'd have a problem, eh?
- F.P. Yes. I just sat a revolver around me, and I think I'd ~~feel~~ have felt pretty small if they took after me with a double-bit axe.
- D.M. But it ~~never~~ ^{didn't} happen ~~eh?~~ eh?
- F.P. It never happened, no.
- D.M. You didn't get along too....
- F.P. I got....
- D.M.badly with all of them.
- F.P.along very well with the prisoners.
- D.M. Well, there you are, you never saw a jail guard beaten up but you mentioned ~~there-w~~ that there was one that was a little bit arrogant or a little bit tougher than need be on the prisoners and he got hit with a shoe or something. What was that story, Peter, Red Fred?
- F.P. Yes, that happened, that happened in the dormatory. One guy got hit by a shoe. One of these steal cleated heels and got cut up pretty badly.
- D.M. Well now....
- F.P. We never did find out who done it.
- D.M. Yeah, yeah. Now you were saying, or, that these weapons that, these fellows used knives and forks for dinner, then they can sneak a ~~knife~~ away, you'd think they use plastic knives and forks eh, but you can't use these in the machine shop eh? What was the story there?
- F.P. Well yes, they were working in the machine shop and they could make numerous weapons and tools and sneak them in some way.
- D.M. There's ~~not~~ ~~toom~~ much you could do about it eh?
- F.P. ~~It's pret~~ It was pretty hard to, to anything about that.
- D.M. Just ~~talking about~~ ^{to} you now, it occurs to me, that if we had them walk ~~through~~ a little tunnel like to get on

airplanes now, we'd hear them ring or something, or maybe they had those in the penitentiaries now?

F.P. Yes, they're more up to date now. Maybe they do. If they haven't, it would be a good idea to have it.

D.M. Now we offered that suggestion free eh?

F.P. Yes

D.M. To the provincial people. Well, here then we have you' as a jail guard at Burwash, but you didn't stay there all that long either eh? The years was around '41, or '42, but how long did you stay at it?

F.P. Approximately a year and a half I believe.

D.M. But now something else happened about this time I think. Did you ~~have~~ not meet a young lady somewhere and, at a dance or something like that? A girl from Coniston.

F.P. Yes, and then....

D.M. And what happened?

F.P. We got married.

D.M. ha ha, and what was her name before you were married?

F.P. Jean St. Jakes.

D.M. Oh yes. Her father was an Inco man right? Or was he....

F.P. No, her father worked sixty, pardon me, fifty-five years for Cashbay at the, I forget who owned that mill, but I know Inco owned at last when he retired.

D.M. Oh I see. Now where did you go then from Burwash?

F.P. From Burwash, I was, went to ~~securiti~~ security officer for defence industry limited in Nobelle.

D.M. mmhh, and how long did you stay there? A year or two?

F.P. Just about a year, a couple of years I guess.

D.M. Well I'm beginning to....

F.P. Towards the end of the war anyways.

D.M. I'm beginning to lose track here Fred, but at least....

F.P. These were all short terms.

D.M.you've been looking around. You've been trying them out anyway eh?

F.P. Yes.

D.M. I'll say that for you. They say, ~~th~~ you should get work that ~~ea~~ you like. We've had you from road gang, to Burwash, to Nobelle, and I there was something on O.P.P. somewhere along in there. So, did you then, and I like this, not start your own business right?

F.P. Yes I did.

D.M. Where was it and what was it?

D.P. It was in ~~Conistren~~- Coniston. I started an ice business. Ice and fuel with a cousin of mine.

D.M. Well that's on the face of what sounds like a pretty good idea but there was a pretty big problem that you hadn't figured on. Is that right?

F.P. We didn't figure on the fridges coming out then.

D.M. Electric refridgerators eh?

F.P. All of a sudden that put an end to that.

D.M. Put an end, well never the less, I ~~think we~~ think we had....

F.P. And then the fuel stoves came in, so that.....

D.M. Put an end....

F.P. ().

D.M. Still Fred, I think we're going to have to give an "E" for effort then eh? So where did you go then?

F.P. I went to Falconbridge.

D.M. ^{And} How long were you there?

F.P. About a year.

D.. That was about par for the course eh, then back to....

F.P. Back to good ol Inco.

D.M. You were working (for someone (I believe) very highly you known and regarded, Wess McDee(?) Sr. Is that correct?

F.P. That's correct.

- D.M. Well Fred we've got you with Inco, and you worked for ~~u~~while here but you got something else going on the side of, what was it, a restaurant business or something?
- F.P. Yes. I had a restaurant in Coniston.
- D.M. Tell us something about it.
- F.P. It was under the name of Joyce's Grill which we had for about five years.
- D.M. How was ~~busi~~ness?
- F.P. It was very good.
- D.M. I hear you were ~~you-were~~ your own boss in effect. Of course you were still working for Inco and your wife was running the restaurant.
- F.P. My wife was running the restaurant and it was very long hours and we sold it out.
- D.M. Well that gave you, you had a run at it. We have to give you....
- F.P. We gave it a try anyways.
- DM. Did you not then, buy another one? Try it again at Minnow Lake or somewhere?
- F.P. Yes. I bought a service station/garage and a snack bar down there.
- D.M. Well....
- F.P. Kept it about five years also.
- D.M. We've got you ten years sort of as an () or ~~buesin-~~ business executive but it worked out a little to hard for you. Is that right?
- F.P. Yes. (). It was getting pretty hard.
- D.M. Fred, I'm not going to even try to recap now. We've got two restaurants behind us ~~now~~ here, and security guard and one thing and another, but it seems to me that you did, you sold this and then you changed your type of work with Inco did you not? Did you not go to the locomotive sheds or something?
- F.P. Well I started, I was in the plate shop in Coniston and then I left there and I went, as a locomotive engineer in Copper Cliff.

D.M. How long did you spend at that?

F.P. About five years.

D.M. Well that's the year, you're starting to spend a little more time.

F.P. Yes, they're getting longer.

D.M. They're getting longer as we go eh? But they cut back on some of the crane, they were about 1960, and they were cutting back on some of the crews now.

F.P. They were cutting back about that time yes.

D.M.P. So you, you got into another department right?

F.P. Yes. I got into the converter department.

D.M.P. Is this where you were clerking there? In the stock room or one thing or another?

F.P. Yes, stock room clerk material and I knew every inch of that smelter like a book.

D.M. That is very fine, but now we're onto about '65, and did you not get involved in the vibration department or something?

F.P. Yes. I was in the vibration department for about five years.

D.M. Another five. Well we're, ()?

F.P. ().

D.M. And at this point, you had an accident or a sore toes that had to be....

F.P. Yes, I had a sore toe that I had to have amputated and I was off work for about six months.

D.M. And did you find that you could not keep your work going then?

F.P. Yes. Standing on my feet was getting me down. I couldn't carry that type of work anymore.

D.M. O.K., but you kept on working for Inco at some other work until you retired I guess eh? Which was what, in '73 you were telling us.

F.P. That's true.

- D.M. But you didn't stay retired for very long. You got working fairly quickly after you retired. Three or four days or something.
- F.P. Four days after I was called to the board of commissioners when they opened up the St. Andrew's Place.
- D.M. ha ha ha, so how long did you stay there?
- F.P. About three months.
- D.M. Well, you're starting to go back to the....
- FF.P. Back down to the low numbers.
- D.M.low numbers right. And after three or four months, you moved on again.
- F.P. Yes. I was asked if I would take a job as an inspector with the SPCA which I accepted.
- D.M. Well now, I love animals, I believe you do, I know you do, as an S.PCA inspector, you do what you can. The SPCA does too, ~~what-they~~ prevent what ~~are~~ cruelty it can to animals, is roughly what it ways eh?
- F.P. That is correct.
- D.M. Now how much authority does an SPCA inspector have?
- F.P. He has the authority of an police inspector.
- D.M. Now you were telling me that very often it is just carelessness that causes some pets to be treated very badly.
- F.P. More or less carelessness.
- D.M. In what way? What do you mean by that?
- F.P. People buying an animal, having it as a novelty for a few days, and then taking it out to the back and tying it under a tree or post of what have you and throw a ball once in awhile at it and a dish water once in a while, and more or less forget about the animal.
- D.M. That's a bad, bad thing.
- F.P. It is very bad.
- D.. We sometimes hear about animals, this is bad too, I know there was a story on T.V. or something awhile back about a number of ~~cattle-~~ cattle, horses I ~~think~~, starved in a barn, now without mentioning any names or anything, you've bumped into something like that too.

Is that correct Fred?

F.P. Yes that is correct. I bumped into six cattle starved to death.

D.M. So this is a dreadful thing.

F.P. Yes it was.

D.M. The, I guess the people again were careless or didn't care or forgot about it or something.

F.P. Yes. The family mixed up and they just ignored the animals....

D.M. That shouldn't happen.

F.P.and the marshal trouble.

D.M. Well Fred we've talk~~ed~~ about your numerous jobs. It's been fun because you've been in and out of so many. Certainly you've, you've gone through life. You've if you saw something you thought you had ~~enough~~ enough courage enough to try this and try that, I'll say that for you, but you also had time to, for some family life too. ~~How~~ What family have you? How many children?

F.P. I have six children.

D.M. What are their names and what are they doing now?

F.P. Robert is the oldest one. He's got his own upholstery business in Windsor. Norman works for Wesco here in Sudbury, and there's Harold Ross who works at the Iron Ore Recovery Plant in the Leeching department, Leonard Lemont who works at the Rrood Mine, and Joyce who was a nurse ~~a~~ in Sudbury here. She's married now.

D.M. Well do we have them all? ~~That~~'s Len and Harold...

F.P. No, we have ~~guy~~ who works for the ministry of environment.

D.M. Right. And how about grandchildren Fred?

F.P. I have twenty-one grandchildren.

D.M. I gues~~t~~t they're among the ~~smarter~~ smarter grandchildren in the district. Would you~~e~~ agree with that?

F.P. I'd say they're an average, yes. ha ha ha.

D.MP ha ha ha, I think that probably they're a little bit above average. You have to face all your children who will hear this broadcast.

F.P. That's correct.

D.MP Ladies and gentlemen, we've had a lot of fun for the last little while here. We've been chatting with Mr. Fred Pilotte. Fred retired in 1973 after some twenty-three and a half years with Inco although he had actually worked longer ~~with~~ than that with the company. He had broken his service on more than one occasion. He really started back around about 1939. Mr. Pilotte did not have it easy. When he was ~~just~~ still a very young man, actually had just joined the army, he had to go back and look after his brothers and sisters after his mother had past on or was helpless, his father too, back on the family farm at Wahnapatæ, but things have worked out pretty well would you say Fred? All things considered?

F.P. I'd say all things considered, I made out fairly well.

D.M. I ~~oul~~ would have to agree with that. Thank you very much Mr. Fred Pilotte for being our guest on Memories and Music.

F.P. Thank you.