



EI-420/CROMIER

EI-420

GEORGE CROMIER

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INTERVIEWER: JANET LEVINE, PH.D.

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FRANCE, 1924

RESIDENCE: LE MANS

AGE 14

US RESIDENCE: NYC, W 58 ST.

PASSAGE ON "THE DE GRASSE" PORT OF EMBARKATION: LE HAVRE

LEVINE: This is Janet Levine for the National Park Service. I'm here today, it's December 13, 1993, and I'm here in Oceanside, New York, with Mr. George Cromier, who came from France in 1924.

CROMIER: '24.

LEVINE: When he was fourteen years of age. Well, I'm very happy to be here, and I'm looking forward to hearing a French story.

CROMIER: You want me to talk in French?





LEVINE: Oh, wow. Uh, no, I think you'd better speak in English. If you want to use some French words, you can throw them in. (she laughs) Okay. So, tell me your birth date.

CROMIER: January 23, 1910.

LEVINE: And where were you born?

CROMIER: In Le Mans, France, Le Mans, L-E-M-A-N-S.

LEVINE: And did you live in Le Mans until you left for the United States?

CROMIER: Yes, about, part of it, yeah, most of the time.

LEVINE: What do you remember about Le Mans? What kind of a place was it?

CROMIER: Nah, the trolley car, the trolley car and, I don't know, it's a pretty nice town. Oh, they have an automobile race every year, twenty four hours, Le Mans race, terrific. They come from all over the world to see that race. And usually they, most of these vans went.

LEVINE: So they had that race when you were a little boy?

CROMIER: Yes, they did, yes. Yeah.

LEVINE: Do you remember, uh, you know, what it was like when you were little?

CROMIER: I think I was twelve when I saw it the first time. I was twelve years old. It's, uh, you know, you have to be there twenty-four hours to see whoever wins. But it was interesting.

LEVINE: So did you, did you stay up, or . . .





CROMIER: No, not the whole time, no, no. A couple of hours. I mean, we had the result in the newspaper the next day, who won. We had any idea, you know, there were two men to each, to each car.

LEVINE: Oh.

CROMIER: The sport car, the sport car. They're not supposed to be souped up, but they are. (they laugh)

LEVINE: So that was exciting for you when you were twelve.

CROMIER: Yeah, yeah, yeah. Otherwise it's just a plain town, a little, it is a city, a city. A lot of churches, and mostly, I would say mostly Catholic.

LEVINE: Were you Catholic, your family?

CROMIER: Yeah, oh yeah.

LEVINE: So was your family religious?

CROMIER: Not really, no. Well, we did go. We received communion and all that, yes. But my mother was not, I go to church practically every Sunday. We have a church right here, St. Anthony. As a matter of fact, we belong, we go and eat there two or three times a week. The food is two dollars, you know, for a senior center, senior citizens. And we also go to a senior center, 2900 Rockaway Avenue. There they have shows, they have things like that.

LEVINE: Uh-huh. Well . . .





CROMIER: As a matter of fact, we're going to Atlantic City the 14th of January. Yeah, it costs twenty dollars, we get ten dollars back in coins. She likes that, I like it. We spend a few dollars.

LEVINE: Well, tell me, tell me about, tell me your mother and father's names.

CROMIER: Well, my mother, Marguerite [ph].

LEVINE: And her maiden name?

CROMIER: Louveau, L-O-U-V-E-A-U. She married my father. He was killed last, in the First World War.

LEVINE: What was his name, your father, his first name?

CROMIER: George.

LEVINE: George. Uh-huh. And, uh, so he was killed, uh, when you were just young.

CROMIER: Yeah, yes, very young. The end of the First World War. That was in '18, wasn't it, in 1918.

LEVINE: Is that when he was killed?

CROMIER: Yes.

LEVINE: Yeah. Oh.

CROMIER: The last, the last, the war was almost over when he got killed.

LEVINE: What do you remember about your father?

CROMIER: Not really too much.





LEVINE: What kind of a man . . .

CROMIER: He was a baker. He baked bread, French bread, you know, the long bread.
And . . .

LEVINE: Did he work for someone in the shop?

CROMIER: Yeah. He worked for, not a big outfit, but he had his, I think he had his shop,
too, for a little while. He owned it. He's, I really don't remember too much
about that.

LEVINE: Do you remember everything that you ever, like, did with your father, things
you did together, or . . .

CROMIER: No, not really, no.

LEVINE: Uh, were you the only child, or did you have brothers . . .

CROMIER: No, I have a brother, he's also dead, Roger.

LEVINE: How do you spell his name?

CROMIER: R-O-G-E-R. Roger.

LEVINE: Oh, Roger.

CROMIER: Roger.

LEVINE: Uh-huh. And he was older than you?

CROMIER: He was older. Six years older than me.

LEVINE: I see. So . . .





CROMIER: That's where my niece lives, in France. See that? That was his daughter.

LEVINE: Well, did, uh, did your brother stay in France?

CROMIER: Oh, yeah.

LEVINE: He never came to the United States.

CROMIER: He never came, he never came here. I went to see him a few times, you know.

LEVINE: Well, um, do you remember your childhood, what, what did you do for, did you have chores that you did when you were in France?

CROMIER: I stayed quite a few years with my grandfather and grandmother.

LEVINE: Oh, where were they?

CROMIER: Oh, also in France, in Neuvill Ea Lais. That's a crazy name.

LEVINE: How do you spell that? (they laugh)

CROMIER: N-E-U-V-I-L-L. Neuvill. L-A, L-A-I-S. Neuvill Ea Lais.

LEVINE: It's a little town?

CROMIER: Yeah, very.

LEVINE: A village.

CROMIER: Just one store, one store.

LEVINE: Now, is this your mother's parents or your father's?





CROMIER: That was my mother's parents, my mother's. My grandfather was very husky. He just loved hunting. Hunting rabbits and deer.

LEVINE: Would you go with him?

CROMIER: No, no, no. He had two dogs, that they were crazy. When he picked up the gun, they went so wild.

LEVINE: You remember the dogs?

CROMIER: No, not really. Just a plain mutt, but they were good, good hunter. See, they went after the rabbit, and they got it.

LEVINE: What else do you remember about your grandfather?

CROMIER: They were nice to me, both of them. We had no kitchen. We used to, you know, everything was cooked on the grill indoors, but on char, not charcoal, just plain wood. We had no gas, no electricity.

LEVINE: Wow. Now where was, where was the cooking done? Inside the house?

CROMIER: Inside the house, yeah. Like a big chimney, that's it. That's it. Like they have a barbecue.

LEVINE: It was like a fireplace?

CROMIER: Yeah, a fireplace. You could sit on the fireplace, sit inside the fireplace, it was so big.

LEVINE: Oh, so it was built with stone.

CROMIER: Yeah.





LEVINE: And there were seats . . .

CROMIER: Yeah.

LEVINE: Built in.

CROMIER: Yeah, built in, yeah.

LEVINE: Do you remember any food that your grandmother cooked?

CROMIER: The most, the one she liked the best was rabbit stew with, with wine, wine sauce.

LEVINE: What was in it besides rabbit?

CROMIER: Uh, let's see now. Mushroom, they did mushroom with the rabbit, and potatoes. It's like a stew, you know. It's good. They had red wine inside.

LEVINE: As a child, did you drink wine?

CROMIER: Yeah, yeah, yeah, yeah. Not too much. We had wine that was not too strong. Otherwise I never drank too much wine. Just a little bit, a little sip.

LEVINE: Do you remember anything else that your grandmother made?

CROMIER: No, not really. She was good to me.

LEVINE: What was her name?

CROMIER: Marguerite.

LEVINE: Marguerite.





CROMIER: The same as my mother, Marguerite.

LEVINE: And, uh, what was she like? What kind of a person, would you say?

CROMIER: I don't know, I don't think. I have photos I can show you. They had the, they had the, uh, the hat, you know, they have all those beret, like. And they dressed up, all in black.

LEVINE: She wore black most of the time.

CROMIER: Most of the time, yeah. That was the outfit of the seniors, like the Quakers would do, you know, with seniors.

LEVINE: And your grandfather? What was his first name?

CROMIER: Well, I don't, Francois, Francois.

LEVINE: And do you remember anything else about him?

CROMIER: No, not really.

LEVINE: Did you go with him to these places, or . . .

CROMIER: Oh, yeah. The cows, he used to sell cows, raise them and sell them. And we had, I had my little horse, horseback riding on that little horse. He was good to me.

LEVINE: So you spent a lot of time visiting them, or did you actually . . .

CROMIER: No, I stayed there for a few years with them. My mother was working at Le Mans, and that was about an hour away from here. There was a train there,





Conlie, we stopped at Conlie. C-O-N-L-I-E. That was the railroad, but the old-fashioned railroad. It's not the railroad we have today.

LEVINE: Tell, describe what that railroad was like.

CROMIER: Well, the compartments, you know, just little compartments. And you could close the door, and you have that, four or five in that compartment. Nobody can come in no more. See? That's much better than the train here. I don't know how they are today. Compartments, yeah. We had fun.

LEVINE: So you would take the train to and from Le Mans?

CROMIER: From Le Mans to Conlie, yeah. And then they used to pick us up with the horse. There was no cars in those days.

LEVINE: Nobody had cars?

CROMIER: No. My grandfather had no car, horse and carriage. So he used to pick us up at Conlie, (?).

LEVINE: Would your brother go with you, or were you . . .

CROMIER: No, my brother was working already. He was six years older than me. He was a butcher. My father was a baker. He was a good butcher, slaughterhouse, just to slaughter the . . .

LEVINE: In Le Mans?

CROMIER: In Le Mans. Yes, yes. And he worked for a kosher butcher, so they were definitely, you know. And the regular butcher, they'd kill the cow with a gun,





and the kosher, they cut the head off with a big knife. The rabbi does that.

And that's about it.

LEVINE: Was there a large Jewish population in Le Mans?

CROMIER: No, no. Very, very small. But they just send it for, all that, all that town, you see. I remember, there was only one butcher, kosher butcher, in the slaughter house.

LEVINE: What was, was there an industry, or what did a lot of people do for work in Le Mans?

CROMIER: No, just ordinary, ordinary. Just the races. That was the number one attraction.

LEVINE: So, um, let's see. Did you go to school in Le Mans, and also at your grandfather and mother's?

CROMIER: Both. At my grandfather's as well. I quit school twelve years old. I graduated at twelve. We go to school, the last two years is from eight to six. It's not like here. Including Saturdays. And on Thursday we go to catechism, that's for Catholic. Catechism was on, on Thursday and Sunday. Sunday just before vespers we had catechism, twice a week.


LEVINE: Was this a Catholic school or a public school?

CROMIER: Yeah, a Catholic.

LEVINE: A Catholic school.

CROMIER: All Catholic. No other religions.





LEVINE: I see.

CROMIER: That I know of. In Le Mans maybe there were a few Jewish, but very few.
Mostly Catholic.

LEVINE: Well, what was school like there?

CROMIER: Uh, you get hit. If you don't do a thing right, you get hit. (he laughs) It's not
like here at all, no way. I went to school here, you know.

LEVINE: Oh, uh-huh.

CROMIER: Yeah.

LEVINE: So you know the difference.

CROMIER: Oh, yeah. The schoolteacher was eighteen, nineteen. I fell in love with her.
(he laughs)

LEVINE: The schoolteacher here, or there?

CROMIER: Just let me stay, in New York.

LEVINE: Oh, in New York.

CROMIER: She just let me stay after school. (he laughs)

LEVINE: Uh-huh. So is there anything else about the school in France?

CROMIER: Wait a minute. I was sixteen then. That's my photo on that side.



LEVINE: Oh, good. Okay. When we finish, I will. So is there anything else about school when you were in France? Were the schools very similar, the two that you went to there?

CROMIER: No, not at all like here. Not at all. But they teach you more over there. See, the school, from eight to six, the last two years. Here at two o'clock they're out, and they're very strict. If you don't, and you're, another thing in France, you could be the first, second or third, every month. One changes. If you're good, you always keep first. I was always practically first.

LEVINE: Oh, uh-huh.

CROMIER: So I was doing pretty good at school.

LEVINE: Ah, I see. So every month you get a rank, or a rating.

CROMIER: Yeah, yeah, yeah. A rating, yeah, to see who's going to be first, and we worked to be first, you know. I think we get some candies or something, and a small book. That's a long time ago. I don't know, I remember all those things.

LEVINE: Well, what did you do for fun when you were little?

CROMIER: Not too much. I just make, put on old bike, very old bike. I still ride the bike.

LEVINE: Today? Good for you.

CROMIER: Yeah, twelve speed racing bike. I used to love races. But, that I did. I fixed an old bike. That was at my grandfather's house.

LEVINE: And you had a horse, you say, a pony?

CROMIER: Huh?





LEVINE: Did you . . .

CROMIER: A pony, yeah. I used to ride the pony, horseback. Oh, yeah, he was good. And the cows, they just come home at five o'clock, and there was a little, a little pool there for the cows to drink. And then they come all by themselves, they knew the time, every, every day they knew it was five o'clock, we had to go home. And I went there with the horsie, to see that they did all right.

LEVINE: Did your horse have a name?

CROMIER: Coco. Coco.

LEVINE: So when the cows came home, did . . .

CROMIER: We had to feed them.

LEVINE: Did you do any of that work?

CROMIER: No, no. My grandmother did that. And she just milked the cow. We had fresh milk. (he laughs) It was hot, too, hot milk, right from the cow.

LEVINE: Now, did you, were there barns for the cows?

CROMIER: Yeah, of course, yeah, yeah.

LEVINE: Right next to the, near the house?

CROMIER: There was a barn, yeah, oh, yeah. My grandfather used to raise, raise cows, and then he sell them when they got old, at the market. Once a month he had a big market.





LEVINE: Oh, did you go to the market?

CROMIER: No. We went for that there.

LEVINE: Were there local markets?

CROMIER: Yeah, local, yeah, local.

LEVINE: Okay. Is there anything else you can think of, any, uh, attitudes or ideas that either your grandparents or your parents tried to, tried to have you learn, any ideas, attitudes, customs.

CROMIER: Not really. They were all good to me, all good to me. My mother came here two years before me, she came here. She was a cook. She was a good cook.

LEVINE: What, do you remember any dishes she made?

CROMIER: Pardon me?

LEVINE: Do you remember any of the dishes that she cooked?

CROMIER: Uh, she just worked for very wealthy people. I don't remember their names.

LEVINE: In France?

CROMIER: No, here, in the United States. That's why she came over. Somebody told her about that party.

LEVINE: So she came over expecting to work for this family.

CROMIER: Yeah, for that family, yeah. That's what she came for.

LEVINE: I see. So you must have been about twelve years old when she first came?





CROMIER: Yeah, about twelve, yeah. Not even twelve, I think. She came about two, two years before me, and I thought she'd pick me up.

LEVINE: Then she came back. And you were staying with your grandparents?

CROMIER: I was staying with my grandfather. And then she, she took a room, and we stayed there for quite a while.

LEVINE: She took a room . . .

CROMIER: Yeah, in New York.

LEVINE: Oh, okay. Well, before we get to the New York part, she came back expressively [sic] to get you.

CROMIER: Yeah, to get me, that's right.

LEVINE: Uh-huh, uh-huh. And what did she tell you about the United States before you came?

CROMIER: Well, she said it's wonderful, you know. She liked it. She worked hard, too. She was a very hardworking woman.

LEVINE: So you left your grandparents and your brother when you came back in with your mother. What was that like, saying goodbye to them in the town and . . .

CROMIER: They were sad. They died a couple of years later. Yeah. They were old already. So . . .

LEVINE: Did they want you to go?





CROMIER: Pardon me?

LEVINE: Did your grandparents want you to go to America?

CROMIER: Yeah, yeah, sure. Yeah, because I wasn't doing much over there, you know. I'll never forget, I worked after the school. I used to make, go to the, not grocery, fruit store, and we used to put the apples in a basket, put the rotten one in the bottom, the beautiful one in the top. (he laughs) I'll never forget that. I was getting fifty cents a week just to do that after school.

LEVINE: Uh-huh. That was still in France.

CROMIER: No, that was here in the United States.

LEVINE: Okay. So let's talk about when you left. You left your grandfather, your grandmother and grandfather's place, and then what did you do? How did you get to . . .

CROMIER: To Le Havre?

LEVINE: To the, yeah.

CROMIER: With the train. There were no planes in those days.

LEVINE: And then did you have an examination before you got on the ship?

CROMIER: Yeah, yeah. Everything was fine. That's why I only stayed about an hour-and-a-half at the, uh, at, what you call it?

LEVINE: At Ellis Island?

CROMIER: Ellis Island.



LEVINE: Okay. Well, when you left, did you, when you left your grandparents, then you went to Le Havre.

CROMIER: To Le Havre.

LEVINE: And how long were you there before the boat sailed?

CROMIER: The day before, just the day before. It took ten days, imagine that. Ten days. I was sick seven days, seasick. All, the boat like that. Oh, I could never do that again. It was terrible.

LEVINE: What was the name of the ship?

CROMIER: De Grasse.

LEVINE: And your mother, how was she on the voyage?

CROMIER: She was all right. She wasn't sick. I was sick. Oh, I was so sick. Ten days. Imagine that.

LEVINE: So were you down in the hold, in steerage?

CROMIER: Way down, yes, way down.

LEVINE: Can you describe that?

CROMIER: She didn't pay much for the trip, that's why. That's why we went to Ellis Island. First class, they don't go to Ellis Island.

LEVINE: That's right.

CROMIER: That's not fair, either.





LEVINE: No, no. But tell me about the accommodations in the ship?

CROMIER: Oh, terrible. Oh, boy. The food was even awful.

LEVINE: How, did you go to a dining room, or did you eat . . .

CROMIER: Yeah, a dining room, yeah. They had a dining room, yeah. It was not good. And I remember there was a lot of Jewish girls, young girls, and all they could eat was fish. That's all they had, fish. Fish every day, every day they had fish. They must have been kosher. They had fish. We had, the food wasn't that bad, but, I don't know.

LEVINE: Was it crowded in . . .

CROMIER: Yeah, it was crowded, yeah.

LEVINE: And bunk beds?

CROMIER: Bunk beds, yeah.

LEVINE: Was there anything about the voyage that was interesting or pleasant?

CROMIER: No. They had a couple of games, but very, very few games. And it's not like today. Today, you know, it's a pleasure to be on a boat. In those days, then it was an old boat. Imagine that, they do that now, in six hours. It took ten days. (he laughs)

LEVINE: Do you remember the boat coming into the New York Harbor, when it first came into the New York Harbor?

CROMIER: Yeah, sure. De Grasse was the name of the boat.





LEVINE: Yeah. And do you remember seeing the Statue of Liberty?

CROMIER: Oh, yes, we did, yeah, before we docked.

LEVINE: Did you know what that was at that time?

CROMIER: Yeah, sure.

LEVINE: And do you remember seeing Manhattan, seeing the buildings and . . .

CROMIER: The first, wait a minute. The elections, when Hoover came, won. I was there at Times Square.

LEVINE: Well, when you first got to Ellis Island, what was your impression?

CROMIER: Well, there was a lot of boats, a lot of water, and big, big city, big buildings. They had big buildings in those days, too.

LEVINE: And how about Ellis Island itself, when you went into that big building?

CROMIER: I really don't remember too much. I'm sorry.

LEVINE: No, that's all right.

CROMIER: I really don't remember.

LEVINE: Uh-huh. Were you there very . . .

CROMIER: I was very tired out there. No (?).

LEVINE: But you say your boat pulled it, it was election day?





CROMIER: Yeah. And we didn't get out till the next day. I don't know whether it was the fourth or fifth, I don't remember.

LEVINE: So you had to stay on the boat, or . . .

CROMIER: On the boat, yeah. I think the first class and second class, you know, the one on the bottom.

LEVINE: But you don't remember eating at Ellis Island?

CROMIER: No.

LEVINE: And you didn't stay overnight?

CROMIER: No, an hour-and-a-half, two hours tops. That's it, that was it. I made it fast. It wasn't, I was in order, you know, having my passport. Everything was fun.

LEVINE: Did you have a physical exam there?

CROMIER: Pardon me?

LEVINE: Did you have a physical examination at Ellis Island?

CROMIER: Yeah, very little, though, very little. Check your eyes, your mouth. They were very nice, no trouble whatsoever. Some had to stay a long time. I didn't. Everything was fine.

LEVINE: Did you hear anything about Ellis Island before you got there?

CROMIER: No, no. I didn't know anything.





LEVINE: You didn't know, uh-huh. Well, uh, did someone meet you and your mother when you got to Ellis Island?

CROMIER: No, she knew the way. She was there two years before.

LEVINE: So she, so she had a job at that time, so you could come right in.

CROMIER: Yeah, sure.

LEVINE: You didn't have to be met by someone. Uh-huh. Okay. So then you left Ellis Island probably on a small boat, and went back to Manhattan. Then what did you do?

CROMIER: We went to, uh, she went back to her work, to our job.

LEVINE: Where was she living?

CROMIER: She had one room, one-and-a-half room apartment.

LEVINE: Where?

CROMIER: On (?), 30, 55th Street, right by the elevated, Ninth Avenue. It's a mess. Every ten, fifteen minutes. But I got used to it. The bathroom was in the hall. The bathtub was in the kitchen.

LEVINE: Did it have hot water?

CROMIER: Yeah, hot water. I think we paid twenty-nine dollars a month, twenty-two, twenty-two dollars a month.

LEVINE: And what floor were you on?





CROMIER: The third floor.

LEVINE: The third floor. Was it a . . .

CROMIER: No ice box. We had to get ice, ice box. No refrigerator. He came every two days with the ice.

LEVINE: And was this like a, uh, a brownstone building?

CROMIER: Yeah, it was an apartment building.

LEVINE: Attached?

CROMIER: An apartment building. There was a few floors. We went on the third floor. They were not the same. There was, the bathtub was in the kitchen. The toilet was in the hall. Everybody could go in the hall. That was not a big building, no. It was a block from Madison Square Garden, the old Madison Square Garden.

LEVINE: Were there a lot of people who had immigrated living in that building?

CROMIER: No, I don't think so, no.

LEVINE: What did your mother ever tell you about the job she had when she came here?

CROMIER: Well, she seemed to like it. She used to be a good cook. I don't remember the name of the party.

LEVINE: So then when you first got here, did you go right to school?

CROMIER: Yeah, I went to school, yeah. I started. We went to the park, the zoo. And maybe I shouldn't say that, because it's a bad word.





LEVINE: It's all right.

CROMIER: You see, a seal in France is fok, see. So I says, we went to the zoo and I saw a fok, I said, "Miss Teggy [ph]," Miss Teggy [ph] was the name of the teacher. "Look, nice fok Miss Teggy [ph]." (he laughs) They all laughed, all the kids. I shouldn't have said that.

LEVINE: That's okay. That's all right. What, so you remember your first teacher's name? That was your teacher when you first . . .

CROMIER: No, my first teacher I don't remember. Miss Teggy [ph], Miss Teggy [ph], we used to call her. It was not Peggy, no. Teggy [ph]. That was her last name, maybe. She was red hair, oh, red.

LEVINE: This was the young teacher that you mentioned before.

CROMIER: Young teacher, yeah. That was in United States.

LEVINE: So when you went into school, what grade did you go into?

CROMIER: The lowest, I guess. And I came out pretty fast. Then I have to, when I got a little older, I went to night school.

LEVINE: Did you know any English when you came?

CROMIER: No, not a word.

LEVINE: And what was that like, learning English?

CROMIER: Well, I got it. I still know how to talk English.

LEVINE: Do you know what helped you when you were learning it?





CROMIER: I think the first school I went to, Miss Teggy [ph]. I think she helped me a lot. She just let me stay after school and teach me, you know, the way she, she tried to really help me. And we had those chocolate candy, five cents bar. I used to love those candies.

LEVINE: Do you remember, were there other children in your school who had come from other countries?

CROMIER: No, I was the only one from that school. So it was, I guess they were glad to see me.

LEVINE: Uh-huh. So you were never treated badly, because you had come from Europe.

CROMIER: No, very nice. Always . . .

END OF SIDE ONE

BEGINNING OF SIDE TWO

CROMIER: I can remember the park.

LEVINE: Central Park?

CROMIER: No, the one I said the bad word to the . . .

CROMIER: Oh, the Bronx Zoo?

CROMIER: The Bronx Zoo, yeah.

LEVINE: So you probably went on a school trip to there. Yeah, uh-huh. Do you remember anything else about New York that was new and different to you?





CROMIER: Oh, we had two other, I got older, I got two friends, both friends, and we had all derbies, the three of us. We had derbies, in those days. I would say about 1927, '27, '28. So . . .

LEVINE: They were in your class at school? They were your friends from school?

CROMIER: Yeah, we met in, no, they were in my school. They were there before me. They were there before me. They talked better English than I did. Then we used to go ice skating. I was much older then. (disturbance to the microphone)

LEVINE: Watch the, uh . . . (referring to the microphone) So they had come from France, those friends?

CROMIER: Oh, yeah, yeah, a long time before me.

LEVINE: So would you speak French with them?

CROMIER: Yeah, of course, yeah. We went ice skating, roller skating, ice skating, and that's all.

LEVINE: Did they live near you?

CROMIER: Not too far away, no, a couple of blocks. Then I got married, I was, 1931.

LEVINE: Oh, okay. Well, when you finished school, first you started out in the low grades, you, you got pushed ahead, probably.

CROMIER: Yeah, yeah.





LEVINE: Then, uh, you finished school, and then did you take a job and go to night school? Is that how you did it?

CROMIER: I, uh, some, uh, good guy, he was a painter. He took me. That was my business painting, as you could see. Uh, and he taught me the whole business. He was so wonderful. And his wife was a hunchback. Mr. Hecht [ph]. I'll never forget him. He was German, German descent. He was so wonderful to me.

LEVINE: Now, how did you meet him?

CROMIER: He used to pay me ten dollars a week.

LEVINE: Did you go to him for a job? Is that how you met him?

CROMIER: No, we used to, then we moved. We used to live at that same building. It was a better, a better apartment.

LEVINE: It was also in Manhattan?

CROMIER: And he was downstairs. She was a hunchback. She couldn't walk very well. And he was in, he had a pretty good business, wallpapering, everything. I did everything with him. He taught me the business. Let's put it that way. He really taught me the business.

LEVINE: So you were like an apprentice at first, and then . . .

CROMIER: Apprentice, that's right. I was about four years with him, yeah. Very nice. I still thank him today, believe me.

LEVINE: So when you were working for Mr. Hecht, were you taking night courses?





CROMIER: No. We used to go once a week to school, night school, that's it, that's it. To teach, to learn English, to write English better, that's it. But now I'm all right.

LEVINE: So then did you become a citizen?

CROMIER: Yes. I become, I got my papers, if you want to see them.

LEVINE: Now, did your mother, did she, did your mother become also . . .

CROMIER: No, no, she didn't, no.

LEVINE: Did she learn English? Did she speak well?

CROMIER: Yeah, sure, she spoke, sure, she spoke English.

LEVINE: So was she happy she had come here?

CROMIER: Oh, yeah, I guess so. She died '59, '59. She lived in Oceanside, a little house.

LEVINE: So, um, let's see. Then how did you meet your wife?

CROMIER: I was working in New York, painting. And she was working next door. So I made a date with her. I knew she was French. I made a date with her. And I didn't keep the date. I had a date with somebody else. And then a couple of days later I met her again. I said, "I'm sorry, I don't know," I lied a little bit, and we made another date. And six months later we were married.

LEVINE: And she was also from France?

CROMIER: Yeah, from Brittany, from Brittany.

LEVINE: So then did you have children?





CROMIER: Yes.

LEVINE: And their names?

CROMIER: Twins, Christmas day.

LEVINE: Oh!

CROMIER: Jacques and Jaqueline. That won't do anything there if I show . . .

LEVINE: Well, why don't we wait till we're finished, and then you can show it.

CROMIER: Yeah, I'll show that to you.

LEVINE: Now, what was your wife's name, and her maiden name?

CROMIER: Louise Douphart. That was her maiden name.

LEVINE: Could you spell the last name?

CROMIER: D-O-U-P-H-A-R-T. Douphart.

LEVINE: And, let's see, do you have grandchildren?

CROMIER: I have three. That's how many, great, I have a great grandchild. Yeah. She was born last, about a year, a year-and-a-half ago. Jacqueline, Jacqueline is my daughter, she has three girls, Laura, Sandy and Kim. And they went to college, all of them. One is (he calls out to someone in room) what does Laura do? What's her name, what's the . . .

: (?). Simone has two. We have five grandchildren.

LEVINE: Five grandchildren.





CROMIER: She's got five years of college. And the other's a schoolteacher. Laura, Sandy is a schoolteacher. They'll be here for Christmas.

LEVINE: Oh, that's nice.

CROMIER: And Kim, Kim works for a lawyer in Mineola. That's the youngest one. She's twenty-one.

LEVINE: Do you think the fact that you came here to this country when you were fourteen years old made a difference in your life, the fact that you started out . . .

CROMIER: Oh, yeah, definitely. I improved my life, believe me. I would never have done that in France.

LEVINE: You wouldn't have . . .

CROMIER: I love this country, I do.

LEVINE: Well, after you learned a trade with Mr. Hecht [ph], did you go off on your own, or what did you . . .

CROMIER: Oh, yeah, in Oceanside, Rockville Centre, sure. Very good customers. Really good. We used to work for mostly Jewish people, Jewish doctors, a lot of doctors. They like one room at a time. They don't like the place messed up. That's what I used to do. I was all by myself.

LEVINE: I see. You were in business by yourself, and you worked by yourself.

CROMIER: Yeah. And in those days I was making, what, forty dollars a week. And that was good pay then.





LEVINE: So you were here during the Depression . . .

CROMIER: Yeah.

LEVINE: Too. How did that hit you personally?

CROMIER: That was pretty bad then. I was not, that was before I start working. When I start working for myself, I was here in 19, I came in 1937, in Oceanside.

LEVINE: And that's where you started your . . .

CROMIER: Wait a minute. I went to Schwarsky [ph] Department Store to buy a pair of overalls and a pair of socks, and he put me, he's the one who started me in business. He give me the first, yeah, the first job. So I was so happy.

LEVINE: Did you ask him if he needed painting done, or did he . . .

CROMIER: No, no. He's, I told him I was a painter. "Oh," he says, "just what I, just what I need."

LEVINE: So you went there to buy some things to paint.

CROMIER: Yeah.

LEVINE: And he . . .

CROMIER: It was little bit, one little store. Now it's tremendous, Schwarsky's [ph], in Oceanside. They're very good people. I thank them, believe me. They were, they're both, they were very good people.





LEVINE: So, um, how about this phase of your life, now that you're retired, and how is your life at this time?

CROMIER: When I retired, my wife got sick, Parkinson's disease. That was very bad. Nine years, tremendous, pains, she was terrible. She used to beat me up. We started to get help. It was very expensive. Finally she wound up in the nursing home, and she died five months later.

LEVINE: So what year was that?

CROMIER: That was 19, 1979.

LEVINE: So what are your interests at this time in your life?

CROMIER: To take life easy, however you can, you know. We go to a meeting, we go to the center a couple of times a week. They're very good to us. Oceanside there, and Saint Anthony, they're very good. Twenty years, twenty years. They said the table used to be a hundred and twenty, a hundred and thirty people, now we have about fifty, forty or fifty. Things are going down. They're all dying. I'm still alive, twenty years.

LEVINE: What are you most proud of that you've done in your life?

CROMIER: Well, I would say my work, and take care of my wife when she was sick. She was really sick. You can look at a photo of here there. Yeah. September, and you know what? She had two sisters, they died of the same disease, the same, Parkinsons, the two sisters died before her, they died in France. They went back to France, and she died. Terrible disease.





LEVINE: So you've been back to France. Have you been back to the place where you grew up?

CROMIER: No.

LEVINE: No.

CROMIER: If I go, I'll stay with my niece in Paris, on the outskirts of Paris. Forty kilometers from Paris. We've got to go, maybe I'll go some day, a couple of years, you know. I have to make some money. It takes money to go there. It's expensive, very expensive.

LEVINE: How about your brother? Did you, did you . . .

CROMIER: My brother is dead.

LEVINE: Yeah. But did you keep in communication all those years?

CROMIER: Oh, yeah, oh, yeah. Of course, sure.

LEVINE: Was he, did he ever want to come to this country?

CROMIER: Not really. He had a good job. He had a good life, a very good life.

LEVINE: Okay. Is there anything else you can think of?

CROMIER: Not really.

LEVINE: Are there any customs that you keep today that you think are French?

CROMIER: No. The Eiffel Tower.





LEVINE: The Eiffel Tower, right, yeah. (they laugh) You've got the picture up, uh-huh, uh-huh. Do you think, like, if you think of yourself as French and American . . .

CROMIER: I like America. I'm American. I really am.

LEVINE: What part, is there any side of you that still is French that you would mention?

CROMIER: No, not really, no. I think I did pretty good.

LEVINE: I think so.

CROMIER: You know, it's hard for me to remember all those things.

LEVINE: Well, yeah. Well, you remembered a lot, that's great. Okay. Well, if there's nothing else, I think we can stop here. I want to thank you very much.

CROMIER: You're welcome.

LEVINE: It's very interesting. And I'm speaking with George Cromier, who came from France in 1924, when he was fourteen years old. And this is Janet Levine signing off for the National Park Service.

