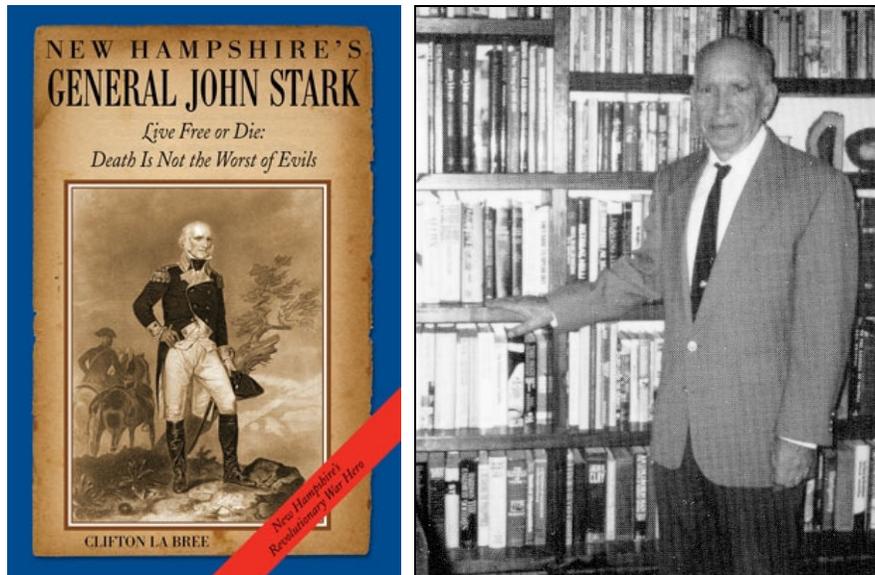


Interview with Clifton La Bree

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by Dan Rothman and Don Grosso of the New Boston Historical Society



Clifton La Bree is a retired forester, a student of military history, and a prolific writer. His twenty books include one of the most popular biographies of General John Stark, and historical fiction, too. Clifton has lived in New Boston since 1959.

Dan Rothman: Today is February 8th, 2018. This is Dan Rothman. I'm here with Don Grosso talking with Clifton La Bree. That's capital L-A capital B-R-E-E.

Clifton La Bree: You got it right.

Dan Rothman: Good.

Clifton La Bree: Most people don't. In answer to your question of how did I become interested in history. Of course, I'm 84 years old, so I grew up as a small child during the World War II years. That was quite an exciting period, actually, for a child growing up. And I went for one year at Boston University and it was there I kind of found out that I would be interested in Forestry. So I transferred from there up to University of New Hampshire and finished in three more years, got my degree in Forestry. I worked several different jobs for the US Forest Service for the New Hampshire County Forester Program. I was county forester in Laconia and for Belknap County and for Strafford County for two years. I enjoyed that very much, but it had a tendency to be quite political and I wasn't comfortable with that.

So a job became available out in New York State at Warrensburg, New York. There's a demonstration forest run by the New York State College of Forestry at Syracuse and it was a supervisor's job and I went out and applied for it and I got

it and I really and truly enjoyed that out there. And of course that area, upper state New York, Fort Ticonderoga, Fort William Henry [from the French and Indian War], Lake Champlain - that whole area is just rich with history. And I kind of think that that's where I got the history bug.

Dan Rothman: So you were in New York State, how did you come to New Boston and New Hampshire?

Clifton La Bree: Well I graduated in '55 at UNH and worked with several programs. One with the US Forest Service in Bangor and on the County Forester program, like I told you. And I went to New York, I was out there for three years and that had a tendency to get quite political and I always thought I wanted to do something for myself, so being an independent Yankee like I am, I decided to come back to New Hampshire and I did private consulting forestry, which I enjoyed every minute of.

Dan Rothman: Were you born in New Hampshire?

Clifton La Bree: No, I was born in Monson Maine. Up in Northern Maine. I've actually lived most of my life, adult life in New Hampshire, but I still consider myself a Mainiac.

Don Grosso: Is that in Arrostook County?

Clifton La Bree: Not quite. It's a little bit south of Moosehead Lake.

Don Grosso: Okay.

Clifton La Bree: It's kind of the last real township before you get into Northern New Hampshire, Northern Maine's woodland area. It's a small town, very poor. Their main item was the production of slate. There were four or five slate quarries in the area. John F. Kennedy's grave in Washington has a piece of slate with his name and everything on it on the grave site that came from Monson. It was a very high grade of slate, but of course when World War II started, most of the men left for the military and so forth, and they got outside, and they saw that there were better and more opportunities other places than the woods in that little small town of Monson, and very few of them returned and took up residence in the old town, and from that point on it's been going downhill.

It's dying daily. Too bad, but it is. It's on a lovely lake too, Lake Hebron, it's a beautiful lake. The water on it is all spring fed and many of the cottages actually draw drinking water from the pond. That's pretty unusual. I still have relatives in Maine. We go back up to visit every once in a while.

Dan Rothman: So after three years in New York state you came to New Hampshire ...

Clifton La Bree: Yes, and started consulting.

Dan Rothman: Did you come to New Boston at that time?

Clifton La Bree: No, I lived temporarily in Manchester. We rented an apartment there and I started looking around for a piece of land and I found one. I originally lived in the old colonial. You came by it coming in from the village and it was the last road, the last house on the Wilson Hill Road. It was a dead end road, dead end at the house. And it had 165 acres and I bought that. Interested in the land more than I was in the house, actually, and we moved there in '59, 1959.

Dan Rothman: So you say “we” - you were married by that time?

Clifton La Bree: Yes. Had six children, three boys and three girls, never a dull moment.

Dan Rothman: So the colonial ... Which was ...

Don Grosso: I can point it out on the way back. I'm trying to think of who lives there now.

Clifton La Bree: The Tostevins ...

Don Grosso: Yeah, Tostevins.

Clifton La Bree: Yes, Bruce and Elaine. Good people.

Don Grosso: Is the barn still there? I didn't notice.

Clifton La Bree: The barn is still there. Bruce has put quite a bit of money into maintaining the barn. It was on its way out.

Don Grosso: Any Studebakers inside the barn?

Clifton La Bree: I don't know. You remember that I was a Studebaker man.

Don Grosso: You were.

Clifton La Bree: We were a Studebaker family or an independent [i.e. not Ford or Chevy!]: Studebakers, Hudsons, and Nashes, and as a matter of fact I've got a picture here.

Don Grosso: That's amazing.

Clifton La Bree: I don't have a picture of my Studebaker cars, but this was a Studebaker pickup that we restored.

Don Grosso: Beautiful.

Clifton La Bree: And I had a '51 Land Cruiser Studebaker that we restored, and it was a beautiful automobile. We did a little tinkering on it. I put a front end under it and I did all

of the work on the antique cars with my older son Jerry who's a cracker jack of a mechanic, and I'm not much of a mechanic and if I start to do something on the cars or what not, the kids always tell me, "Wait a minute, Dad. I'll come down and do it for you."

Don Grosso: Don't ruin it.

Clifton La Bree: Went to a lot of car meets and so forth. This Studebaker was a really great thing for me, I enjoyed it a lot. And after I sold the house, I lost the barn and everything in it. It was only a two car garage; I sold my Studebaker and let them go. But I still get the Studebaker magazine monthly just to keep up.

Dan Rothman: So by 1959ish you were here in New Boston ...

Clifton La Bree: New Boston.

Dan Rothman: ... and therefore you raised your six children here?

Clifton La Bree: Yes. None of the children wanted to really come back to New Boston. I got a daughter in North Berwick. She commutes to Boston and she works at the Boston University, and Jerry, I got one in Antrim, one in Milford, and Bradford, and we lost Kevin, my youngest son. He was a four wheeler man, he was out on a four wheeler and had an accident with it and took him. That was probably one of the most difficult periods I ever had to experience. We were very close. He had married, and I gave him a plot over here on the project we had going, and he married a Chinese girl and we was very close. He'd pull into the yard almost every day and, "Hey Dad, I'm going downtown. Do you need some milk?" And I said, "No, I don't know. I don't think so." And he said, "Dad, get Pauline out of there." That was my wife then and, "She knows what's going on, you don't." But we were very close and I loved that boy. I love all of them, but Kevin was very special. Hard one to take.

Don Grosso: You did a lot together, mechanically.

Clifton La Bree: Yeah. My oldest boy, Jerry, is a mechanical engineer. He worked for Osram for a while and then got off on his own in Hillsborough. But they've all encouraged Dad [Clifton] in my writing and what not and my first wife, Yolande, passed away with leukemia in '77. And five years later I married Pauline and both marriages were very good, but especially Pauline, she was ... I'm not sure if you ever met her? [asked of Don]

Don Grosso: Not sure, can't remember. Might have, cause I remember being in your yard at the other place. I might have met her.

Clifton La Bree: And she's the one that kind of encouraged me to ... In the back of my mind I always wanted to write and when I finally retired, sold the old house, and basically retired, and moved out here, it gave me an opportunity to do that, so I

started collecting my books and what not. Pauline created the atmosphere so that I could do that. I don't know about anyone that does any writing, but when you're into a project such as a John Stark or whatever book I'm on or what not, you eat, sleep, and drink the thing and it required, at least with me anyway, it requires a lot of concentration and sometimes you just get up and walk away from it. ["New Hampshire's General John Stark" written by Clifton, published in 2007.]

Don Grosso: I noticed in "Flickering Flame" [2014, one of Clifton's novels] you have a lot of historical facts like Fort Number 4 [in western New Hampshire]; coming into Portsmouth, you knew what was on the port side ... Did you go and walk those areas?

Clifton La Bree: Oh yes. Fort Number 4, I'm amazed. They're having a hard time financially in keeping it together up there, but it's a beautiful site and the people that work there are really dedicated to it and everything. I did most of my work, I did some of my work there and I did a lot with the New Hampshire Historical Society and the Manchester Historical Society, and I spent quite a little bit of time at Fort Ticonderoga's facility up there. They've got some beautiful facilities attached to the fort. I did the same thing at Fort William Henry. Those were interesting places. So it was nice to go back and visit every once and a while to people that I came to know there at the University-run demonstration forest.

Dan Rothman: Which was the first book you wrote?

Clifton La Bree: First book I wrote was the ... I don't know if I had that one. I got one downstairs that's the one with the Marine corps general. Don, you said you read that one. ["The Gentle Warrior: General Oliver Prince Smith, USMC", 2001]

Don Grosso: I did, yeah. He brought the boys down from Chosin reservoir right? Wasn't he the one that brought them down?

Clifton La Bree: Yes.

Don Grosso: In an orderly fashion. There was no panic, nothing, and they were surrounded by Chinese.

Clifton La Bree: Absolutely and the reason that ... We were quite a Marine family. I had two brothers that were Marines, my nephew, and my son-in-law was a Marine. I was quite interested in them even as a kid, the Marines were the greatest. I still like them and I respect them a great deal, but in getting into this O.P. Smith book, going to Quantico - they were helpful there, the historical branch - but I found they are obsessed with self-glorification. Oh my lord. Even to the point of not being really truthful in some of the military writings that's sponsored by the Marine Corp. And I came on to that before I did this John Stark book and I had read some of his work. He [General Smith] never wrote a book and he never wrote an article, but I was able to get ahold of some of his diary that he kept.

Don Grosso: Oh wow.

Clifton La Bree: And he gave credit to an Army unit and up in the Chosin reservoir and the mountains when his first Marine division, which he was commanding, got hit by the Chinese, about 20 miles from their location there was an Army, the 31st regimental combat team, was stationed and they was in the process, it was a period in their work at the reservoir where they were bringing up some of their troops, their tanks and their other equipment and what not. When the Chinese hit them, they hit the Marines and they hit this 31st regimental combat team and the way they ... The Red Chinese, actually ran into that Army unit without realizing it was there. They bumped into it and found that it was there and they held for almost a week and a half, while O. P. Smith gathered his several divisions into one unit and when you got the first Marine division in one unit and what not, very few organizations could take it. It was a very potent force. He was able to do that.

Don Grosso: Gave him the time to do that.

Clifton La Bree: Well that 31st regimental combat team bled themselves to death. They lost over two thirds of their men.

Don Grosso: Wow.

Clifton La Bree: And they [the Army unit] really and truly saved the 1st Marine division and to this day, the 1st Marine division, the writers about it, they don't acknowledge that, but O. P. Smith did to his credit. That's why I wrote his story.

Dan Rothman: So you worked a long career as a forester, and you began writing after you retired?

Clifton La Bree: Yes. But I was always interested in the military. To this day I am a real believer in ... I think that the best this country has, wears our country's uniform like your son. [Don's son, David Grosso.]

Don Grosso: He's retired, you know.

Clifton La Bree: He is retired.

Don Grosso: He's at the Pentagon. He's the principal deputy director to the assistant Secretary of Defense for Special Forces combating terrorism.

Clifton La Bree: Oh.

Don Grosso: So he's got an executive position.

Clifton La Bree: Oh yes, right.

Don Grosso: But for some reason why the Marines ... They've always been a second orphan to the ... Truman really wasn't impressed with them MacArthur didn't like them ...

Clifton La Bree: That's true.

Don Grosso: So they had some gripes too. But I don't wanna talk.

Clifton La Bree: You're right on that. I don't wanna get into politics, but we have three Marine Corp Generals stationed in Washington now and I think this Mattis, especially, the Secretary of Defense is the right man at the right time for that job. My nephew for about a year in the Marine Corp was his chauffeur.

Don Grosso: Oh no kidding. Wow.

Clifton La Bree: Yes. And he said the man is fabulous.

Don Grosso: He's well respected.

Clifton La Bree: He's a wonderful person.

Don Grosso: He's a Marine's Marine.

Clifton La Bree: Yes.

Dan Rothman: So you wrote about the Korean War, and later you wrote about John Stark.

Clifton La Bree: Yes.

Dan Rothman: What motivated you to write about General Stark?

Clifton La Bree: Actually our nation's beginning, the French and Indian War prior to the Revolutionary War, was a making of this country, kind of the heartbeat of the country and that has always interested me. And most of my novels are of that period, and I've got a couple of books downstairs for both of you that covered that period. It's a two book series and I don't think you have that.

Don Grosso: I don't think so. What's the name of it?

Clifton La Bree: "Raising the Torch." [2014, the second book in The Colonial Series after "The Flickering Flame"]

Don Grosso: Okay.

Clifton La Bree: Does that ring a bell?

Don Grosso: I don't have it.

Clifton La Bree: Okay. So I've got them down there. Don't let me forget to give them to you. But this was the beginning of our country and I was also always interested in World War II. Course I grew up as a child in that period and we moved from Monson to York Beach and so my father went to work in the Navy yard at Portsmouth during that time, and I always remember the soldiers that were patrolling the beach at that time and we always, me and some of the other kids around was always around. They used to invite them into the camp, sometimes and they showed us their guns and what not and that was really quite a thing for us kids. And they also manned the large cannon that were established at York Beach. The big hotel that's kind of midway at Long Sands.

Don Grosso: Wentworth is it? Is it called the Wentworth or not?

Clifton La Bree: I can't remember what the name of it is, was. But they had two big cannons between the road and the beach, partly on the beach and they manned those cannons and every once in a while they fired it and that was pretty interesting for kids like us. And they had a place, a little few miles from the beach where the cooks made up the meals and what not and then they used to use Army trucks to bring them down and scout cars to bring them down to the men on the coast. We always tried to make it a point to show up at about that time 'cause this is when they passed out candy bars and so forth. So I became really interested in the military at that point. Those were nice years. That was all Army. There was a small area that the Coast Guard used to do and for a short period of time, they actually patrolled the beach on horseback. That was always kind of interesting too.

Don Grosso: The Coast Guard?

Clifton La Bree: Yeah the Coast Guard. Matter of fact my granddaughter joined the Coast Guard. She just got out two years ago. That is quite an organization.

Don Grosso: I'll say.

Clifton La Bree: Yeah. We're proud to have them, that's for sure.

Don Grosso: There was a great book written, Coming Back Alive, about the rescue up in Alaska of personnel of a ship that helicopters out there in 120 mile an hour winds, and they're just heroes.

Clifton La Bree: Yeah. Jenny [Clifton's granddaughter], before she went in to the Coast Guard, was an EMT with the Concord Police Department, and they maintained her EMT status in the Coast Guard, and she went to Alaska for a few months and went out on several of their rescue missions and what not, and she said, "Gramps, it's scary," because they never went but what it was bad weather. She always told us the story of one call that they got, and it was a fishing boat that had lost all power and was caught in a real bad storm and there 12 men on board. And they

went out with three helicopters and Jenny was in one and one of the helicopters went down too low and got hung up in the rigging of the ship and went down.

They actually got the people, saved the people, it was a pilot and co-pilot and the EMT that was at the back of it, they finally got them, but the last end of it they had six more people that needed rescuing, and Jen was on the helicopter they already had three people in it and the pilot said, "We've got a chance. If we leave those people are not going to survive. Should we take them on?" And unanimously, by all means we'll take them on. So she brought the helicopter down, waves were landing on the helicopter itself and they picked up the other six people and just barely started to lift and what not, but they did, they got out, but one of the helicopters went down again on the way back to land and Jen's like saving the best part last: you know that the helicopter pilot was a 57 year old grandmother! Now there's a lady with grit.

Don Grosso: Everybody got back alive there?

Clifton La Bree: Everybody got back alive in that one.

Don Grosso: Miracle.

Clifton La Bree: Yeah.

Dan Rothman: So we're here on a second floor office with nice views of the Uncanoonuc Mountains and there are bookshelves all around the room. Is this where you do all your writing?

Clifton La Bree: Yes.

Dan Rothman: Typewriter, computer, or what?

Clifton La Bree: I use a computer primarily as a word processor. I have an email and thing, but that's changed and I'm probably gonna change to a different email. Other than that I can do crazy things with that computer and I call up my daughter Vivian. "Viv, I've got a problem." "Okay dad I'll be down."

Don Grosso: It's good to have a backup.

Clifton La Bree: Oh yeah.

Dan Rothman: So the book of yours that I've read of course is the "John Stark," which you must've been 70-something when you wrote that, and yet it's very polished and very easy to read and very logical, yet you don't have training in English and History and all those things. How do you describe your writing? How did you learn to write?

Clifton La Bree: I don't know as I did learn to write. I don't know as I can really tell you. I just had the urge to do that. And having an atmosphere at home that was peaceful and so forth. If I'm a good writer, I'm a good writer because of Pauline, my second wife. She was an angel. I loved that lady and still do dearly. We had a beautiful marriage. I could come up here and isolate myself and work on it. Sometimes I'd bring it downstairs too and could work. And sometimes in the middle of the night, I'd be thinking of a chronology and if I didn't have it down or what not, I frequently got up in the middle of the night before I forget that, I gotta make a note of that. And I did that quite often, I know, and I still do.

And I never wanted to try to be an intellectual, big words and so forth. I wanted it to be very simple for an everyday person, I'm talking to an everyday person. Other than that I enjoyed English and what not, but I never did anything more on writing, in school anyway.

Don Grosso: Clifton, was the General Stark book your second book about General Stark or is that a dream that I had?

Clifton La Bree: That was the second book [that Clifton wrote, not his 2nd about John Stark].

Don Grosso: Okay. I thought.

Clifton La Bree: The O.P. Smith book was the first one, John Stark was the second. And then after that I started doing novels. These here are some. My daughter Vivian ... Well these are some of them. I got 20 of them altogether.

Don Grosso: You have 20 different books?

Clifton La Bree: Yeah. If you've gone to email me, you've got probably some of these.

Don Grosso: Patty showed me three of them, but she may have some others.

Clifton La Bree: Yeah.

Dan Rothman: Are you working on a book now?

Clifton La Bree: Yes, I am. It's another novel, like these are. This one here is another New Hampshire general. General Enoch Poor, who's raised in Exeter. I don't know if you remember, Don, in the John Stark book, one thing that is unique with John Stark, he was a very independent character. A little bit on the brusque side, but he was a beautiful leader of men. When he came home for a visit from having been in the Northern New York area for a while, Congress did not give him a Brigadier Generalship, which he was entitled to, because he had been handling a brigade for a while and he retired. Do you remember that? He quit ...

Don Grosso: He was mad.

Clifton La Bree: He was mad. To be blunt, pissed off. The individual who got the Brigadier Generalship that should've gone to John Stark, went to Enoch Poor, who started out with the 2nd New Hampshire regiment [during the Revolutionary War]. He went up to New York, Northern New York. He served under General Sullivan, who was also a New Hampshire general. New Hampshire was gifted with some very able people during the war and Stark, Sullivan, Enoch Poor and there was another, Scammell that was a very competent commander. I'm having trouble with Enoch Poor because there wasn't much written on him. He died, I think he had diphtheria or some disease like that, and he passed away in Southern New York and he's buried in New Jersey, so that may account for the fact that he's not as well known as Stark was. I'm gonna have to go down in that area to where he's buried and get some pictures of it, of his grave site and so forth. But he was a very competent commander and he was one of the generals that Washington truly admired.

He was responsible for developing the light infantry that they started to use and Poor is the one that commanded that with Lafayette as the overall commander, and Lafayette thought the world of him. He was a very competent commander. Brilliant. There isn't as much information available. I gotta check for Ticonderoga, because he served in that area most of the time. He did do Princeton and Trenton, the same as John Stark did, but he's not mentioned anywhere in literature of that particular operation.

Don Grosso: He didn't go south to Virginia?

Clifton La Bree: But he served under Sullivan, he was with Sullivan in that period. I'm having fun ... Doing the research is probably as much fun as the writing.

Don Grosso: Yeah, I bet.

Clifton La Bree: Oh yeah.

Don Grosso: Do you know what town he's buried in, in New Jersey?

Clifton La Bree: Yes.

Don Grosso: Not Morristown, by any chance?

Clifton La Bree: No. I can't remember what town it was, but there is a monument of him down there in that. [Hackensack, N.J.] Stark attended his funeral cause Stark made a comeback and did get his, finally did get his Brigadier Generalship, after Bennington.

Don Grosso: May I ask you, your views (since you mentioned Bennington) of the Molly Stark cannon? [This 1743 cannon, supposedly captured at the Battle of Bennington in August 1777, is now in the New Boston Historical Society museum. It is named after General Stark's wife.]

Clifton La Bree: I'm not dearly loved by the people that run the cannon. Molly is a cannon of the period, but Molly is not one of the cannons that John Stark captured at the Battle of Bennington. And I describe that completely in the book and I researched it quite thoroughly. They captured two six pounders and two three pounders at the Battle of Bennington. The two three pounders are in Vermont. One is in Montpelier and one is in Bennington. The six pound one, there's one six pounder that has been located and the second one is what Molly supposedly is, but Molly is a three pounder. I talked with an expert ... I had quite a nice conversation with an expert, he was a West Point instructor and he was a real authority on firearms of that period. He said, "Clif," he said, "I've seen and I've examined Molly," cause sometimes the New Boston group [the New Boston Artillery Company] goes out there to Bennington.

Don Grosso: Yeah reenactments.

Clifton La Bree: Yes. And he said, "It's of the period. It's what is known as a trade cannon." He said, "Probably what happened when John Stark was retired and he was back in Manchester [N.H.], he went to the place," I forgot the name of the town that it was in, near Fort Edward, an Armory that had quite a few cannons there. [The Arsenal in Watervliet, NY] And he said, "Clif what probably happened is that Armory was run by a Lieutenant and a Sergeant and the Lieutenant told the Sergeant, go out back and get a cannon and stamp it and send it to New Boston." That probably fits as well as anything.

Don Grosso: Not General Stark, I mean General Knox brought down a lot of cannon from the fort, right, to Boston [the Siege of Boston 1775-1776]?

Clifton La Bree: Yes, he did.

Don Grosso: So there was any inter-mixing of that cannon ... Evidently it came out of Fort Ticonderoga, it would then go to Boston.

Clifton La Bree: It might ... No the one, the Bennington ones didn't go to Boston. The ones that went to Boston were from Fort Ticonderoga and that was done by a Colonel Knox who went up and picked out the canon there and brought them down to Boston. After Princeton was history, pretty much most of the activity went South.

Don Grosso: Down to Yorktown.

Clifton La Bree: And I dare say that probably any cannon that was serviceable at that time, probably went south with them.

Dan Rothman: So have you any theories, we have the date stamped on Molly Stark of 1743, as you write in your book, obviously Stark gave it to the militia before he died, so there's that gap of 70 years. Any theories as to where that cannon was in between? Do you have any idea where ... Have you seen any documentation? I

haven't seen anything around 1820 to say "here is when Stark gave it to the militia. "

Clifton La Bree: That cannon was built in France, cause it's got a France stamp on it, made in France. And very few of the cannon, which the British had, came from France. Very few of them, but when France was prominent in the Canadian area they got a lot of trade cannons that went up there and that probably was one of them. They would stamp them, you know made in France, the dates and so forth. But according to the authority that I got from the gentleman from ... He actually went down and visited it with me and he said, "That's a trade cannon."

Don Grosso: What's a trade cannon?

Clifton La Bree: Trade cannon. It's one that ... They bought to set up ... When French military left Canada, they left a lot of their equipment there, so it was something that after it came into Canada with French Army and they had some military or a militia up there but not much of it.

Don Grosso: So trade being? The term T-R-A-D-E meaning it was traded, it was bartered?

Clifton La Bree: Yeah. And of course they used to do an awful lot of trade with pelts, beaver pelts and what not. What was the name of that famous store?

Don Grosso: Is that the Hudson Bay ...

Clifton La Bree: Hudson Bay stores.

Don Grosso: Hudson Bay stores.

Clifton La Bree: Yes. They had a lot of cannon come in and they set them up frequently at some of the trade places.

Dan Rothman: Well, the Molly Stark is stamped with the India Company, so it was owned by a private company. I wonder if that's what you mean by trade. So it wasn't a military cannon so much as company owned.

Clifton La Bree: Correct, yes.

Dan Rothman: I've been unsuccessful to find any record of it being, it was legendarily at this battle or that battle, and I could find no proof of that at all, and nothing about how it came to New Boston other than stories that were written 40 years later. So I haven't seen any paperwork to show. I like your story about the lieutenant and the Sergeant and the Army.

Clifton La Bree: I was a little ... Put it this way, it's not a size that was captured at Bennington because there was six pounders and three pounders. And Molly is not either of those.

Don Grosso: It's a four pounder?

Clifton La Bree: It's a four pounder.

Don Grosso: That's what I thought.

Clifton La Bree: Wait a minute. No it's a three pounder instead of a four pounder. It should be a four pounder.

Dan Rothman: There are two three pounders that were captured, so there's some uncertainty. There's also question about the bore of the cannon because it's been bored out in 1890-something by Butterfield according to the trunnel of the cannon. That's not its original size.

Clifton La Bree: Oh, I've never heard of that.

Dan Rothman: Well, I'll leave you some documentation, but that's a side show [not the purpose of the interview]. Cause we have the twin of the Molly, which is over in England. There's two identical cannons. Molly and one that was in Woolwich Armory near London. So we have measurements of that. I've spent some time on that. It's very confusing, but I share your doubt that our cannon [the Molly Stark] was ever at Bennington.

Clifton La Bree: Yeah.

Dan Rothman: Okay. It's an interesting mystery.

Clifton La Bree: If you can come up with some better documentation I would love to hear it.

Dan Rothman: I failed miserably in my attempts. I've written to Canada and other places. I need to ask you also about New Boston, and you've been here 60 years almost. And you raised six children here. What do you remember of the town and the schools, and the churches, and the stores?

Clifton La Bree: Well, I'm kind of a loner. I value my privacy tremendously. When I first came to New Boston, I knew they had a town forest and I went down to the selectmen once and told him that I'm a professional forester and I'd be very happy to work with you on your town forest and so forth and I did work up a forest management plan for it several years ago. My reaction from three different people was basically the same thing, we don't want any newcomer coming to tell us what to do. It kind of soured me for the town, so I had very little to do. I stayed on the forestry committee for several years with Oliver Dodge. I thought the world of Oliver.

Don Grosso: Everybody liked Oliver.

Clifton La Bree: Yes. When I finally decided not to stay on the committee, I got out and I never went back to it. But I found to be real honest, that there was an awful lot of mean-spirited people in this town. There was a little clique and what really turned me off ... You remember when I had a subdivision down here and I went to planning board with the subdivision. We had to do things, that if I had been a New Bostonite, I never would of had to have done. The good ole boy system was alive and well, trust me, at that particular time very alive and well. And if you was one of the boys, you went through planning board, the skids were greased, yes. So I have many friends in town and I love them and what not, but the town itself, I had kind of a sour feeling on it, to be honest. I think that the influx of new people is the best thing that happened to this town, really.

Dan Rothman: Glad to hear that, being one of them. Someone was telling me about a mill of some sort that you ran.

Clifton La Bree: Oh yes. I did outside consulting work in Southern New Hampshire and I did some up in Maine too, but that was never enough to keep me going so I set up, what they called a bolter mill. It's kind of a small saw mill and I did pallets and I was able to do that, I got the contract with Anheuser Busch [brewery in Merrimack, N.H.] to supply them with pallets and I did for several years and that worked great. They were a fabulous company to do business with and I didn't drink their product, but I was given very good treatment down there. And my beginning with them, I was afraid that I'd gotten off to a bad start with them. In the first year our understanding, I was gonna be paid 2% with it paid within ten days and that worked out good for a few weeks. Went along great. All of a sudden I stopped getting a check.

I went about three weeks and I finally called up Rich Giovine, he was the purchasing agent and I said, "Rich, I'm just a little guy and I haven't received a check. You owe me three." He said, "Clif hold on." He came back a few minutes later, he said, "Clif this our problem, this is not your problem. I apologize for it. Something has happened to your tape on the computer." And he said, "You've got two loads in here right now with your other three." He said, "You've got five loads of pallets." He said, "I'm going to bypass the system, I'm gonna make out a check by hand, my secretary will have it up to your place within three quarters of an hour." And she did.

Don Grosso: Wow that's impressive.

Clifton La Bree: That's integrity, isn't it?

Don Grosso: I'll say. That's impressive.

Clifton La Bree: I was with them for about 18 years. Not exclusively. I did other pallets for others, but they were my number one.

Don Grosso: How many people did you have working with you?

Clifton La Bree: Off and on about four or five. I used a lot of school kids and my kids worked quite a little bit. Especially the boys and some of their friends at school. And we did some repair work on some of their pallets and so it wasn't all new pallets. And actually there was more money in doing a repair job on one of their pallets and return it than it was to do a brand new one. Jerry and a couple of his friends, the Webb boys in from Goffstown, they worked piece meal and sometimes when we got a pallet from Anheuser Busch that were broken up pretty bad and the main stringers were broken, that required quite a bit of work to tear apart and then rebuild it.

So I used to put those off in a pile when there was nothing else to do and finally we'd accumulated quite a pile. So Jerry my son and Josh and one of the other young men that was going to high school with them, came to me and they said, "Clif, how about if that pile of pallets there, if we do that on contract." "What do you mean on contract?" He said, "You give us so much for each pallet we do." "Okay, that's all right with me." I thought that was fine. Son of gun - they went at it! Hammer and tongs, you know, but they never worked like that for me.

Don Grosso: They became capitalists.

Clifton La Bree: That was fun. And then I had a fire. I got burned out and I put up a large metal building. You probably remember that.

Don Grosso: No, it's something I've having a hard time remembering that.

Dan Rothman: This was all on Wilson Hill?

Clifton La Bree: Yes. Right across the road from it. I put the bolter mill and did the work in, it was an old chicken house actually and that's what burned on me.

Dan Rothman: What caused the fire?

Clifton La Bree: Well my son was working in it, and when we tore one of their pallets apart, he used a grinder to grind the nails off and those caused sparks and my son Jerry was out working this particular evening and evidently when he left there must have been a spark in some of the stuff ...

Don Grosso: Sawdust.

Clifton La Bree: ... sawdust and stuff that was on the floor and that was how it started. He felt terrible about that, but obviously he didn't want to do it on purpose. It wasn't done on purpose, so I put up a metal building after that, and I ran it a couple more years and then I decided I was gonna retire, and I sold the business to him, and he took it to his place in Bradford and he ran it for another three years after that.

Don Grosso: Right.

Clifton La Bree: But things had changed a little bit with Anheuser Busch. For all the time, 18 years I was with them, their purchasing agent handled the contracts locally. For some reason or another there a lot of changes took place and corporation was gonna handle it. So here I was dealing with a corporation miles away and that didn't work out as good. I was glad to get rid of it. And Jerry worked with it under those conditions for a few years and he gave it up too.

Don Grosso: Good livelihood for a lot of years though.

Clifton La Bree: Oh yes, it was. It was a good steady income.

Dan Rothman: Are there other stories you wish to tell about New Boston or anything else important to you?

Clifton La Bree: Not really. I still have a lot of friends in town, but I never got involved in town affairs after I quit with the forestry committee. Every once in a while I would write an article, you probably get the thought that I'm quite a conservative, and I'm very much a conservative, and every once in a while I'd write something with a conservative line and the newspaper they'd put it in the New Boston ...

Don Grosso: Bulletin?

Clifton La Bree: ... Bulletin, yeah. And I'd get comments sometimes from people from that. Pro and con. And that was always kind of interesting.

Don Grosso: There's not too many conservatives in town now.

Clifton La Bree: No that's true. They're kind of a dying breed nationwide too.

Don Grosso: Well there's the evangelicals who are conservative and they're a big voting block.

Clifton La Bree: Yes.

Don Grosso: That's the group that helped Trump get elected. They wouldn't vote for Mitt Romney but they would vote for ... I never understand that. I think eight years went by, that's why.

Dan Rothman: Well I appreciate this. I don't wanna go on too long. It's such a pleasure to meet you, having read your book, and you're a fascinating individual! So I appreciate you taking the time with us.

Clifton La Bree: Thank you very much. I've enjoyed visiting here with you.