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Summary

René Rivière, born in 1930 in Saint-Etienne, France, discusses talks his family history; his four sisters, one brother, his grandfather, who launched a trucking company, Fourgon-Stefanois, Rivière et Co. [SP], which transported goods across France, Europe and around the world, later taken over by his father, Henri Rivière; describes learning to drive a truck at the age of 12, learning the family trade, a youth totally occupied by the family business; discusses strength of Protestantism in the region, the Reform and Calvinist churches and the different branches including the Darbystes; notes that the region, always known for its climate and tourist attractions, was a draw for populations from Africa, Eastern Europe, and at the War's outset, the Occupied Zone so that, to some extent, the influx of refugees in the early years of the war was not seen initially as an unusual occurrence; describes the important role of the Pasteurs Trocmé and Theis, pushed by Magda Trocmé, the Pasteur's wife, in establishing classes for Protestant children, leading eventually to the founding of the Collège Cévenol; states that, before 1939, boarding houses for children on vacation were established in the region, which would eventually provide a shelter infrastructure for Jewish refugee children fleeing the Occupied Zone and elsewhere; highlights the feminist militancy of his Aunt Dora, who studied medicine and travelled to Poland to treat a typhus outbreak, later traveling throughout the region and reporting on concentration camps and virulent antisemitism upon her return to widespread skepticism; describes with admiration and pride how Aunt Dora eventually distributed anti-Nazi tracts through their trucking business, joining the Resistance for a more active role throughout the war; recalls his first memory of antisemitism with imposition of Vichy laws, the dismissal of the principal of the local school, M. Monteux [SP], and the arrival of Monteux and his family, taking refuge in the Rivière home, other local Jewish families including the Coudry [PH], and Rousseau; describes network of Rivière company farms growing hay to feed the horses used in the transport of Rivière merchandise, their close management by his grandfather, the purchase in 1939-40 of second farm, 20 km from Saint-Etienne in Vaugneray, and the later acquisition by Uncle Paul Leroux [PH] of a larger farm and hotel in a relatively inaccessible location managed by Rivière employee M. Morel [PH], which would shelter many fleeing refugees, even while the Germans, after 1942, came to the Hotel de Lyon to dine; describes how the fleet of Rivière vehicles with authorizations from Vichy and the Gestapo to move merchandise for them crisscrossing the demarcation zone, would eventually transport refugees in those vehicles, hidden in the back and/or often masquerading as a second or third driver; describes how the family network spoke in coded language as they worked to transport refugees to various locations both within the region, within the Free Zone and to Switzerland via Annemasse; recalls how, in July 1943, he was asked to transport a young man about his age to one of the farms to assist in the harvest who turned out to be Paul De Gaulle, nephew of Charles De Gaulle; recalls the importance of Pierre Piton [PH] as a Resistance leader of one of the escape networks within Chambon-sur-Lignon; describes how, in October 1943, the Gestapo and French police arrived at Rivière home to arrest Aunt Dora, while his father fearing arrest managed to escape; recalls how the Protestants and Jews got along better than the Catholics and the Jews, noting that many passages in the Bible concerned the welcoming of strangers into the home without asking questions, also because many Protestants were Dréyfusards while more Catholics were anti-Dréyfusards; also stresses important of education about tolerance received regularly at home, in the Protestant church and in the church schools, citing Mme. Soubiron [PH] as fundamental in achieving this goal in the school; cites the importance of the Collège Cévenol in sheltering refugees and in fostering tolerance and understanding.