

# New Hampshire's French-Canadian Americans

Immigrants arriving in the United States tend to share at least two experiences: they look forward, trying to become American, and they look back, trying to maintain some traditions from their homeland. This document is part of a series discussing these tendencies in groups that have migrated to New Hampshire. The series is meant to support the New Hampshire Historical Society school program *Passport to New Hampshire History: Immigration and the Granite State*.

## Becoming American

### Creating Community

In the late 1800s and early 1900s, social clubs known as fraternal organizations were an important part of most New Hampshire communities. For New Hampshire people whose ancestors had been here for generations, organizations such as the Grange and the Masons were popular. New Hampshire immigrants often created their own groups and associations.

These brotherhood organizations fostered a sense of community among people with a common language and other cultural ties.

L'Association Catholique de Jeunesse Franco-Américaine was a youth group modeled after the ones in Québec. Manchester native and historian



Robert Perrault explained that his grandfather, Adolphe Robert, belonged to L'ACJFA when he first came to Manchester in 1908. This well-known photo of the group (above) was taken in 1910 when Bishop Gerlier of France visited Manchester. Perrault ironically notes the use of the word, “Jeunesse” or youth. At the time the photograph was taken, his

grandfather was twenty-four. In Québec, members tended to be much younger. But with L'ACJFA fulfilling a vital role in the French Canadian community, it served members well into adulthood.

In addition to L'ACJFA, Manchester was also home to the Ligue du Sacre Coeur, a fraternal organization with ties to the traditionally Franco-Canadian parish of St. Augustin, which was established in 1871.


## A Spirit of Entrepreneurship

Many immigrants found their first jobs in New Hampshire as unskilled factory laborers or as lumberjacks in the heavily forested regions of the state. However, as French Canadians became better established, they began their own small businesses in increasing numbers. The advertisement (below) from a business directory for the city of Berlin from around 1900 illustrates one of the small businesses that emerged in the early 1900s.





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
THE BARNEY PRESS CITY OF BERLIN DIRECTORY.


**C. BROOKS** † **PHARMACIE**   
**CANADIENNE**

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Corner Main and Mason Streets

DEALER  **Drugs, Medicines,**  
IN  **Toilet Articles and**  
**Cigars**

PHYSICIANS PRESCRIPTIONS Carefully Compounded 



Also Dealer in **COAL**

## Capitalizing on the French Canadian Market

As French Canadian immigrants became more numerous in the U.S., advertisers recognized their potential as consumers of basic goods like canned foods, patent medicines, and ready-made clothing. By the 1880s, advertisers published materials in several languages to capitalize on the growing consumer market that immigrants represented.

One of the more novel advertising techniques of the late 1800s was the trade card. Typically, the front of the card featured an illustration accompanied by the name of the product being advertised; the back of the

card was devoted to advertising copy

promoting a company's products. Due in part to

the novelty and scarcity of finely printed pictures in this early period, many ordinary Americans collected these free cards that were distributed at dry goods and drug stores. Many of the surviving examples of these cards bear traces of the glue used to paste them into scrapbook albums.

Shown here are two trade cards, front and back, for products marketed by the Carter Medicine Company. While the illustrations and text differ on the front of each card, the advertising copy is virtually identical on the reverse sides, varying most significantly in that one is in English while the other is in French.



<p><b>NERV</b></p> <p><b>CARTER'S</b> <b>LITTLE</b> <b>NERVE</b> <b>PILLS</b></p> <p><b>CARTER'S</b> <b>LITTLE NERVE PILLS,</b> <i>Made specially for Nervous and Dyspeptic Men and Women.</i></p> <p>These Pills are intended for every person who is in the least degree nervous; who is easily irritated or disturbed through the day, or who cannot sleep at night; for those whose hands tremble and whose nerves are unsteady; for mothers whose children worry them, and fathers whose business worries them; and for all who, from any cause, do not sleep well and fail to get proper strength from their food. Also every case of Weak Stomach, Indigestion, Dyspepsia, Nervous and Sick Headache, will receive most prompt and grateful relief from the use of these Pills, particularly if accompanied by the Little Liver Pills as directed. Dyspepsia makes you nervous, and nervousness makes you dyspeptic; either one renders you uncomfortable, and these little pills cure both. Price 25 cts. Sold by druggists everywhere. Or sent by mail.</p> <p><b>CARTER MEDICINE CO., NEW YORK CITY.</b></p>	<p><b>NERFS.</b></p> <p><b>CARTER'S</b> <b>LITTLE</b> <b>NERVE</b> <b>PILLS</b></p> <p><b>PETITES PILULES DE CARTER</b> <b>POUR LES NERFS.</b> <i>Préparées Spécialement</i></p> <p><b>Pour les Femmes ou Hommes Nerveux et Dyspeptiques.</b></p> <p>Ces Pilules sont destinées à toute personne qui est le moins nerveuse; à celle qui est facilement irritable ou dérangée dans la journée, ou qui ne peut dormir pendant la nuit; à celle aussi dont les mains sont tremblantes, et dont l'état nerveux est changeant; et encore aux mères qui sont importunées par des enfants, ou au père que les affaires fatiguent; et à tous ceux qui, par quelque cause que ce soit, ne dorment pas bien, et ne réussissent pas à retirer une force suffisante de leur alimentation. De même aussi dans tout état de faiblesse d'estomac, d'indigestion, de dyspepsie, de douleurs et maux de têtes nerveux, on retirera un soulagement agréable et très-prompt de l'emploi de ces Pilules, surtout si elles sont accompagnées des Petites Pilules pour le Foie, comme c'est indiqué. La dyspepsie vous rend nerveux, et l'état nerveux vous rend dyspeptique. L'un ou l'autre de ces états vous rend, mal à l'aise, et ces petites pilules guérissent les deux. Prix 25 cents. En vente partout, chez les droguistes, ou envoi par la poste.</p> <p><b>CARTER MEDICINE CO., New-York City.</b></p>
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## Manchester's "French Fair," December 1876

### Document Background

It is significant that this document is in English rather than in French. We know that Manchester's St. Augustin Church broke off from the traditionally Irish St. Anne parish so that Catholics of Franco-American heritage could be ministered to in French.

While relations were often strained between the Irish, who began arriving in Manchester around 1850, and the later arriving French Canadians it appears that that Rev. Joseph-Augustin Chevalier of St. Augustin's parish got along well with Rev. William McDonald of St. Anne's.

The objective of the event was to raise funds to assist the French Canadian population of the city, an interesting collaboration between two parishes of extremely different and often mutually antagonistic populations.

**Smyth's Hall, . . . Manchester.**

# **FRENCH FAIR**

**Dec. 14, 15, 16, 18, 19 and 20, 1876.**

For the benefit of the

**New French Church.**

During the Fair a nice

## **Gold Headed Cane**

will be voted between

**REV. JOHN O'BRIEN,**

of St. Joseph's Church, and

**REV. J. A. CHEVALIER,**

of St. Augustine's French Church.

**TEN CENTS A VOTE.**

The voting will close Wednesday Evening, the 20th inst., at half past ten by the clock in the Hall.

A Splendid

## **GOLD WATCH**

will also be voted between

**MICHEL LEDUC**

and

**A. GEO. GRENIER.**

The voting for the Watch will close at eleven o'clock—Wednesday Evening, the 20th inst.

## Additional Background

- Smyth's Hall was in Smyth's Block on the west side of Elm Street between Water and Spring streets. It is where Lincoln spoke in the spring of 1860 while on the campaign trail. The Smyth Block was torn down in the summer of 1970 and is the site of the present-day Hampshire Plaza. At this time, Manchester's West Side was still largely undeveloped, and French-Canadian immigrants were concentrated on the Merrimack River's east bank.
- The French Fair was for the benefit of the "New French Church." This could mean one of two things:
  - To help pay the mortgage on St. Augustin's Church, completed in 1872, therefore making it still relatively "new" in 1876.
  - To raise money to start a new parish and build a new church. This would eventually happen in 1880 with the founding of Ste. Marie's parish on the West Side, with a tiny wooden church (predecessor of the present Ste. Marie's Church) to follow in 1881.

Based on the information in the document, it is not clear whether the reference is to St. Augustin's or the future Ste. Marie's. However, the Franco-American population at this time was growing far more rapidly than the builders of St. Augustin's had anticipated. At that time, in 1870, there were perhaps 2,500 Franco-Americans in Manchester, and St. Augustin's was the only French-language church. By 1879 or so, that number had grown to about 9,000 and the church was bursting at the seams.
- The Gold Headed Cane and the Gold Watch were likely to serve as symbols of parish pride and would have been conferred onto prominent individuals in the parish as a way to raise money for the new church. It seems likely that the parishioners of St. Augustin's and St. Joseph's were being asked to vote for their respective pastor so that he could win the prized cane. But, in order to vote, one had to pay 10 cents, which was a means of raising money. In this instance, feelings of hostility between the two groups was set aside—or perhaps harnessed—in the interest of a greater cause.
- Abraham George Grenier was a Manchester grocer who, in the fall of 1882, would go on to become the city's first Franco-American to be elected to the Common Council.
- While it is unclear whether or not such voting was a common practice as a fundraiser, church fairs and bazaars certainly were. These events featured booths that allowed people, even children, to bet and win money, a practice that was subsequently outlawed. Robert Perrault of Manchester recalled that in the late 1950s and 1960s, his parents would give him a supply of dimes and tell him to go have fun; returning from the gambling booth having doubled his money, he was told, "Hey, you're supposed to spend that money to help the church, not win more and take it away from the church! Now you go back and spend it or lose it wherever you won it!"

## Keeping Traditions

### Franco-American Cuisine

In addition to language, religion, and dress, a cultural group's food ways are an important component of its traditional customs.

Reproduced here are two illustrations from *Franco-American Soups and Other Specialties*, an advertising booklet published by the Franco-American Food Company of Jersey City Heights, N.J.



Ox-tail Soup.

ANOTHER popular thick soup; some even prefer it to Mock Turtle. The ox tails, after being well cleaned, are parboiled and neatly cut. They are then cooked in beef stock slightly thickened with browned flour and seasoned with spices and herbs. Additional flavor is given with small cubes of carrots and turnips, a little celery and some barley.

The full-page illustration for Ox-tail Soup shows at the top the dish's ingredients, which include cubed carrots and turnips, barley, celery, and parboiled ox tail.

Perhaps the traditional dish most closely associated with the French Canadian table is pea soup. Wholesome and easy to prepare, this soup is made from ingredients including beef stock and peas and can be seasoned to taste.

## Documenting a Traditional Way of Life



Valcourt d'Ely,  
Quebec (ca. 1908)



Ulric Bourgeois, ca. 1913

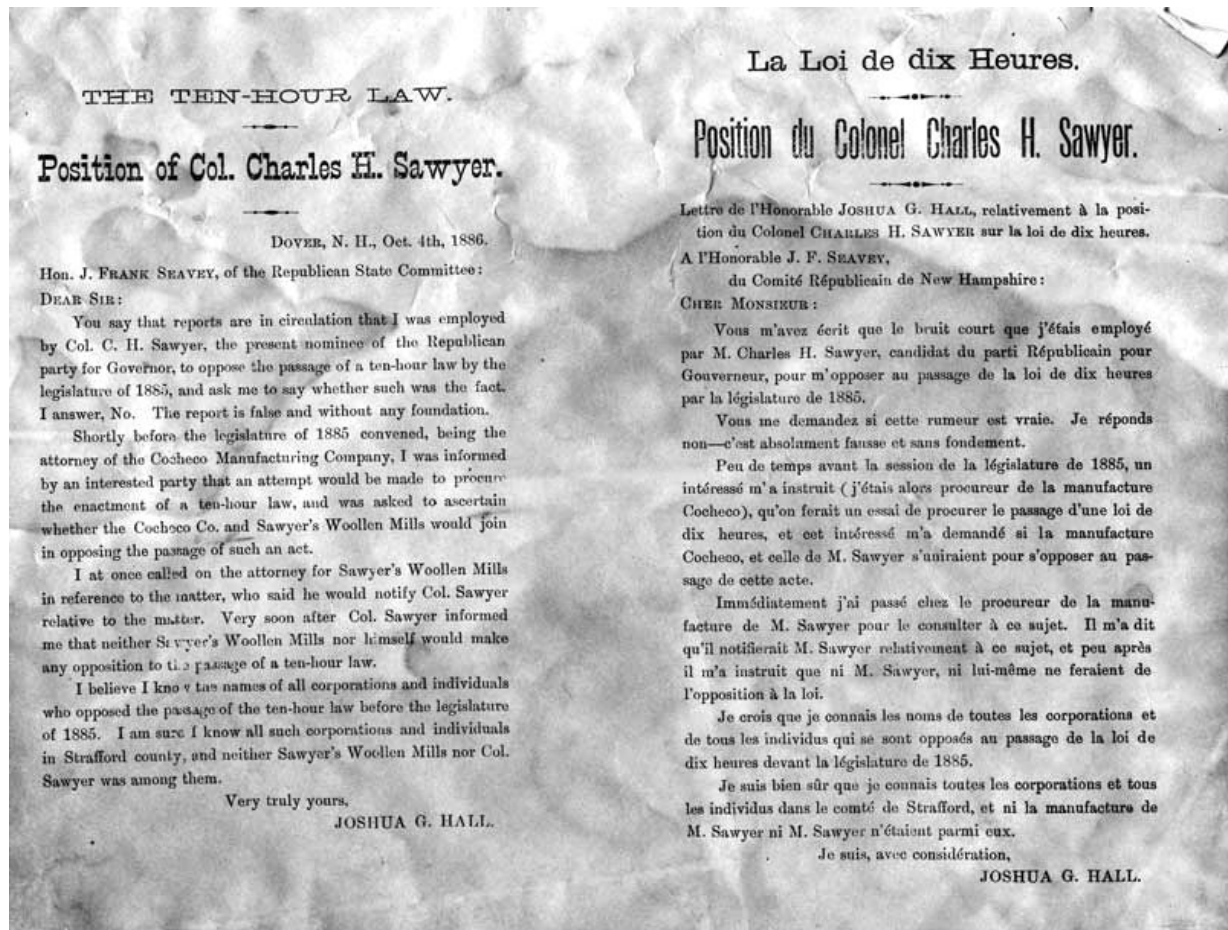
French Canadian immigrants coming to New Hampshire in the late 1800s were economically motivated. Farming, the traditional basis of Quebec's economy, had always been difficult due to marginal soil and a short growing season.

The farmland of the region where French-Canadian immigrants came from was barely productive enough to sustain its population in the early 1800s. Between 1763-1871, however, the French-speaking population of Quebec grew from 60,000 to over 1 million. Conversely, between 1827-1844, Quebec's wheat production dropped 70 percent. During this time, Quebec was also hit by a potato blight. Of the 76,000 French Canadian immigrants living in New Hampshire in 1900, many had left behind a traditional way of life based on farming.

While this agricultural way of life was in decline, it was by no means extinct. In the early 1900s, Manchester photographer Ulric Bourgeois traveled to Quebec to capture images of a life that thousands of immigrants had left behind (above).

## For Further Investigation

Study the document below and then answer the questions on the following page.



## French-Canadian Workers and the Ten-Hour Law

During the late 1800s, large textile manufacturing companies relied heavily on French Canadian immigrants to fill many of the unskilled jobs in their mills. In addition to low pay and sometimes dangerous working conditions, these immigrants also had to endure long workdays that ranged between twelve and sixteen hours per day. The bilingual broadside (shown on previous page) was posted at Dover's Sawyer Woolen Mill (right).



1. Why do you think this document was printed in both English and French?  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_
1. Based on context clues, do you think that mill laborers were working more or less than 10 hours a day when the document was written? \_\_\_\_\_
1. In paragraph three, can you tell what Charles H. Sawyer's position was on the passage of a law limiting the workday to 10 hours? Is he opposed to or in favor of the law? \_\_\_\_\_
1. How might Sawyer's French-speaking employees have felt about his position?  
\_\_\_\_\_
1. *For advanced investigation:* Go back to question #1. Does Sawyer's position provide an additional clue about why the document was published in English and French? Would he have been more likely or less likely to let his French-speaking employees know his position if he had felt differently?

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## Manchester's French Fair: Questions for Inquiry

Study the poster and then answer the following questions:

1. In which year did this fair take place? \_\_\_\_\_

2. In which city was the event held? \_\_\_\_\_

What might this suggest about the French-speaking population of this community at the time? \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

3. For what cause was the fair being held to benefit? \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

4. How could people attending the fair contribute to this cause? \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

5. Why might winning the "Gold Headed Cane" for your parish priest be a source of pride for those belonging to your church? \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_