

Le Patrimoine franco-américa
Franco-American Heritage in New Hampshire
A Photo Essay by Gary Samson

Originally published in 1999 Smithsonian Folklife Festival Program Book



SMITHSONIAN FOLKLIFE FESTIVAL 1999

Quebecois artist Ozias Leduc was commissioned in 1906 to decorate the interior of the recently completed Sainte- Marie Church, located in the heart of Little Canada, Manchester's French-Canadian neighborhood. The parish was established in 1880 to ease the overcrowding of the city's first French- language Catholic church, Saint Augustine's, founded in 1871.

Photo by Laurier Durette, circa 1930

As the new century began, Quebecois continued to relocate across the southern border, drawn away from small Canadian towns such as Waterloo, Magog, and Fulford by the attractions of prosperous American cities such as Manchester, New Hampshire, home of the Amoskeag Manufacturing Company, then the world's largest producer of textile products.

The French Canadians came to be known as Franco-Americans. In mill towns, the Franco-American community was often called Le Petit Canada, or Little Canada, and at times entire

populations of rural Quebec villages were transferred almost completely intact to a particular mill town neighborhood.



In Manchester, New Hampshire, the Merrimack River flows through the once great Amoskeag Manufacturing complex, reflecting a part of history, industrial progress, and social change. This 1903 panoramic view of the company captures the dramatic expanse of the largest textile mill yard in the world and the city it built, a unique example of 19th-century community planning. *Photo @ Alphonson H. Sanborn*



When social documentary photographer Lewis w. Hine made this photograph of Amoskeag employees exiting the mill yard in 1909, 40 percent of the company's work force of approximately 15,000 was Franco- American. Hine had come to Manchester to record child labor practices as part of his work for the National Child Labor Committee.



Besides textile and shoe manufacturing, Franco-Americans found work in other industries or established their own small businesses. Employees of the Manchester Coal and Ice Company, which harvested ice from Massebesic Lake, pose for a photograph by Boulanger et Freres, abot. Between 1850 and 1900, 340,000 French Canadians abandoned the poor economic conditions that existed in their native province of Quebec for the promise of a better way of life and a chance to more fully realize their ambitions in the industrial centers of New England.



Manchester photographer Ulric Bourgeois as he ventured forth with camera and tripod for a day of fieldwork, about 1913; photographer unknown. Bourgeois and his wife arrived in the city at the turn of the century after an apprenticeship at Ethier Studios, Waterloo, Quebec. His bilingualism coupled with his creative imagination and knowledge of the technical aspects of the medium enabled him to become one of the state's leading photographers. He retired in 1950 after 50 years of photographing Manchester's history and culture.



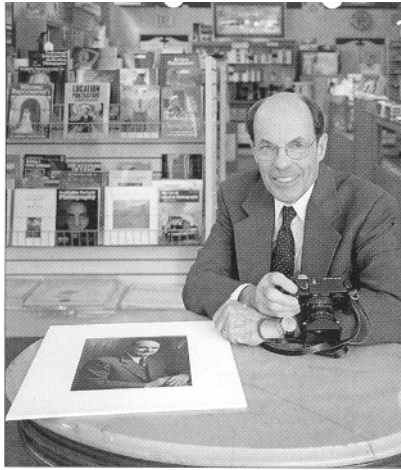
The first credit union in the United States, La Caisse Populaire Sainte-Marie, was established in Manchester on November 24, 1908, to serve the rapidly growing Franco-American population. The organization, initially operated from a private home, was moved to new headquarters in 1913. *Photo by Laurier Durette, circa 1930*



Inspired by the earlier documentary work of Lewis w. Hine and Ulric Bourgeois, I began photographing the diverse Franco- American population of Manchester in 1980. Doris Houle Burke, expecting her first child, was photographed in her kitchen in 1982 as part of this extended portrait of the community. *Photo by Gary Samson*



Parade float, Saint-Jean Baptiste Day, Manchester, 1950. John the Baptist is the patron saint of French-speaking people in North America. *Photo by Laurier Durette*



For three-quarters of a century, the Durette family has been recording the people, customs, and events of Manchester's Franco- American community. Gerald Durette, son of Laurier Durette, is a third-generation photographer carrying on the family tradition established by his grandfather, Francois Xavier Durette. *Photo by Gary Samson, 1999*

On the author & photographer;

Gary Samson is head of the Photography Department at the New Hampshire Institute of Art in Manchester, New Hampshire. He was formerly manager of Photographic Services at the University of New Hampshire. He has produced ten films reflecting the diverse history and culture of the state of New Hampshire and has organized many exhibits on historic aspects of New Hampshire. Gary is one of the state's most respected photographers.

Suggested Reading

Brault, Gerard I. 1986. *The French-Canadian Heritage in New England*. Hanover, N.H.: University Press of New England.

Hareven, Tamara K., and Randolph Langenbach. 1978. *Amoskeag: Life and Work in an American Factory City*. New York: Pantheon Books.

Samson, Gary. 1989. *The Merrimack Valley: A Visual History*. Norfolk, Virginia: The Donning Company Publishers.

.1991. "Ulric Bourgeois (1874-1963): Franco- American Photographer;" *Historical New Hampshire*, volume 46, no.3 (Fall).

.1996. *A World Within a World: Manchester; the Mills and the Immigrant Experience*. Dover, N.H.: Arcadia Press.