



# vermont

## HISTORY SPACE



COURTESY OF LIBRARY OF CONGRESS, NATIONAL CHILD LABOR COMMITTEE COLLECTION  
Addie Card, a young spinner at the North Pownal Cotton Mill in southern Vermont, was photographed by Lewis Hine, circa 1910. This famous photo became known as the face of child labor reform in America.

Immigration from Quebec in late 1800s and early 1900s had major impact on state



PHOTO COURTESY VERMONT HISTORICAL SOCIETY  
Early immigrants from Quebec started farms and worked the land with Vermont farmers.

# VERMONT'S FRENCH CONNECTION



DAVID MASSELL, GREER  
COWAN AND RICHARD WATTS  
FOR THE FREE PRESS

**A** young girl stares into the camera, one arm hanging by her side, another propping her up against a loom. She wears a dirty smock and no shoes. Addie Card, the young French Canadian featured in the photo, was part of a vast wave of immigrants from Quebec who moved to Vermont and New England in the late 1800s and early 1900s.

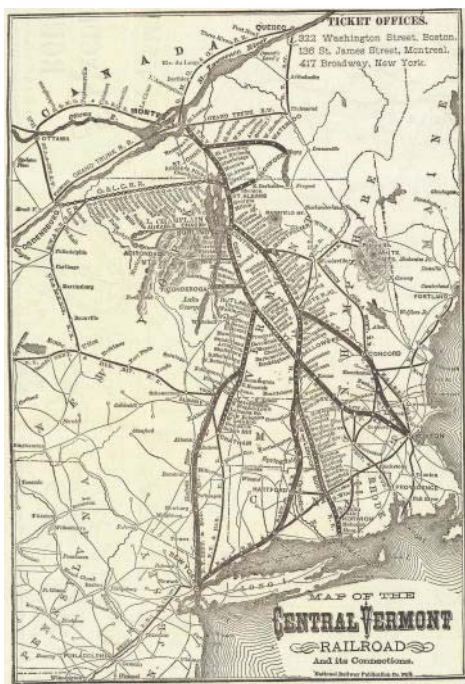
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# the history space



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"Back-roping boys" Leopold Daigneau, left, and Arsene Lussier in the mule-spinning room at the Chace Cotton Mill in Burlington in a photo taken by Lewis Hine in 1909.



COURTESY

Map showing rail routes from Canada through Vermont illustrating why Burlington and Winooski were the gateway for French-Canadians entering New England.



COURTESY OF LIBRARY OF CONGRESS, NATIONAL CHILD LABOR COMMITTEE COLLECTION

Historic photo by Lewis Hine shows a group of boys working in American Woolen Mills in Winooski. Youngest was 13 and oldest was 15. All had been working one year or more.

## French

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Addie moved to North Pownal in southern Vermont with her mother and father in 1906 as they took jobs in a textile mill. To make ends meet, mother, father and children went to work. The conditions were hard, but they had left Quebec because life there was more difficult.

Addie stayed in the area, married twice, had one biological child, and one adoptive child, both of whom had children of their own. Her descendants are disseminated into the cultural fabric of the Northeast, perhaps unclear of their French-Canadian descent and the tremendous impact they had on a region starving for labor and new life.

### Franconnexions

The story of Addie is a story that played out tens and tens of thousands of times. French Canadians immigrated to Vermont and New England in search of work, and their heritage is now an essential part of our state's ethnic diversity. While the majority of these first generation immigrants worked low-paying unskilled jobs, now the Bouchers, Cla-



A view of Winooski, showing American Woolen Mills.

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velles and Paquettes are the farmers, business owners and political leaders that make Vermont the unique state that it is today.

French-Canadian emigration to New England began as a trickle in the 1830s, Burlington and Winooski being the first communities to receive sizeable populations. Burlington's own St. Joseph's church of 1852 on the hill overlooking Winooski was in fact the first French-Catholic parish church on U.S. soil with a priest who spoke French. Winooski's St. Francois Xavier parish would follow suit in 1868.

The trickle became a floodtide after the end of the Civil War, with the majority settling further south and east, in Maine, Massachusetts and Rhode Island. When the Great Depression put a brake on the exodus, some 900,000 French Canadians had made the journey and stayed.

How large is this number? The Canadian Census of 1931 indicated 2.8 million people in the entire province of Quebec. So by the time the wave of emigration had broken, an astounding one-third of the population of Quebec had uprooted to New England.

### Reason for push and pull

The basic motive on the Quebec side, the "push," was a lack of work. In the Quebec countryside, settled since Samuel Champlain's time, there were now too many children for the available farmland. U.S. tariffs on Canadian produce, starting in 1866, hurt Quebec farmers trying to ex-



A photo by Lewis Hine in 1909 shows young girls at the Chace Cotton Mill in Burlington.

COURTESY FLEMING MUSEUM

**The Canadian Census of 1931 indicated 2.8 million people in the entire province of Quebec. So by the time the wave of emigration had broken, an astounding one-third of the population of Quebec had uprooted to New England.**

port their crops. And the province's major urban center, Montreal, could not absorb the swelling numbers of landless poor.

Just across the international border, meanwhile, there was the "pull" of industrial work. By the end of the Civil War, New England's industrial sector was robust, especially in textile mills that produced cottons and wools. And the managers of these factories welcomed new and relatively cheap labor, since French Canadians — men, women and children — worked dawn to dusk at wages considerably lower than the Yankee farm girls or Irish immigrants who had tended the spindles before.

As of 1870, wrote historian Betsy Beattie, the Burlington Woolen Mill of Winooski paid an average of \$1.09 for a 12-hour day; at roughly \$20 in today's currency, that amounts to \$1.67 per hour. No wonder that children were called on to augment the family income. By 1900, 30 percent of textile workers of Massachusetts were French Canadian; 60 percent in New Hampshire and Maine.

Geographic proximity was a driving force of this exodus. The impoverished farmlands of the St. Lawrence Valley sat cheek by jowl to industrializing and urbanizing New England towns and cities. And railroad and road access between the regions, including the Central Vermont Railroad which linked Montreal to St. Albans and Burlington and points south and east, made it relatively convenient and inexpensive to make the trip.

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FREE PRESS FILE

St. Francis Xavier seventh-graders look at the photographs of mill workers by Lewis Hine at the Heritage Winooski Mill Museum in 2011.

## French Connections conference coming to UVM

The University of Vermont will be holding a conference called French Connections: Franconnexions on March 20, International Francophonie Day.

The conference will highlight the historical, cultural and economic contributions of French Canadians from Quebec into Vermont and New England. It will examine the past, the present and the future of these cross-border migrations and relationships.

This is a one-day conference starting at 8 a.m. with a continental breakfast and continuing until 3:30 p.m., with three panels and lunch provided. Following the last panel, a special flag raising ceremony and reception will take place in downtown Burlington.

In three panels the conference will examine this story, asking these fundamental questions:

» **Past:** How and why was Vermont and New England populated by so many French Canadians in the 19th and early 20th centuries? When, how and why did this massive influx assimilate?

» **Present:** How do cross-border connections with Québec, in tourism and in trade, continue to shape the culture and economy of Northern New England?

» **Future:** How does the French-Canadian wave of immigration relate to current immigration trends? What can we learn from the past as we think about the future?

Speakers include:

- » Mark P. Richard, professor of history and Canadian studies, SUNY Plattsburgh.
- » Christine St-Pierre, minister of International Relations and la Francophonie, Government of Québec.
- » Leslie Choquette, director of the French Institute at Assumption College.
- » David Massell, professor of history and director, Center for Canadian Studies, University of Vermont.
- » Susan Pinette, director of the Franco-American Centre, University of Maine.
- » Ernest Pomerleau, French honorary consul in Burlington, Pomerleau Real Estate.
- » Carole Salmon, chair of World Languages and Cultures, University of Massachusetts, Lowell.
- » Adeline Simenon, director, Paul, Frank & Collins.
- » Chris Louras, mayor of Rutland.
- » Jack Jedwab, executive vice president of the Canadian Institute for Identities and Migration
- » Vermont Gov. Phil Scott.



» The Rev. Marcel Rainville, campus minister, St. Michael's College.

» Ted Brady, deputy-secretary, Vermont Agency of Commerce and Community Development.

» Pierre Chartrand, dance historian, choreographer, founder of Danse Cadence.

» Mary Rice-DeFosse, professor of French & Francophone Studies, Bates College.

Registration is \$40 which includes breakfast, lunch and coffee breaks. Registration scholarships and student discounts are available by contacting Richard Watts at [rwatts@uvm.edu](mailto:rwatts@uvm.edu).

It is open to the public. Register at [https://www.uvm.edu/~crvt/?Page=francoconn.php&SM=rr\\_submenu.html](https://www.uvm.edu/~crvt/?Page=francoconn.php&SM=rr_submenu.html)

Conference sponsors include: Government of Québec, the Vermont Green Line, UVM Humanities Center; Center for Canadian Studies, Center for Research on Vermont, Pomerleau Real Estate, Vermont Academy of Arts & Sciences, RETN.

## Discount for Free Press readers

The University of Vermont French Connections conference will offer a special discount to Burlington Free Press readers. You can get this discount when you fill out the registration form or when you register at the website by using the special promo code: FREEPRESS

## International flag-raising ceremony downtown

March 20 is International Francophonie Day, which is observed in 77 countries and political entities the world over.

There will be a ceremony starting at 4 p.m. at City Hall in Burlington. The celebration begins with a short concert by Va-et-Vient, Vermont's French traditional music trio, in Contois Auditorium. There will be French and Quebecois top diplomats serving New England. Participants will move outside to the flagpole in front of City Hall for the ceremonial raising of the flag of the international francophonie by Burlington's Police and Fire Color Guard. It will be hosted by the Alliance Française!



Photographs of mill workers by Lewis Hine are seen in this 2011 exhibit at the Heritage Winooski Mill Museum.

FREE PRESS FILE

## French

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### “Petits Canadas” sprout up

Proximity to the homeland helped to keep Quebec traditions alive. So did the fact that so many of the immigrants lived in neighborhoods, or ghettos, and that the language of the factory floor could be French. By 1900, “little Canadas” (“petits Canadas”) dotted most Northeast cities, including Burlington and Winooski, complete with their own parochial schools, newspapers, churches, snowshoe clubs, festivals, and the like.

As late as 1967, the historian Mason Wade could describe “the Franco-American’s remarkable resistance to assimilation in the general population, which surpasses that of any other American immigrant group.”

French Canadians’ ability to retain language and culture — in combination with old-fashioned racism in the host community — fostered nativism in New England. In Vermont, one scholar described them as “an abominable crew of vagabonds, robust, lazy men and boys, slatternly women with litters of filthy brats....The character of these people is not such as to inspire the highest hope for the future of Vermont if they should become the most numerous of its population.”

In Connecticut another asked: “Is our good old fash-

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## French

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ioned New England to pass into a middle age of mediocre brain and body; are we to become so foreignized that our [Puritan] virtues and culture are to become extinct?"

In the end, French Canadians did become Americans, of course. The cauldron of the Second World War undoubtedly played a role, as did the closure of New England's mills in the postwar period (Winooski's mills closed in 1954), and the drive for upward mobility among Franco-Americans themselves. Nor should we dismiss the homogenizing effects of television and the Cold War.

### The legacy remains

Still, the legacy remains. In Vermont, nearly one in four families trace its ancestry to these farmers-turned-factory-workers who settled here between the 1830s and 1930s.

Among these families are the Clavelles: Former Burlington Mayor Peter Clavelle grew up in Winooski, and his family lived there through the 1990s. His grandfather had been a mill worker and his parents both spoke predominantly French.

The Franco-American influence can also be seen in local events.

Winooski's annual French Heritage Day, begun in 2015, provides an opportunity for Franco-Vermonters to celebrate their identity. So does the Flag Raising Ceremony that takes place during Francophonie Month to honor the connection between the city of Burlington and French culture. Similar celebrations have



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All these small boys, and more, worked in the Chace Cotton Mill in Burlington. Many of the smallest ones had been there from one to three years. Only a few could speak English. Photo was taken by Lewis Hine in 1909. These are the names of some: Lahule Julian, Walter Walker, Herman Rotte, Arsonne Lussier, Addones Oduet, Arthur Oduet, Alder Campbell, Eddie Marcotte, John Lavigne, Jo Bowdeon, Phil Lecryer, Joseph Granger.

been cropping up across the state, in New England and beyond.

While Addie lived a modest life, the image of her at age 12 became the face of the child labor movement. The Lewis Hine photo and collection of photos of child workers led to the creation of child labor laws. The image was printed as a 32-cent stamp, has a place in the Library of Congress, and inspired Elizabeth Winthrop to write the novel "Counting on Grace" that is used in elementary schools across New England.

**The Lewis Hine photo and collection of photos of child workers led to the creation of child labor laws.**

Today we are justly proud of our French-Canadian heritage. We are a region — and a nation — of immigrants. And we are richer for it.

*David Massell is the director of the Canadian Studies Program and Richard Watts is the director of the Center for Research on Vermont at the University of Vermont. Greer Cowan is a research intern and UVM senior. Information on the upcoming international conference at UVM can be found at [French Connections/franconnexions](http://www.uvm.edu/franconnexions) or at <http://www.uvm.edu/~crvt/>*