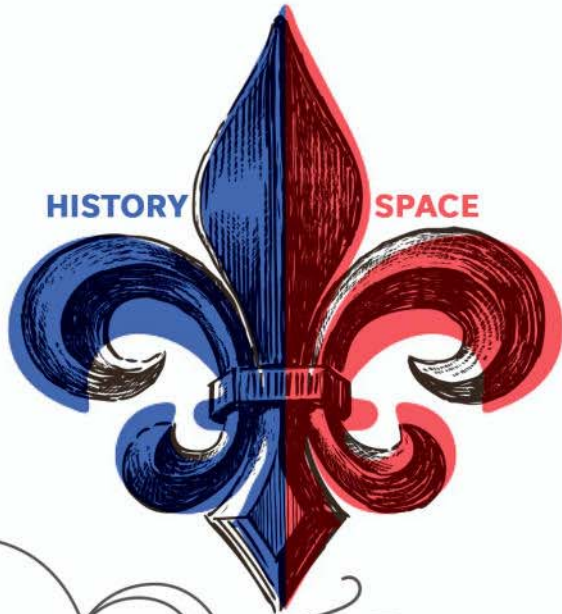


# Vermont

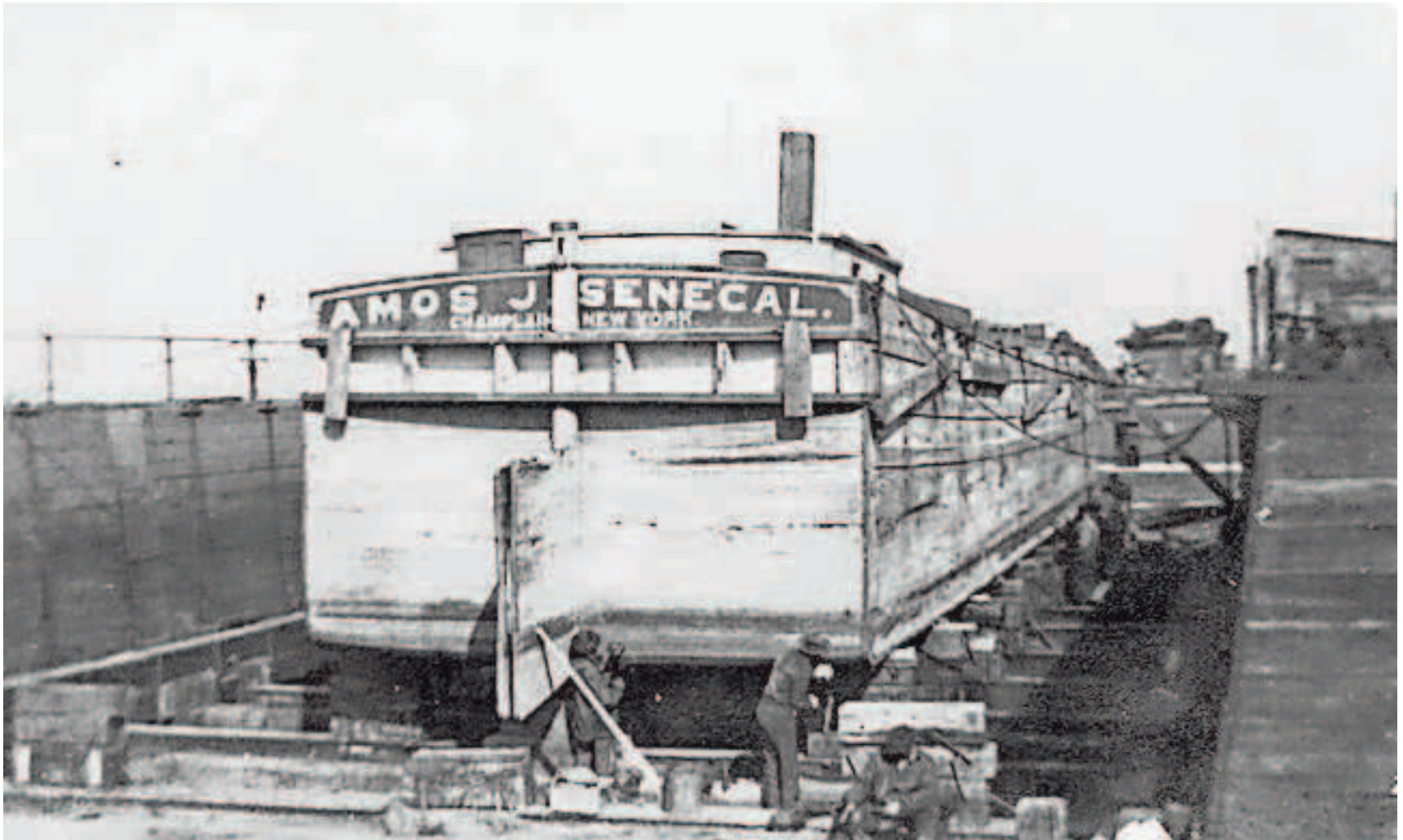


## A SUBTLE AND ENDURING **LEGACY**



In August 1916, French-Canadian workers crafted a prize-winning float in the second annual parade and field day of the American Woolen Company in Winooski. Miss Alfreda Fisher dressed as "Liberty" (seated with flag wrapped around her head), and her escorts, earned second place. PHOTO COURTESY JOHN FISHER

## History Space



The Amos J. Senecal canal boat from Champlain, N.Y., docks at an unknown location. Many barges, canal boats and private boats that traversed up and down Lake Champlain were owned or operated by Franco-American families. Goods were transported from Québec all the way to New York City and many stops in between. Louise (Lafountain) Chevalier, also of Champlain, remembers traveling the Québec-to-New York route on her father's boat and missing several months of school each year because of the long canal boat season. COURTESY SAMUEL DE CHAMPLAIN HISTORY CENTER

# Franco-American roots run deep in Champlain Valley

New book explores the culture and traditions French Canadians brought to northern VT and NY

Kimberly Lamay Licursi and Celine Racine Paquette

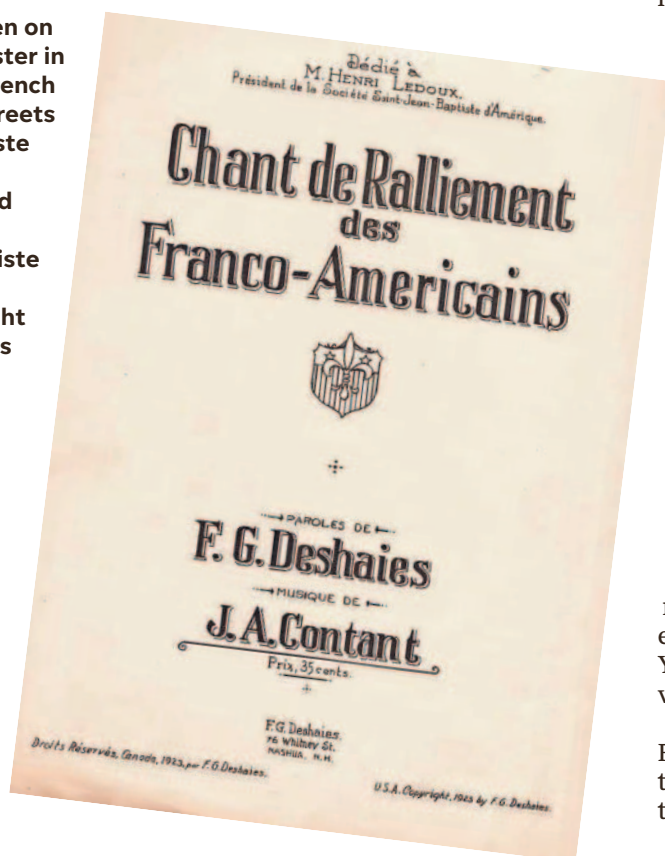
**K**imberly Lamay Licursi's ancestor was likely the first settler to the town of Champlain, N.Y., in the early 1780s. Prisque Asselin was a private in Moses Hazen's regiment of Nova Scotia refugees during the American Revolution.

After the war, and some wrangling with government officials who excluded the French from receiving land allotments, Asselin was granted 500 acres in two separate plots in what is now the town of Chazy, N.Y. Many other French refugee soldiers, including Capt. Antoine Paulint, received land grants as well and were early inhabitants of what would become Clinton County. Yet, even with such a longstanding presence in the country, the French seemed to get little notice as an ethnic group and even less respect as a culture.

# History Space



This panoramic photo of the Convention of the Union-Saint-Baptiste was taken on June 16, 1928, by Louis McAllister in Burlington. As early as 1869 French Canadian revelers filled the streets to celebrate Saint-Jean-Baptiste Day. Events usually included a parade, the end of which would often be a young boy representing Saint-Jean-Baptiste along with a live lamb. The holiday observance was brought to New France by the French as early as 1638. PHOTO BY LOUIS MCALLISTER/COURTESY UVM SPECIAL COLLECTIONS



The "Rally Song" of Franco-Americans was issued in 1923 and dedicated to the President of the Union Saint-Jean-Baptiste d'Amérique. The song implores Franco-Americans to preserve their memories as brave Canadians and descendants of Old France. PHOTO COURTESY JOSEPH PERRON

In the 1970s, the Asselin (anglicized to Ashline) family deeded over land to the town of Champlain for a housing development. Documents submitted with the deed listed an "Ashline Street" as part of the plan. A furor erupted when the town unilaterally changed the street name to Whiteside, after an early English settler in the region. Again, it took the intervention of more progressive people to champion French-Canadian contributions as they were being marginalized by an English immigrant who was held in higher esteem. The road remained Ashline Street.

### A subtle and enduring legacy

French Canadian culture has become inextricably entwined with that of the Lake Champlain region even if French Canadian contributions have not always been as heralded by the history books as those of the British or other ethnicities. Franco-Americans were often a quiet presence but their subtle and enduring legacy is evident throughout northern New York and Vermont. The Champlain Valley is permeated with the signs of French settlement. From the names of towns and prominent landmarks to the culture that infuses society, French influence is omnipresent. Chazy, N.Y., and the Great and Little Chazy Rivers are named for a 17th century French officer; Vergennes, Vermont is named for the Comte de Vergennes, the French foreign minister who sided with the rebels during the Revolutionary War; and Rouses Point, New York is named for Jacques Rouse, a French Canadian Revolutionary War veteran who settled in New York in the 1780s.

Isle La Motte on Lake Champlain is named after Pierre LaMotte, a French soldier who built a military outpost there in 1666. Even the name of the State of Vermont comes from the French Vert Mont, or Green Mountain. Many of the people who live in these places bearing French names

Continued on Page 4



The French constructed a fort on Isle La Motte in 1666 and dedicated it to St. Anne. It was there that the first Mass in Vermont was offered. The fort was abandoned within a few years. The Diocese of Burlington acquired the land for a chapel in 1892. The direction of St. Anne's Shrine was entrusted to the Society of St. Edmund in 1904 and subsequently purchased by the Society in 1921. This photo depicts an early gathering at what is now known at St. Anne's Shrine. It was the first church/chapel dedicated to St. Anne in the U.S. COURTESY SAMUEL DE CHAMPLAIN HISTORY CENTER

## History Space

Continued from Page 3

have French surnames. They are descended from French Canadian pioneers and some of them continue to preserve the faith, rituals, music, folklore, and language of their ancestors.

The new book, "Franco-Americans in the Champlain Valley," seeks to present a visual image of that heritage and preserve it for future generations. Historians have documented Franco-American heritage in some of the New England states, but very little exists to document the unique circumstances of the French who settled on both sides of Lake Champlain. Most of the counties that make up the Champlain Valley have strong ties to a distinctive French culture that still echoes today. Much of this way of life was preserved through fraternal and social organizations like the Union Saint-Jean-Baptiste and the Canado-American Club. The authors explain that within these groups:

"French Canadians formed an insular community where French music, theater, language, celebrations, customs and food were sheltered and treasured. The father's New Year's blessing, the celebration of Saint-Jean-Baptiste Day, family musical traditions and storytelling, strong faith communities, and the iconic tourtière, or meat pie, among other foods, are all part of what the French brought to this country and fought hard to preserve. Community leaders were successful in safeguarding many of these traditions, and some continue today, like the Christmas Eve réveillon, maple sugarcake parties, and the loving words children call their grandparents, *mémère* and *pépère*."

Licursi's co-author, Celine Racine Paquette, drew from her experiences as the founder of the Samuel de Champlain History Center and her deep French roots in the area when helping to compile information for the book. Celine's parents were born in Quebec and she learned to speak English when she started school. Her grandparents emigrated to Champlain in 1928 when they purchased a farm. She recalls that only French was spoken at all the family gatherings. Today, she is president of the Association des Familles Racine headquartered in Quebec.

Both women previously worked together on an Arcadia book about Champlain, New York. They share a passion for understanding their significant French-Canadian heritage and enjoyed being able to meet so many other like-minded people on their travels throughout northern New York and Vermont. They identified with many of the stories they were told about growing up in Franco-American households, including recalling the myth of the Loup Garou, the fictional human wolf hybrid used as a threat against mischievous French-Canadian children.

### Arrival of Samuel de Champlain

The book covers many aspects of French-Canadian life in the Champlain Valley including its origins with the arrival of explorer Samuel de Champlain in North America in 1603. Champlain founded Quebec City on his second trip to North America in 1608. As population in the area grew and encroached on land



This group of patriotic women were part of the Union Saint-Jean-Baptiste "Equipe d'initiation du Conseil Charbonneau," or initiation team, of the Charbonneau Council in Keeseville, N.Y. The photo, probably from the 1920s, attests to the devotion the French had to their new country. The women, proudly carrying American flags and wearing red, white and blue sashes are, from left to right, back row, Merilda Bisailon, Priscilla Gladu, Mildred Laroche, Mildred Bisailon and Agnes Martin; middle row, Beatrice Galarneau, Irene Mitchell, Eugenia Picotte and Blanche Tellier; front row, Helene Desroches, Blanche Martin, Hélène Dionne and Rachel Galarneau. PHOTO COURTESY ASSUMPTION COLLEGE



This 1512 woodcut illustrates the myth of the Loup Garou, or werewolf, in European folklore. The French were captivated by the idea of a man who could shape shift into a werewolf. The Loup Garou was thought to roam the countryside at night in search of victims. French Canadians brought this story to northern New York and Vermont when they relayed it to their children as a morality tale. Fear of the Loup Garou was an effective foil to bad behavior of all sorts. The story was so widely told among French Canadians the Canadian government issued a stamp depicting the Loup Garou in 1990. IMAGE COURTESY KIMBERLY LAMAY LICURSI

# History Space



A parade float crafted by Gelineau's Pastry Shop displays bakers and a cake in this undated photo. Gelineau's was a fixture on North Street in Burlington for many years. Hermengilde Gelineau established the shop in 1914 and his son Raymond and grandsons George and Ernest followed him in the business. Hermengilde, or Hermand, immigrated from St. Brigide, Québec in 1893. UVM SPECIAL COLLECTIONS/COURTESY

settled by the Iroquois, France sent Carignan-Salières soldiers to protect them in 1665. By 1666, Vermont's oldest settlement at Fort St. Anne had been established by French Jesuits who later celebrated the first Mass and built the first chapel there. It wasn't until the mid-19th century, however, when more French Canadians began arriving in New York and Vermont because of declining social and economic conditions in Québec and a growing need for labor as America industrialized.

In 1853, Monsignor Louis deGoesbriand became an early leader for the new waves of immigrants when he was installed as the first bishop of the Burlington Diocese. DeGoesbriand was the son of a French nobleman and a fierce protector of the French language and culture. Other notable French Canadians of the nineteenth century from the region include the first woman steamboat pilot in the world from Vermont and two Civil War soldiers from New York who were part of the cavalry unit that caught and killed President Abraham Lincoln's assassin, John Wilkes Booth.

The authors stress the historical contributions made by average French immigrants as well. The growing towns of Northern New York and Vermont attracted laborers and farmers from Québec who advanced industry and agriculture in the region. In most places the French formed "Little Canadas" or "French Villages" in their new communities where they could continue to speak their language, practice their faith and rely on one another when their presence was not always welcomed by Protestant Yankees. Without the French, the Northern portions of both Vermont and New York would look vastly different today. The French were the prevalent labor force in

Continued on Page 6



Anna Grenier and Agnes Fountain, in the front row of this photograph, were just two of the many women and child employees at the Chace Cotton Mills in Burlington. Many French immigrant families found it necessary for most members to work to survive. Women and children were sought after as employees because they required less pay and were often more compliant than their male counterparts. PHOTO COURTESY LIBRARY OF CONGRESS

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## History Space



The Stephen (Steven) Boule family is seen here in the yard of their home in Keeseville, N.Y., where they had a blacksmith and wagon-making shop. As tradesmen, they would have had an easier life than many French-Canadian immigrants. Stephen Boule is in the center of this photograph surrounded by his wife, daughters and sons. PHOTO COURTESY FEINBERG LIBRARY, SUNY PLATTSBURGH.

Continued from Page 5

the quarries, textile factories, and forests in the region. They developed the economy and the landscape through brute strength and tenacity, and then fought to protect what they built during the Civil War and the World Wars of the twentieth century. Tributes to veterans on both sides of the New York/Vermont border are often dominated by names like, Tremblè (Trombley), Racine (Root), La Roche (Rock) and DuBois (Wood).

### Strong focus on Winooski

The authors also dedicated an entire chapter to Winooski because of its continued recognizably French influence in the area. Licursi and Paquette worked with two local citizens, Rita Martel and Joseph Perron while researching and writing about the city. Rita Martel is the Winooski historian and Joe Perron is an avid collector of artifacts and ephemera representing French life in the region. Both are dedicated to the preservation of Winooski's French culture, including the annual celebration of French Heritage Day.

Employment at Winooski textile mills brought many Quebecois south to work in the first large manufacturing center in



Eliodor Gagne works on a horseshoe in this photo from the early 1930s. His father was a farmer in Roxton Falls, Quebec, and Eliodor was the oldest of 14 children. He came to Highgate Center in 1930 where he established his blacksmith shop. This photo originally appeared in *Look* magazine as an illustration for an article on the difficulties people faced during the Depression. PHOTO COURTESY GABRIEL GAGNE

Vermont in the early to mid-nineteenth century. As early as 1839 one of the first French-language newspapers was established in Burlington, the *Patriote Canadien*, to cater to the new settlers. Winooski has been a Francophile center ever since.

Religion is also a strong component of the book. The authors note:

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# History Space

“Nothing is more significant in the exploration of Franco-Americans than religion. Roman Catholicism dominated so much of their life that it is impossible to fully understand French Canadians in America without appreciating the strength of their parishes. Everything tied back to their religious beliefs and bound French Canadian immigrants with a code of conduct and ritual that was consistent regardless of geography. The church was their refuge in Canada and quickly became a refuge in their new country. It provided comfort and familiarity in a time of great change.”

The book highlights the history of many local Roman Catholic churches and the strong financial and social commitments Franco-Americans made to their faith.

The book was compiled with the assistance of local archivists, historical societies and other organizations and individuals in the Champlain Valley. A great deal of persistence was necessary in locating the over 175 images in the book as finding photographs and information was not an easy task. The lives of French immigrants were not always as well documented as those of their Protestant neighbors. The French were more often a quiet force focused more on community and family than business and upward mobility. Funding for the book was provided by the Champlain Valley National Heritage Partnership.

The foreword is by Jim Brangan, assistant director of the CVNHP. The partnership has many goals including researching local cultural heritage and promoting cross-border understanding. Brangan notes in his foreword that the news today is filled with stories of immigrants, refugees and migrant workers who do not always find easy acceptance in the United States. The story of the French in New York and Vermont has been repeated throughout the decades by others seeking a better life in a new place. Understanding how and why the French came here, and the trials and tribulations they faced as they assimilated into American life is a timely reminder of the fact that most Americans are relatively recent transplants to this nation.

“Franco-Americans in the Champlain Valley, was released to local book and other specialty stores in the area earlier this spring.

Kimberly Lamay Licursi is a historian and writer who has been researching her



Historic photo of St. Mary's Church in Champlain, N.Y. Samuel de Champlain is memorialized as the “Father of New France” and many places, streets, and structures in northeastern North America bear his name, or have monuments established in his memory. Some 6,000 visitors descended on Champlain for the dedication of the Champlain Monument on July 4, 1907, the first in the United States, outside St. Mary's Church. The entire village was decorated for the occasion with American flags and the tri-color of France. COURTESY SAMUEL DE CHAMPLAIN HISTORY CENTER



From left, Celine Racine Paquette, Robert Picher, and Kimberly Lamay Licursi. For their book, Paquette and Licursi were able to interview Picher, who was connected to the French community through his father's leadership in L'Union Saint-Jean-Baptiste in Winooski.

French Canadian ancestry for more than 30 years. Celine Racine Paquette is founder and curator of the Samuel de Champlain History Center in Champlain, N.Y.

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