

1970

## Franco-American Culture and Identity Lecture

Madeliene Giguère

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Date? Occasion?

THANK YOU MRS AUSTEN.

THANK YOU FOR INVITING US TO SPEAK FRANCO-AMERICAN CULTURE AND IDENTITY.  
~~THEIR LITERATURE.~~

FIRST, I THINK WE MUST ANSWER THE QUESTION WHAT IS A FRANCO-AMERICAN?  
BUT OF COURSE, ~~YOU SAY~~, IT IS A PERSON OF FRENCH-CANADIAN DESCENT.  
*Yet* I SERIOUSLY DOUBT THAT ALL PERSONS OF QUEBEC DESCENT ARE CONSIDERED  
OR CONSIDER THEMSELVES FRANCO-AMERICANS. A MORE ACCURATE DEFINITION  
WOULD INCLUDE OTHER FACTORS, A PREFERENCE FOR CERTAIN WAYS OF LIVING,  
FOR INSTANCE. I BELIEVE THAT BEING FRANCO-AMERICAN IS MORE THAN BEING A  
DESCENDENT OF THE LESS THAN 10,000 FRENCH PERSONS WHO MIGRATED  
TO NEW FRANCE, ALL BEFORE 1700. MY DEFINITION OF FRANCO-AMERICAN IS  
A PERSON OF FRENCH CANADIAN OR ACADIAN DESCENT WHO HAS A PREFERENCE FOR CERTAIN  
WAYS OF LIVING. THESE WOULD INCLUDE SOME OF THE FOLLOWING  
ASPECTS OF WAYS OF LIFE:

A VIGOROUS <sup>Family</sup> LIFE WITH TIES KEPT UP WITH EXTENDED KIN  
AND EMPHASIZED BY RITUAL OCCASIONS SUCH AS WEDDINGS, <sup>Burials +</sup> FRIENDS BAPTISMS.

A PREFERENCE FOR CATHOLICISM AS A RELIGION

A PREFERENCE FOR FRENCH AS A SECOND LANGUAGE

A PREFERENCE FOR SOME PARTICULAR TYPES OF LEISURE  
TIME ACTIVITIES

A PREFERENCE FOR FRENCH CANADIAN TYPE COOKING

THERE ARE OBVIOUSLY DIFFERENT LEVELS OF INTENSITY OF PARTICIPATION  
IN THESE PARTICULAR WAYS OF LIFE. MY COUSIN WHO LIVES IN PHILA-  
DELPHIA NORMALLY WOULD ONLY USE THE COOKING BUT THE REST OF HIS  
CULTURAL HERITAGE IS ONLY ACTIVATED WHEN HE COMES TO MAINE.  
ANOTHER PERSON MAY PARTICIPATE IN THE FULL RANGE OF FRANCO-  
CULTURE, ALL OF HIS LIFE. HE MARRIES A FRANCO-AMERICAN GIRL,  
HE CARRIES ON AN INTENSE FAMILY LIFE WITH HIS BROTHER AND SISTERS  
AND AUNTS AND UNCLES AS WELL AS HIS PARENTS AND HIS SPOUSE PARENTS.

he teaches his children french as a second language, he plays amateur hockey, he vacations in quebec, he watches Channel 3 on cable vision and he really prefers some of the french Canadian dishes <sup>such as</sup> fevres au lard or tortiere.

We have chosen two of these themes to talk about this evening. I will speak of <sup>religion</sup> the parish and Mr. Boucher will speak of leisure time activities.

My focus in religion will be on parish life, Perhaps the parish Churches are the most visible aspects of French American culture here in the two cities, and since my Parish church St. Peter and Paul is the Mother church to all the French parishes much of what I say will relate to this parish in particular. My basic question is what part did the parish play in maintaining Franco American identity in the past, what part does it play today and what part will the french parish of the future play in maintaining the identity of Franco-Americans?

When my great-grandparents came to Lewiston they came with a model of social life structured around the parish. This parish was headed by a cure or pastor who was the spiritual head of the parish but financially the parish was administered by the fabrique, a sort of church board made up of elected church wardens or marguilliers who met with the pastor to handle the financial affairs of the parish-- this fabrique more than foreshadowed the current development of lay power in the Roman Church in the form of Parish Councils. This tradition of lay involvement in the finances of the parish may well have been partly responsible for the willingness of the early Franco-Americans to participate in the financial affairs of a religious nature. My Grandfather Giguere for instance served as a kind of business

agent for the Dominican sisters when they first came to Lewiston. Certainly the willingness of the ~~poor~~ France-Americans to finance the building of the first St. Peter's church in 1872 when they had so little was remarked upon at the time. Later this tradition of lay participation in the financial affairs of the parish was to lead to serious confrontations with the Bishop, not only in Maine but in other New England states as well. The parish was important to the early Franco-Americans, it was important as a religious entity, the non-Catholic or non-practicing Franco-American up to this generation was considered deviant-to be Franco-American was to be Catholic. The parish provided ritual support at the ~~times of life~~ transition points in life, birth, marriage, serious sickness, death, entrance into <sup>full participation</sup> ~~the~~ church, and confirmation as a member of the church. The quality of one's relationship with god was preached, one's obligation as the child of God was stressed. But over and above these religious functions, the parish performed many other functions in the lives of Franco-Americans. Education in both sacred and secular subjects was a concern from the beginning. The first school, the Dominican Block was built in 1882, on Lincoln street where it still stands now the home of the Pine Tree Warriors. <sup>The</sup> one school was the forerunner of all the later schools, St. Peters, St. Louis, St. Mary's, Holy Cross, and Holy Family and Sacred Heart. Finally on the eve of World War Two this system was to be crowned with a four year high school. <sup>St. Dominick.</sup> Of these schools <sup>It's true tho</sup> only St. Peter's, Holy Cross and St. Dominic's will open their doors next fall. <sup>as Catholic School</sup> St. Peter's parish has been supporting a school for over 90 years. The concern of the parish for the young was not only seen in schools but also in youth organizations like the Association St. Dominic, the predecessor of the Central

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Maine Youth center of today. And in <sup>that time</sup> ~~the days~~ of high mortality the parish sponsored the development of the Healy asylum for the many orphans of the day. It may be that this high mortality <sup>tuberculosis</sup> led people to be more otherworldly, the other world might always lie in next summer's epidemic. But St. Peter's parish not only provide a gate of Heaven it also fostered the development of a hospital <sup>st. mary's</sup> to care for bodily ills just as later it was to foster the development of the organism that is to-day the Tri-County Mental Health Center. Within the parish a host of organizations were spawned, for young ladies there were the ~~Enfants~~ Enfants de Marie, for the married women, the Dames de St. Anne, For Charitable women, the Dames de Charite, for pious women, L'Oeuvre du Tabernacle, , the third Order of St. Dominic, for men the Holy Name Society, for charitable men, the St. Vincent de paul society. There were choirs of various kinds, bands and orchestras, a cooking school, a summer camp etc. All these organizations carried <sup>on</sup> a myriad of activities and programs. What were the meaning of all these activities for Franco-American identity? Quite simply the parish or the ensemble of parishes served as a community for the Franco-Americans in which they might <sup>live out their lives</sup> find and <sup>there they found</sup> both support, refuge from the strains of an alien world as well as socialization in both the new american culture and in the traditional French-Canadian culture. I believe that learning is facilitated when you are in a sympathetic atmosphere so that the effective adaptive behavior was being transmitted from person to person with the parish <sup>in</sup> at the same time that the parish was transmitting the traditions of French Canada to the immigrants, religion, language, feast and holidays , and ways of recreation.

The past is clear the French Parish provided solace, support, and socialization. It helped the Quebecois to survive in a strange ~~world~~ <sup>society</sup> and provided him with the tools of social living for two worlds, **French + English.**

What of the French Parish of to-day, St. Peters. St. Mary's. St. Louis, Holy Family, and Holy Cross still merit that appellation. It is no longer accurate to say that French is the only language of communication in these parishes, they may be more probably called bilingual - ~~probablyxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxx~~ But whether the language of communication is French or English, they continue to serve a French origin group. And since people are <sup>have</sup> in these parishes by choice, they alternate Catholic parishes to turn to, I see these parishes still performing cultural and identity functions. for the Franco-Americans.

The parish helps the Franco to define who he is, and in this age when we are all searching for a little more community, the extra bond of a common sub-cultural heritage is most valuable.

Some of our ancestors said " Qui per sa langue perd sa foi" - he who lose ~~his~~ language lose his faith. Some are saying today that he who loses his language loses his cultural identity. I think this will prove just as false as the first prediction. ~~I believe that the "French" parish/play a vital~~ <sup>will</sup> ~~continued~~ <sup>vital</sup> ~~and continued~~ <sup>contributing to the</sup> ~~role in the continued sense of identity of the Franco-American~~ ~~xxxxxxxxxxxxxxxx~~ Franco-American

<sup>in the future</sup> I believe that the French Parish will play a vital role in the continued sense of cultural identity of the Franco-American by <sup>transmitting</sup> ~~being~~ a prime agency by which the French cultural heritage ~~will~~ <sup>be transmitted</sup>

<sup>in the future</sup> The French parish will be