

1-22-1998

Maine's 'La Marrainne': Lewiston's Gigure highly regarded by Franco-Americans Article

Dawn Gagnon
Bangor Daily News

Follow this and additional works at: <https://digitalcommons.usm.maine.edu/giguere-awards>

Recommended Citation

Madeleine Giguère Collection, Franco-American Collection, University of Southern Maine Libraries.

This Book is brought to you for free and open access by the Career at USM Digital Commons. It has been accepted for inclusion in Awards 1972 -2000 by an authorized administrator of USM Digital Commons. For more information, please contact jessica.c.hovey@maine.edu.

Maine's 'La Marraine'

Lewiston's Giguere
highly regarded
by Franco-Americans



Madeleine Giguere served on Gov. Ken Curtis' Advisory Council on Women in 1973. (Photo courtesy of Madeleine Giguere)

By Dawn Gagnon
Of the NEWS Staff

In Maine's Franco-American circles, Madeleine Giguere is known as "la marraine," the godmother, a title indicative of the high regard in which Giguere, her work and her efforts on behalf of others are held.

A Lewiston native, Giguere is one of last year's recipients of a Maryann Hartman Award. The awards, sponsored by UMaine's Women In the Curriculum and Women's Studies programs, are presented each year to three Maine women who have inspired others through their work and community service.

While Giguere's work as an educator and researcher has earned her respect throughout the United States and Canada, many believe her effort to collect and report data on the state's Franco-American population is her most significant contribution. Tracking statistics about Mainers of French descent remains an area of study that few — if any — other Maine researchers have tackled.

"Nobody else has done it. It's really tedious work," Giguere acknowledged in a recent interview at her home on Germaine Street, not far from the home at the corner of Webster Avenue and Orange Street where she grew up the only child of a Lewiston doctor and a public school teacher.

Nevertheless, Giguere is responsible for identifying the large percentage of Maine people who are Franco-American, an estimated one out of three, and has extracted from otherwise lifeless U.S. Census figures meaningful information about the state's French heritage.

Her groundbreaking work with Maine's Franco demographics began in the early 1970s, a heady and exciting period of ethnic revival many say was sparked by the Vietnam War. With the nation's social structure turned on its ear, people of French, Irish, African, American Indian and virtually every other cultural extraction began reclaiming and re-examining their heritage and beliefs.

Giguere's findings helped shed light on the social and economic characteristics of Mainers of French descent.

"She believed in the power of numbers," said author Rhea Cote Robbins of Brewer, who nominated Giguere for the award. "Madeleine determined her course of work in tracking the French through the U.S. Census because she believed that numbers do open avenues for other kinds of change to take place.

"Having a visible and viable presence on the national level increases and enhances the possibilities for Franco-Americans to be seen as a political body."

In 1986, Robbins said, Giguere led an effort to include a question on ancestry in the 1990 U.S. Census to help determine the size of cultural groups. Without the ability to indicate ancestry, as well as language, Franco-Americans would have continued to be perceived as a much smaller portion of Maine's total population than they are now.

Though Giguere officially retired from her post as head of the University of Southern Maine's sociology department in

See Giguere, C5, Col. 3



Madeleine Giguere, a Maryann Hartman Award winner, is best known for her work compiling statistics on Maine's Franco-Americans. (NEWS Photo by Susan Latham)

Style

Giguere credited with key research



Al Carbee poses with some models. (Aaron Smith Photo)

ound Barbie's waist as he offers r a Hershey's Kiss. Entire pages are dedicated to otos of lunar Barbie, who ars a NASA uniform and space lmet as she pilots a moon rover ade from the aluminum coners of TV dinners. A picture a moonscape provides the ckground. On another page, NASA Barbie running, with illustrations of ososaurs dominating the backop. A separate image shows urbie with her limbs positioned conform to an anatomical diam of the human body. "Can't you see her personal-?" said Carbee, flipping ough the pages. "I'm seeing r as if she were a live model. As she were living ... You can see y I'm fascinated with her." When asked why he prefers urbie dolls to human models, rbee is quick to answer: "Bar never complains." While Carbee claims "an artist a lonely life because nobody derstands us," he is increasing efforts to share his work with outside world. Though he has cently sold several of his drawgs and his sculpted lamps, he is ding that most people are relucit to trade money for art. Carbee would like to think of nself as "the legend of Saco." t as he is first and foremost an ist and last and least a self-propting salesman, he doesn't know his artwork will ever become as ll-known as he would like it to Carbee said that he's lonely, but en turns to Van Gogh for inspi-tion. "[Van Gogh] couldn't stop inting. He couldn't stop. Of urse, that's his whole life," said rbee. He also turns to Barbie. "I've got to start painting her," said.

Giguere, from C1 1990, her extensive knowledge of Franco-American demographics remains in great demand. "She's a walking library," says Sen. Judy Paradis, D-Frenchville. "She's a wealth of information. I've been a fan of hers for years. She's one of our gurus." Giguere's most recent effort involves her work as a member of the Commission to Study Development of Maine's Franco-American Resource, created by legislation presented by Paradis. "She's a legend in the field," said Connie LaPointe-Brennan, commission chairman. "We've learned a good deal from her." Among Giguere's contribu-tions to the study, which looks at the potential of the Franco-American community regarding economic development opportu-nities, are demographic pro-files, information on education levels and breakdowns on where people who speak French can be found. A report to the Legislature on the findings of the study is in draft form. The final version is expected to be completed in about a month. Giguere said keeping on top of changing Franco demographics has become more difficult since budget cuts closed the state's data center. As she was inter-viewed for this story in her home in a quiet Lewiston neighbor-hood, Giguere listened for the fax machine in her home office to deliver data from MISER, the Massachusetts Institute for Social and Economic Research at the University of Massachu-setts, the closest source she was able to find for census informa-tion about Maine. Though Giguere's academic career has taken her as far away as Jamaica, her heart has never strayed far from Lewiston's brick mills and canals. "It's my home. I wouldn't want to move anyplace else," she said with characteristic frankness. Giguere has surrounded her-self with things most important to her, many illustrating the interconnected and recurring themes that have fueled her life's work: her French ancestry, the importance of family, the Roman Catholic Church and the mills of Lewiston. The shelves in the living room are filled with photographs that span generations, including pic-tures of her paternal Giguere and maternal Callier forebears, who, like many other French

Canadians, migrated to New England in search of a better life. "They came here for a job, and they believed in hard work," she said. "They pursued happi-ness through family, community and service." On one wall of Giguere's bed-room hangs a painting by Marc Poirier, depicting a view of Lewiston from the Auburn side of the Androscoggin River, which once powered the textile mills for which Lewiston was known. The scene takes in, among other things, St. Peter's Roman Catholic Church. Founded in 1870, it was the first parish in Maine established to serve the French-speaking Cana-dians who came to work in the mills. Eight years later, the parish started the state's first bilingual parochial school.

"She's a walking library. She's one of our gurus." — Sen. Judy Paradis

On another wall is a copy of a 1709 map of the Cote de Beaupre-Ille d'Orleans region in Quebec. The map shows where, on the northern bank of the St. Lawrence River, Giguere's fore-bears lived centuries ago. On a table is a reliquary, yet another variation of the inter-twining themes. The small shrine, which once belonged to her father, holds minute bone fragments of St. Gabriel Lale-mant, St. Jean de Brebeuf and Charles Garnier, three of a group known as the North Amer-ican Martyrs, six French Jesuits and two assistants killed by the Iroquois between 1642 and 1649, a period of fierce rivalry between Iroquois and Hurons who were allied with English and French colonists. Though her educational pur-suits kept her away from Lewis-ton for extended periods, she found herself settled in 1965. "I started being a faculty

activist in 1970-71 because the women were underpaid at the university, in spite of having the same credentials as their male counterparts," she said. In her presentation at the Hartman awards reception, Rob-bins noted Giguere and some of her colleagues organized USM women to push for the adoption of affirmative action guidelines in the University of Maine Sys-tem. Because of this work, then Gov. Ken Curtis appointed Giguere to the Governor's Advi-sory Council on Women, one of several leadership posts she held in the equal rights arena. Giguere, however, does not see herself as political, a character-istic she believes holds true for Franco-Americans as a group. "One of the characteristics of Franco-Americans is that they don't rock the boat," she said. "They are family-oriented, kin-oriented. They are interested in making a living, but not in being the richest or most successful." But she points out that becom-ing involved in local politics enabled many French-Canadians in Lewiston to make the move from mill jobs to more desirable occupations. Such was the case with her own grandfathers. One became chief of police and the other landed a coveted post office job. Since retiring from USM in 1990, Giguere has served as volunteer director of the Franco-American Heritage Col-lection at the University of Southern Maine's Lewiston-Auburn campus, a post she held until a year ago. In that capac-ity, she screened some 2,000 books and entered them into the university library's URSUS com-puter data base, developing carpal tunnel syndrome in the process. She copied all the Franco-American papers onto acid-free papers and stored them in acid-free compartments to preserve them for future genera-tions. She helped research a recently published history of St. Peter's and St. Paul's Parish in Lewiston. Among her current projects is to research the life of Lewis-ton newspaperwoman Charlotte

Michaud. "That's this box right here," Giguere said, pointing to a card-board box filled with documents about Michaud, whom she admits intrigues her. "She was a contemporary of my mother's and I saw her any number of times," Giguere said. "It's a bit of detective work. She did write a lot. She wrote Dorothy Parker-like verse. She fancied herself a dance critic." Born in the late 1800s, Michaud was the daughter of a printer for Le Messenger, a French-language newspaper published in Lewiston from 1880 through 1966. Giguere describes Michaud as a "young, perky woman" when she embarked on her writing career at the Lewis-ton paper, but she lost her job when a new boss arrived and became a free-lance writer for such publications as La Presse of Montreal and the Portland Press Herald. Among the trends that Giguere has tracked over the decades is the continuing decline of the use of French in Maine. But how to reverse that trend — or even if it should be — is something that Giguere admits escapes her. "I've never been an activist in that sense ... I never went out proselytizing," she said. "I've never felt responsible for doing something about [saving the lan-guage]. If there's a French event, I go to it. I'm part of the audience ... My feeling is that it's very difficult to maintain [French] in an English-speaking atmosphere. "I can remember going to my aunt's as a child and they were listening to a French station from Montreal," she said. That Lewiston continues to have access to French television and radio stations might be a key to the use of the language in the future. "We need to be fluent in all aspects of the language — not only the literature, but the recipes and sports and soap operas," Giguere said. "The con-text has to change. If you do have to speak French to your grandmother as I did, you con-tinue to speak French."

98 TV LISTINGS						
8:30	9:00	9:30	10:00	10:30	11:00	11:30
Union	Seinfeld	Veronicas	ER "The Long Way Around"	News	Tonight	
igs	National/CBC News		National Up.	News	Trial at Fortitude Bay (1994)	
d (R)	Diagnosis Murder		True or False: Teen-agers	News	Late Show	
Union	Seinfeld	Veronicas	ER "The Long Way Around"	News	Tonight	
earch	Billy Madison	★½ (1995, Comedy) Adam Sandler.		News	Nightline	
d (R)	Diagnosis Murder		True or False: Teen-agers	News	Late Show	
y" (R)	Billy Madison	★½ (1995, Comedy) Adam Sandler.		News	Nightline	
d (R)	Diagnosis Murder		ER "The Long Way Around"	CTV News	News	
Maine	Mystery! "Cadfael"		Man-School	Manor Born	Red Green	
d (R)	Diagnosis Murder		True or False: Teen-agers	News	Late Show	
	Godsword	To Be Announced		Soldier of Fortune, Inc.	Youngblids	
ager (R)	Sentinel "The Trance"		News	Cheers	M*A*S*H	Real TV
Ask Harriet	New York Undercover		News	Edition	Jerry Springer	
idice ★★½ (1987, Drama) Nick Nolte.			News		Star Trek: Next Gener.	
m Hanks	New Explorers (R)		Unexplained		Law & Order "Volunteers"	
The Night of the Grizzly ★★½ (1966) Clint Walker. 'G'				The Four Musketeers ★★ (1975) 'PG'		
★★★½ (1975) Giancarlo Giannini. 'R'			Foot Notes	Final Act	Ticket to Heaven (1981)	
Hardball	Rivera Live		News With Brian Williams	Charles Grodin		
	Larry King Live		World Today	Sports Illus.	Moneyline	
od ★★½ (1988) Anthony Michael Hall.			Offsides (R)	Make-Laugh	Daily Show	
iblic Affairs					Prime Time Public Affairs	
y: Forest	Strange-True	Movie Magic	Wings "Flying Coffins" (R)	Justice Files "Have Faith"		
tem at Penn State.		College Basketball: Alabama-Birmingham at Memphis.		Sportscenter		
ate.	Super Bowl	NFL's Greatest Game		Super Bowl	NFL 2 Night	



NEWS Photo by Bridget Besaw

days of
ICE