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# Migrants and Millworkers: The French Canadian Population of Burlington and Colchester, 1860-1870

*The high level of political activity of Colchester's French Canadians contrasted sharply to that of Burlington émigrés.*

By BETSY BEATTIE

**I**n the first five years of the 1860s the Burlington area witnessed the personal tragedies, the dislocations, and the economic expansion of wartime. The Civil War drained off young men in record numbers; some died on battlefields and in army hospitals, while others remained in the new territories they had visited. According to one estimate, less than half the thirty-four thousand Vermonters who left the state in the course of the war ever returned.<sup>1</sup> Those who did, however, benefitted from the wartime industrial expansion, employment, and rising wages. During the course of the war, as demand for lumber and wood products increased and new tariff restrictions protected local manufacturing from foreign competition, the Burlington area thrived. For the Burlington Woolen Mill Company, contracts to produce cloth for Union Army uniforms meant that its business increased, its work force expanded, and its profits soared.<sup>2</sup>

The impact of the war extended into Canada. In spite of England's declared neutrality in the conflict and threats of prosecution for

Canadians who joined either side as soldiers, agents for the Union Army circulated freely throughout Quebec convincing poor French Canadian youths to enlist in return for bounties, which, by the end of the war, amounted to as much as one thousand dollars.<sup>3</sup> Some young Québécois even enlisted accidentally, thinking they were signing job agreements.<sup>4</sup> Generous bounties and substitute fees (paid for serving in place of native Americans) also attracted French Canadians living in the United States to join the conflict. While a few of these men undoubtedly joined the Union cause out of patriotic or anti-slavery sentiment, it is likely that most simply sought adventure or needed the money. Historians do not agree on the exact figure, but a conservative estimate is that a total of twenty thousand French-speaking youths from Quebec and the United States served in the American Civil War.<sup>5</sup> Among them were over 150 men from Burlington and Colchester.<sup>6</sup>

#### LA GRANDE ÉMIGRATION

The French Canadian youths who came to the United States to fight in the Civil War were not part of a larger migration of immigrants to America. In fact, emigration from Quebec slowed somewhat in the early years of the 1860s. The United States-Canadian Reciprocity Treaty of 1854 had guaranteed free trade of all natural products, and some Quebec farmers increased their profits by selling agricultural goods in American markets. Not until 1863 did the flow of immigrants increase as more northern Americans were called to join the Union Army, creating job opportunities for the foreign-born.<sup>7</sup>

The total immigration during the war years was insignificant, however, when compared to the flood of French Canadians that poured southward into the United States in the second half of the decade. It is impossible to know just how many Québécois arrived during these years, but, according to Mason Wade's research, 101,020 Canadians migrated to the United States between 1865 and 1869 of which "a very large part came from Quebec."<sup>8</sup> Yolande Lavoie, in her study of French Canadian emigration, has estimated that, in New England alone, the Canadian-born population more than doubled between 1860 and 1870, reaching a total of 159,445.<sup>9</sup> These are the bare statistics of a phenomenon that Robert Rumilly has labeled *la grande émigration*.<sup>10</sup> Alexandre Belisle, in his *Histoire de la Presse Franco-Américaine*, described the physical reality behind those statistics:

In the last week of April, 1869, trains coming from Canada and passing through St. Albans [Vermont] carried 2,300 French Canadian émigrés. Americans would come to Canada to hire employees and on May 3rd one train carried 600 of them in cars locked, apparently to avoid confusion and make any desertion impossible.<sup>11</sup>

These Québécois left their farms, villages, and parishes for the same general reasons that had impelled earlier émigrés to leave—overpopulation, low agricultural output, and inadequate employment opportunities in French Canada. In 1866, the struggling Quebec economy suffered an additional blow, which acted as further inducement to the poor habitant to emigrate. The American government abrogated the Reciprocity Treaty with Canada in order to protect its domestic agriculture. The Quebec farmers, never able to compete successfully with American and Ontarian growers, now faced tariffs on produce sold to the United States, a burden that forced more of them either to subsistence farming or off their land. Meanwhile, the New England cotton industry, forced to reduce production when the Civil War interrupted shipment of cotton from the South, resumed its growth. The depletion of the Yankee work force from war and westward migration meant industrial jobs for all immigrants who sought them.<sup>12</sup>

Many of these poor French Canadian farmers and their families did not have to seek out factory positions; agents from the larger companies in such textile centers as Lowell and Lawrence, Massachusetts, and Manchester, New Hampshire, visited rural Quebec parishes and aggressively recruited them. With glowing reports of steady wages and extensive job opportunities they lured whole families, sometimes entire parishes, to their towns and mills. To both corporate owners and hungry French Canadian families the arrangement seemed ideal. The émigrés found work for several members of their large families while the employers gained an accessible, loyal, and uncomplaining work force.<sup>13</sup> Disrupted lives, crowded trains, arrival in an unfamiliar urban world, and the long, tedious hours of factory labor were harsh realities, but the prospect of weekly wages for several family members was preferable to the uncertainties, sometimes hopelessness, of farming in Quebec. Emigration to the industrial centers of New England continued virtually unabated throughout the rest of the nineteenth century. By 1890 there were over 331,000 French Canadians living in New England.<sup>14</sup> In 1900 they represented thirty percent of the textile workers in Massachusetts and over sixty percent of those in New Hampshire and Maine.<sup>15</sup>

No agents from Burlington-area businesses traveled to Canada to recruit employees, however. For them recruitment was not necessary. The region was close to Canada and directly on the train route to southern New England. Those whose money ran out, those who wanted to remain near the Quebec border, those with friends or relatives in the region, and some who simply tired of traveling found the Burlington area a convenient or a necessary place to stop. In T. D. Seymour Bassett's words, they were "stranded before they reached their destination—stranded on the Ver-

mont bridge" and created an influx of laborers without the cost of solicitation.<sup>16</sup>

The population figures for 1860 and 1870 reveal the impact of *la grande émigration* on the region. The total combined population of Burlington and Colchester rose about seventy percent, from 10,754 to 18,305, and the area's French Canadian population rose 171 percent, from 2,392 to 6,484 residents. While in 1860 French Canadians constituted less than one-fourth of the region's population, in 1870, over one-third of the area's residents were Quebec immigrants or their dependents. Furthermore, as had been the case in 1860, the French Canadians in 1870 represented a largely new group of settlers; only 109 of the 1,039 families living in the region had been there ten years earlier.

Both the growth and the changing composition of the French Canadian population during the 1860s were dramatic in scope but were not new phenomena. Instead, they represented an acceleration of trends clearly established in the previous decade. A similar pattern of change appeared in the employment choices of French Canadian workers. As the statistics in Table 1 reveal, there was a continuous decline in the occupational status of the region's French Canadians from 1850 to 1870.

TABLE 1  
Occupational Status of Male French Canadians, Burlington and Colchester (combined), 1850, 1860, 1870.

| <i>Type of Job</i>   | 1850     |          | 1860     |          | 1870     |          |
|----------------------|----------|----------|----------|----------|----------|----------|
|                      | <i>N</i> | <i>%</i> | <i>N</i> | <i>%</i> | <i>N</i> | <i>%</i> |
| Merchant             | 4        | (1.3)    | 2        | (0.3)    | 2        | (0.1)    |
| Professional         | 2        | (0.6)    | 0        | (0.0)    | 3        | (0.2)    |
| Small Business       | 8        | (2.5)    | 19       | (3.2)    | 34       | (1.9)    |
| Other White Collar   | 3        | (0.9)    | 4        | (0.6)    | 18       | (1.0)    |
| Skilled Labor        | 120      | (38.1)   | 175      | (28.5)   | 364      | (20.7)   |
| Semi/Unskilled Labor | 135      | (42.7)   | 293      | (47.7)   | 1108     | (62.9)   |
| Farm Labor           | 40       | (12.7)   | 55       | (9.0)    | 99       | (5.6)    |
| Factory Work         | 4        | (1.3)    | 60       | (9.8)    | 120      | (6.8)    |
| Personal/Domestic    | 0        | (0.0)    | 6        | (1.0)    | 13       | (0.8)    |
| Total                | 316      |          | 614      |          | 1761     |          |

The percentage of Quebec immigrants in white collar and skilled labor positions, which at mid-century totaled 43.3 percent of the French Canadian work force, had declined to only 23.9 percent in 1870, leaving three out of every four male workers in low-paying unskilled jobs. Just



*The village of Winooski became a center for French Canadian settlement in the last third of the nineteenth century. This photograph shows Winooski in 1900. From J.-F. Audet, Histoire de la Congrégation Canadienne de Winooski au Vermont, 1906.*

how grave a problem this decline was for the economic condition of the French Canadian community is evident from the wage differential between skilled and unskilled labor in 1870. While a carpenter received an average of \$3.50 per day, the common laborer received only half that wage, or \$1.75 per day. Meanwhile, by 1870 the cost of board alone had climbed over 230 percent.<sup>17</sup>

The only way out of the financial bind of low wages and high costs was to put more family members to work. In 1870, 273 sons and daughters of French Canadian families, aged fifteen through nineteen, worked outside the home; the majority worked in the same low-paying positions that dependents in 1860 had held, such as factory operative and day laborer. Moreover, by 1870, child labor had become so common in the United States that the census for that year included occupations for all children above age nine, and in Burlington and Colchester sixty children, aged ten through fourteen, also held outside employment. The total numbers of employed sons and daughters are somewhat misleading, however, because the actual percentage of working dependents, aged fifteen through nineteen, declined from 52 percent to 39.2 percent across the decade.<sup>18</sup>

Meanwhile, the size of the families of French Canadians continued to rise (see Table 2). The combination of growing family size and declining occupational status without a comparable rise in the percentage of working dependents suggests that in 1870 a large number of these Burlington-area families did not make enough money to keep out of debt. While in 1850 families with fewer children and a father employed as a craftsman could survive with only one wage earner, these larger families in 1870,

headed by unskilled laborers, likely found even subsistence problematic unless several family members worked. Given this increasing need for extra income, it seems doubtful that families chose to keep their children at home but rather that there were not enough available jobs in the Burlington area to employ all who wanted to work.

TABLE 2

Average Number of French Canadian Children Living at Home, by Age of Wife, Burlington and Colchester (combined), 1850, 1860, 1870.

| <i>Age of Wife</i> | <i>Average Number<br/>of Children<br/>1850</i> | <i>Average Number<br/>of Children<br/>1860</i> | <i>Average Number<br/>of Children<br/>1870</i> |
|--------------------|--|--|--|
| Under 20           | 0.9  | 0.4  | 0.6  |
| 20 - 29            | 2.1  | 2.4  | 2.3  |
| 30 - 39            | 3.7  | 4.4  | 4.3  |
| 40 - 49            | 3.9  | 5.1  | 5.5  |
| 50 and over        | 2.1  | 2.0  | 4.7  |
| Total              | 2.8  | 3.4  | 3.8  |

FROM "DOUBLE-TOWN" TO CITY AND VILLAGE: BURLINGTON AND WINOOSKI  
IN THE POST-WAR PERIOD

While the French Canadian community faced increasingly difficult economic conditions brought on by the flood of post-war immigrants, the overall economy of the Burlington area was experiencing a period of sustained and vigorous growth. The Civil War had stimulated demand and raised prices in nearly all the business enterprises from the lumber trade to the manufacture of wood products to the production of woolen cloth.<sup>19</sup> Even the Winooski Mill Company survived the disruption in shipping of raw cotton from the southern states and continued its slow, steady growth.

Although the region's economy had fattened itself directly from war-time contracts and shipping, the years immediately following the war did not bring a post-war depression to the area's industries. Even America's abrogation of the Reciprocity Treaty in 1866, and the subsequent tariffs on foreign lumber, did not curb the nation's growing demand for Canadian lumber, and the Canadian timber trade, Burlington's primary economic base, continued its expansion.<sup>20</sup> As lumber shipments increased, new wood-product manufacturers appeared, expanding in number from twelve to twenty-two by 1870.<sup>21</sup> Many of these operated in the Pioneer Shops, which had survived both a serious boiler explosion and a change of ownership and, in 1870, were still a prosperous venture.



They continued to house numerous machine shops and other small craft-style enterprises.<sup>22</sup>

The textile industry in the Burlington area also weathered the transition to a peacetime economy. The cessation of war and the gradual resumption of domestic cotton shipments sustained the local cotton mill until, by 1870, it had expanded its work force to 108 operatives and its annual production to a value of \$92,410.<sup>23</sup> Even the Burlington Woolen Mill in Winooski Falls, which had been the most dependent on Union army commissions, continued to thrive after the war. Demand for police and railroad employee uniforms supplanted army orders, and the woolen mill began producing "their specialty of indigo blue goods" to fill that demand.<sup>24</sup> By the 1880s the factory also manufactured "broadcloths, moscows, fancy suitings, ladies' dress goods and cloakings."<sup>25</sup>

The general prosperity and population growth in the Burlington area led to two somewhat contradictory developments in the first years after the Civil War. On the one hand, settlement expanded as more houses, stores, and other buildings were constructed to satisfy the needs of new residents. The urbanized area grew in a roughly triangular shape with its northern point extending from Prospect Street across the river to include a growing Winooski Falls.<sup>26</sup> Thus, physically, the two parts of the Burlington/Winooski "double-town" were growing even more indistinct, with the river a mere strip of blue running between house-lined streets.

On the other hand, during the same period in which these two communities grew together physically, they both affirmed their separate political identities. In 1865 the citizens of Burlington voted to incorporate as a city, establishing both a government of mayor and alderman and a new municipal fire department. In the next ten years the young city built curbs, extended streets, and developed a municipal waterworks.<sup>27</sup> Meanwhile, in December of 1866, Winooski Falls residents distanced themselves from the more rural areas of Colchester by voting to form a separate village within the larger town.<sup>28</sup> What, in 1825, had been a small grouping of forty houses had blossomed into a community of 1,745 residents and 296 buildings on thirty-two streets.<sup>29</sup>

The separate local governments that Burlington and Winooski established in the last half of the 1860s also reflected more fundamental differences between the two urban communities, differences somewhat masked by their proximity. In the thirty years since Burlington interests had first harnessed the Winooski River to build the original woolen mill, the city had returned to a more modest pattern of industrial development. Local entrepreneurs built and maintained manufacturing concerns like the craft-style industries in the Pioneer Shops and the Winooski Cotton Mill, enterprises that were small relative to plants under construction in

such New England industrial centers as Lowell, Lawrence, and Worcester, Massachusetts. After 1850, the major economic growth in the city had been in the lumber trade, largely a mercantile rather than an industrial development.

Only in Winooski Falls was there an industrial operation of a size and sophistication to compete with the other major textile manufacturers in the Northeast. This concern, the Burlington Woolen Mill Company, had been purchased in 1861 by a group of Boston stockholders who had then hired a manager, Frederic C. Kennedy, to oversee the Winooski operation.<sup>30</sup> The Woolen Mill Company, once the property of Burlington investors, became a "branch plant," a subsidiary of a larger southern New England corporation. As a result, Winooski Falls, originally a part of a regional urban development, after 1861 became a separate industrial center dominated by one absentee-owned company. It became a typical New England mill town. Symbolic of that transformation was the imposing presence of the company agent whose house, the grandest in town, sat on a hill overlooking town and factory.

Thus, by 1870 Burlington and Winooski Falls were separate communities each moving in its own political and economic direction. The changing nature of the region from a general urban area to more clearly defined municipalities suggests that a study of the French Canadians of Burlington and Colchester as a single group, appropriate for the pre-Civil War years, is no longer appropriate for those living in the two communities in 1870. Burlington, with its collection of small industries and its mercantile businesses, offered a far different array of job opportunities than did Winooski, a mill town. At the same time, the French Canadians who came after the war had different employment needs from those who had come in earlier years. Such different employment opportunities and needs, in turn, meant different patterns of family employment and different rates of persistence for the French Canadians of each community.

A comparison of occupational status reveals that French Canadian males in the two communities did choose different types of employment, reflecting the different job opportunities available in each place (see Table 3). While over seventy percent of Burlington's male Québécois work force was employed in unskilled jobs, less than forty percent of Colchester's French Canadian workers were common laborers. Men employed in factories and on farms made up the thirty percent difference. In 1870, the Burlington Woolen Mill, the major factory in Colchester, continued to pay less than the average wage for unskilled labor, with operatives' wages averaging \$1.09 for all workers, male and female, as compared to \$1.75 for day labor.<sup>31</sup> Furthermore, the \$1.09 was the wage for a twelve-hour — some claimed a fourteen-hour — day.<sup>32</sup>

TABLE 3

A Comparison of the Occupational Status of French Canadian Males Living in Burlington to Those Living in Colchester, 1870.

| <i>Type of Job</i>   | <i>French Canadian Males - Burlington</i> |          | <i>French Canadian Males - Colchester</i> |          |
|----------------------|---|----------|---|----------|
|                      | <i>N</i>                                  | <i>%</i> | <i>N</i>                                  | <i>%</i> |
| Merchant             | 0   | (0.0)    | 2   | (0.4)    |
| Professional         | 3   | (0.2)    | 0   | (0.0)    |
| Small Business       | 18  | (1.4)    | 16  | (3.5)    |
| Other White Collar   | 11  | (0.8)    | 7   | (1.5)    |
| Skilled Labor        | 269                                       | (20.7)   | 95  | (20.7)   |
| Semi/Unskilled Labor | 931                                       | (71.5)   | 177                                       | (38.6)   |
| Farm Labor           | 36  | (2.8)    | 63  | (13.7)   |
| Factory Labor        | 25  | (1.9)    | 95  | (20.7)   |
| Personal/Domestic    | 9   | (0.7)    | 4   | (0.9)    |
| Total                | 1302                                      |          | 459                                       |          |

On the other hand, availability of day labor fluctuated with weather conditions while factories ran in all weather.<sup>33</sup> Moreover, while unskilled jobs on loading docks and in lumber yards required the strength of full-grown men, young women and children as well as men could find work in textile mills. The typical post-war French Canadian families, who arrived poor and without any members trained in special skills, were probably more concerned with finding steady work and jobs for their dependents than with finding higher wages for the family head. Three or four steady incomes were critical for the economic survival of many of these large families.

There was a marked difference in employment of dependents among Burlington and Colchester sons and daughters.

TABLE 4

French Canadian Sons and Daughters, Aged 10 to 19, Employed Outside the Home, Burlington and Colchester, 1870.

| <i>Town</i>       | <i>Total Number of Dependents</i> | <i>Number Employed Outside the Home</i> | <i>% Employed of Total Number of Dependents</i> |
|-------------------|-----------------------------------|---|---|
| <i>Burlington</i> |                                   |   |   |
| Sons              | 583                               | 109                                     | 18.7  |
| Daughters         | 570                               | 38                                      | 6.7   |

|                   |     |    |      |
|-------------------|-----|----|------|
| <i>Colchester</i> |     |    |      |
| Sons              | 215 | 96 | 44.7 |
| Daughters         | 214 | 90 | 42.1 |

While over forty percent of Colchester's French Canadian dependents held outside jobs, only 12.7 percent of Burlington's French Canadian dependents worked outside the home. The most dramatic difference appears in the figures for employment of daughters. Only thirty-eight daughters from Burlington's French Canadian families had outside jobs, less than half the number of Colchester's French Canadian daughters even though Burlington had more than twice as many of these girls. As Frances Early has pointed out in her study of Lowell's French Canadians, Quebec émigrés who arrived after the Civil War depended upon the family economy for their survival.<sup>34</sup> What was true in Lowell, Massachusetts, was just as likely to be true in Burlington and Colchester, Vermont. Therefore, post-war Québécois immigrants must have found Burlington a harder place than Colchester in which to survive financially.

In fact, a comparison of the persistence rates for the two towns reveals that in the 1860s Burlington was not as attractive a place to live for French Canadians as Colchester.

TABLE 5  
Number of French Canadian Families in Burlington  
and Colchester, 1870, who had lived there since 1860.

| <i>Town</i> | <i>Total Number<br/>of Families<br/>in 1860</i> | <i>Number Still<br/>There in<br/>1870</i> | <i>% of<br/>Total</i> |
|-------------|---|---|-----------------------|
| Burlington  | 275   | 54  | 19.6                  |
| Colchester  | 141   | 55  | 39.0                  |

When combined with the statistics on employment of dependents, these persistence rates reinforce the idea that, by 1870, French Canadian families were more likely to remain in a community where there was employment available for several family members. In the Burlington area, the community offering the most employment opportunities for dependents was Winooski Falls, and, as a result, it supported the most stable French Canadian community. According to one nineteenth-century observer who visited Burlington, in 1870 the city had "a floating population." By comparison, Winooski was what T. D. Seymour Bassett has described as "a typical mill town for which the French Canadians were looking," a place that "was able to offer to many of the transients steady jobs near Canada."<sup>35</sup>

Events of the 1870s underscored this difference in economic opportunity for immigrants between the two communities. The period between 1870 and 1880 included years of nationwide economic depression and unemployment. Burlington lost 55.7 percent of its foreign-born population. However, in spite of wage and hour reductions in the woolen mill, Colchester lost a tiny 0.2 percent of its foreign-born residents.<sup>36</sup>

Thus, to most of the French Canadians arriving in the United States just after the Civil War, Burlington had little to offer in the way of steady factory employment. Until its industrial base grew, particularly with the construction of the Queen City Cotton Mills in 1894, the city was largely a conduit to the factory towns and cities of central and southern New England—a place for a brief sojourn to earn money before continuing their journey, but not a promising place in which to settle permanently. Winooski Falls, on the other hand, had many of the same employment opportunities that larger textile centers offered to Quebec émigrés and was also close to friends and relatives still in Canada. Because Winooski could attract a more stable population, the village became a center for French Canadian settlement in the last third of the nineteenth century.

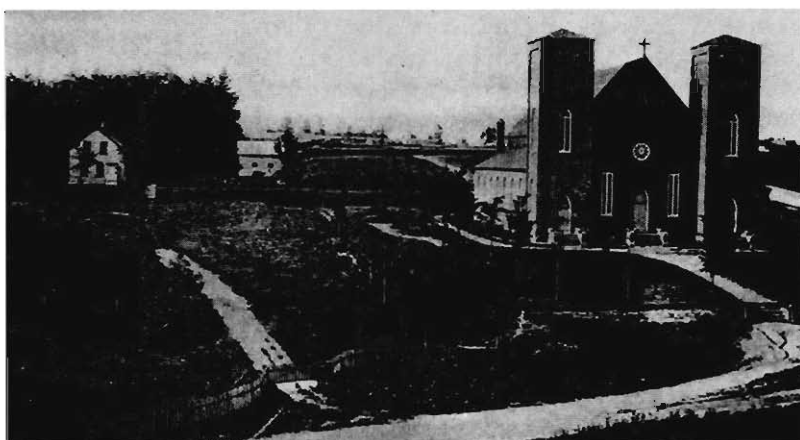
#### NEW IMMIGRANTS AND DEEP ROOTS: THE POST-WAR FRENCH CANADIAN COMMUNITY IN WINOOSKI FALLS

Immigrants from Quebec arriving in Winooski Falls in the years following the American Civil War found more than just employment opportunities. They also discovered a small but well-established French-speaking community whose members were committed to preserving their culture and serving the special needs of their *confrères*. Some of these older immigrants took specific leadership roles in the larger community and strengthened the position of the French Canadian population within the social, economic, and political fabric of the village.

Following the pattern of the village itself, during the 1860s the French Canadians of Winooski had grown apart from the larger French-speaking population of the Burlington area. Even before the end of the Civil War, French Canadians in the town of Colchester had become so numerous that in 1863 Bishop Louis de Goësbriand decided to fund the construction of a separate Catholic school in Winooski. From 1863 to 1867 members from the Burlington convent of the Sisters of Providence crossed the bridge to teach two classes a day to about eighty children.<sup>37</sup> After the war, when Winooski began feeling the impact of *la grande émigration*, it became even more obvious to de Goësbriand that the village's French Canadian population would continue its rapid growth. A separate school would no longer suffice; the French-speaking Catholics of Winooski deserved their own parish. In March of 1868 he appointed Jean-Frédéric Audet, a curé from St. Alexandre parish in St.-Hyacinthe, Quebec, the

first priest for the new St. François Xavier parish, which included the French Canadians of Colchester and Essex.<sup>38</sup>

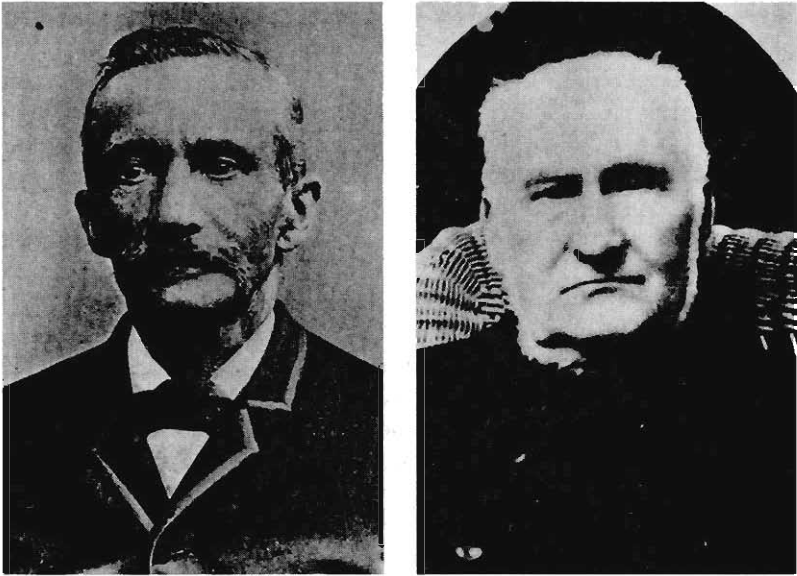
Church authority rather than lay initiative created St. François Xavier parish.<sup>39</sup> The founding of St. Joseph's in Burlington had established the pattern of national parishes in New England, and Bishop de Goësbriand was anxious to give French-speaking Catholics in his diocese their own church and priest. On the other hand, several of the older Québécois immigrants of Winooski who had been instrumental in the establishment and governing of St. Joseph's parish played prominent roles in building



*The church and rectory of St. François Xavier parish in 1876. From J.-F. Audet, Histoire de la Congrégation Canadienne de Winooski au Vermont, 1906.*

and supporting the new parish in Winooski. Bruno Pepin, a cooper in Winooski Falls, had served St. Joseph's parish as a *marguillier*, or parish trustee, from 1861 to 1869. After St. François Xavier was founded, he acted as a trustee in that parish from 1873 until his death in 1903.<sup>40</sup> Joseph Niquette, a railroad engineer on the Burlington-Essex Junction run, had served on the building committee for St. Joseph's church and subsequently became a trustee of St. François Xavier parish. Peter Villmaire, a Winooski mason, had provided the stone and brick work for St. Joseph's while Charles Lafountain, a large landowner in Colchester, had been a member of the building committee of that church. Both later became members of the new Winooski parish.<sup>41</sup>

By far the most important lay person in the founding of both St. Joseph's and St. François Xavier parishes was another resident of Colchester, Francis LeClair, Jr. LeClair, one of only a handful of French Canadian



*Bruno Pepin, a cooper (left), and Joseph Niquette, a railroad engineer (right), were early church and political leaders in Winooski's French Canadian community. From J.-F. Audet, Histoire de la Congrégation Canadienne de Winooski au Vermont, 1906.*

businessmen in the region, became one of the most influential individuals not only among French Canadians but in all of Winooski. LeClair, like Bruno Pepin, had been a *marguillier* for St. Joseph's parish and later became a lifelong trustee for St. François Xavier parish. Because of his economic standing, however, his contribution to the new parish extended beyond personal leadership. The Winooski church stood on LeClair land, and he was a major financial backer of the parish.<sup>42</sup> According to Father Jean Audet, LeClair was "the support and bulwark of the new congregation."<sup>43</sup>

To the French Canadians of Winooski, however, Francis LeClair was more than just a pillar of St. François Xavier parish; he was a benefactor, a leader, and the immigrant community's counterbalance to the wealth and power of the Yankee mill executives. He had come to Colchester in 1828 at the age of ten and lived on the farm of his father, Francis LeClair, Sr., the same man who had once harbored refugees from the Rebellions of Lower Canada. At about the age of twenty the young LeClair had become acquainted with such *Patriote* leaders as the journalist Ludger Duvernay and the lawyer R. S. M. Bouchette. His later

political activism and concern for the French Canadian community may well reflect the influence of these Quebec reformers.

LeClair began his business ventures in 1843 as proprietor of a general store and prospered by serving the needs of the French Canadian community. However, it was in real estate and in the manufacture of bricks that he made both his personal fortune and his greatest material contribution to the French Canadians of his town. According to David Blow, LeClair began his real estate dealings in 1849, built his first brickyard in 1860, and by 1875 had "erected and sold or rented 75 brick houses in Winooski and 10 in Burlington."<sup>44</sup> These houses were "designed for families of moderate means and sold to mill operatives on easy terms, giving them a chance to own a home of their own which they would not otherwise have had."<sup>45</sup> By Father Audet's count, nearly two hundred French Canadian families had purchased homes from LeClair by 1889.<sup>46</sup> Thanks to his efforts and "easy terms," well over half the property in the west ward of the town was in French Canadian hands.

Clearly, Francis LeClair benefited financially from his dealings with fellow Québécois immigrants. He not only profited from land sales but built the houses on that land with bricks from his own yards. His were not merely acts of charity but business arrangements. On the other hand, historians of the region have all described his construction and sale of homes as acts of service; they suggest that, while making a profit, LeClair did not exploit those to whom he sold or rented dwellings.<sup>47</sup>

Whatever LeClair's motives, the results of his construction and sales were impressive. Over twice as high a percentage of Colchester's French Canadians owned land as did their counterparts in Burlington.

TABLE 6  
Value of Real Estate owned by French Canadian Heads of Families  
in Burlington and Colchester, 1870

| <i>Value in<br/>\$</i> | <i>Burlington Heads<br/>of Families</i> |          | <i>Colchester Heads<br/>of Families</i> |          |
|------------------------|---|----------|---|----------|
|                        | <i>N</i>                                | <i>%</i> | <i>N</i>                                | <i>%</i> |
| No Property            | 619                                     | (84.9)   | 198                                     | (63.7)   |
| 0 - 500                | 32                                      | (4.4)    | 38                                      | (12.2)   |
| 501 - 1000             | 38                                      | (5.2)    | 46                                      | (14.8)   |
| 1001 - 1500            | 6                                       | (.8)     | 8                                       | (2.6)    |
| 1501 - 2000            | 16                                      | (2.2)    | 13                                      | (4.2)    |
| 2001 - 5000            | 13                                      | (1.8)    | 5                                       | (1.6)    |
| over 5000              | 5                                       | (.7)     | 3                                       | (.9)     |
| Total                  | 729                                     |          | 311                                     |          |



Since the 1870 census does not separate Winooski Falls from the town of Colchester, it is difficult to isolate the rate of French Canadian property ownership for just the village, but, since LeClair sold most of his homes to village residents, that rate is likely to have been even higher than the 36.7 percent for all of Colchester.

The real estate holdings of most of Colchester's French Canadians were small in both size and assessed value. Nevertheless, these lots represented a degree of financial security to their owners that few French Canadians achieved either in Burlington or in other parts of New England. For example, according to Frances Early, in 1870 there were nearly three thousand French Canadians living in Lowell, Massachusetts, but only ten "working class" men owned property and eight of those were skilled laborers.<sup>48</sup> By contrast, in Colchester, a community with just under seventeen hundred French Canadians, ninety-six working-class males owned property, of whom only thirty-two were skilled laborers. Furthermore, by 1890, the New England communities of Biddeford and Lewiston, Maine, Southbridge and North Adams, Massachusetts, and Waterbury, Connecticut, all had over five thousand French Canadian residents but had fewer than 275 French Canadian property owners. Worcester, Massachusetts, had about thirteen thousand Québécois residents of whom only 350 owned real estate. Winooski Falls, by comparison, had fewer than three thousand French Canadian residents in 1890 but three hundred of them were property owners.<sup>49</sup>

The majority of French Canadians who lived and worked in the textile centers of New England neither owned homes nor rented them from a fellow Quebec immigrant. Most lived in tenements built by the mill owners and owned either by the company or by those who had bought them as an investment.<sup>50</sup> Conditions varied in these dwellings; some were well-maintained while others, in the words of one nineteenth-century observer, were "hell-holes" and places "not fit to house a dog."<sup>51</sup> Even the cleanest and most spacious tenements shared one important characteristic with their most delapidated counterparts, however: rental rates were set by outsiders whose primary concern was increasing profits and who could raise rents to whatever level the market would bear. Moreover, in the case of company-owned housing, the mill owner or proprietor, who controlled the wages and working hours of French Canadian operatives, also set their rents, thus exercising almost complete economic control over them. To preserve this control some mill owners even required that all their employees live in company-owned tenements.<sup>52</sup>

Frederic C. Kennedy, proprietor of the Burlington Woolen Mill, controlled the wages and working hours of the mill employees in Winooski, and, in 1873, when the whole country suffered an economic depression,

he responded by reducing the wages of his operatives. After 1870 wages dropped in all but the most specialized textile occupations, and between 1869 and 1879 spinners in the woolen mill saw their pay cut in half. During the same period, weavers worked eleven-and-a-half hours for a daily wage of seventy-two cents.<sup>53</sup> In depressed economic times like the 1870s it was probably a comfort to many French Canadian workers that they owed their rent or house payments not to the man who reduced their wages, but to a fellow Quebec immigrant who spoke their language and better understood the problems of the immigrant community. It seems likely that when times were desperate a Québécois laborer would have found Francis LeClair more tolerant of delayed payments than the Boston businessman Frederic Kennedy, a person David Blow once described as someone who "could not be ignored or overlooked nor frightened nor flattered."<sup>54</sup>

To the French Canadian worker property ownership signified more than just a form of financial security. As laborers, the acquisition of real estate was a sign of what Stephan Thernstrom has labeled "status mobility," which was the most common form of social mobility for first-generation members of the working class.<sup>55</sup> As immigrants, the purchase of a home was, in William MacDonald's words, "among the surest indications of a disposition to permanency."<sup>56</sup> It usually implied that a Canadian émigré no longer planned to return to Quebec but had decided to stay in the country.<sup>57</sup> Owning property also meant having a material stake in the future of one's community, so it probably increased one's commitment to a locality and its affairs.

The most effective means of influencing community affairs open to those without great wealth or social status was through political activity: voting, holding local office, or perhaps supporting a candidate for a state-level position who represented the interests of their community, class, or ethnic group.<sup>58</sup> For the first-generation immigrants, the first step to participation in politics was naturalization, a process that symbolized political commitment to their adopted country just as property ownership signified physical permanence. Of the two, the political statement of American citizenship was the more powerful, for it meant not only allegiance to a new country but the severing of legal ties with the old.

The "old" country for French Canadians, however, was only a day's train ride away, and they preserved a deep emotional attachment to their native land through frequent trips back to Quebec to visit friends and relatives.<sup>59</sup> Another factor that discouraged citizenship was the existence of state regulations in Maine, Connecticut, and Massachusetts requiring that all voters be able to read English. Such laws made the primary benefit of citizenship, the franchise, difficult to obtain for many immigrants.<sup>60</sup>

For all these reasons few French Canadians in the nineteenth century became American citizens. According to Norman Sepenuk in his study of French Canadian political attitudes, by 1890, twenty-five years after the first wave of post-war immigrants arrived, "only 28,465 out of 306,440 male adults of French Canadian origin [or 9.3 percent] had been naturalized."<sup>61</sup>

In Vermont there was no stipulation that a man be able to read English in order to vote.<sup>62</sup> Nevertheless, the rate of naturalization of French Canadians in Burlington, 9.5 percent, was about equal to the naturalization rate of all French Canadians twenty years later (see Table 7). In Colchester, on the other hand, one in four adult French Canadian men had become an American citizen by 1870. Moreover, while Burlington, with its 1,044 adult French Canadian males in 1870, gained 122 new Quebec-born citizens between 1870 and 1876, Colchester, with only 299 French Canadian men, gained 89 such citizens during the same period.<sup>63</sup> Colchester's exceptional rate of naturalization among French Canadians was evidently not a short-lived phenomenon but an ongoing pattern within the French-speaking immigrant community.

TABLE 7  
Naturalization Rates of French Canadians in  
Burlington and Colchester, 1870

| <i>Town</i> | <i>Total Number of<br/>French Canadian-Born<br/>Men, Aged 21 and Over</i> | <i>Number of French<br/>Canadian-Born Men<br/>Who Were Citizens</i> | <i>% of<br/>Total</i> |
|-------------|---|---|-----------------------|
| Burlington  | 1044  | 99  | 9.5                   |
| Colchester  | 299   | 77  | 25.8                  |

There were several factors that contributed to this rate of naturalization among Colchester's French Canadians. Colchester's Quebec-born population was more stable than that of its neighbor, Burlington, and many of its immigrants owned property, giving them a vested interest in the affairs of both the town and the village of Winooski Falls. Also, there were very few Irish in the town of Colchester, only 472 by 1870. French Canadians formed the only major ethnic group in the community besides native-born Americans, and they could create a counterbalance to the traditional Yankee political power. In Burlington, on the other hand, there were 3,150 Irish, twenty percent of the city's population. Irish immigrants, with their understanding of English language and legal traditions, their own sense of ethnic solidarity, and their animosity toward the French Canadians dating back to the founding of St. Joseph's parish,



*Francis LeClair, Jr.*  
 From J.-F. Audet,  
 Histoire de la  
 Congrégation  
 Canadienne de  
 Winooski au  
 Vermont, 1906.

represented a separate political force, which potentially served to dilute the impact of any French Canadian voting bloc.<sup>64</sup>

Another possible inducement for Colchester's French Canadians to become citizens may have been the number of its own potential political leaders who lived in the town in 1870. The wealthy and dynamic Francis LeClair was only one of several such men, all of whom had come to the Burlington area before the Civil War. David Blow lists five of these early immigrants who were active in local politics between 1867 and 1900: Peter Desautels, Charles LaFountain, Joseph Niquette, Bruno Pepin, and Peter Villmaire.<sup>65</sup> As a group, these men were not exceptionally wealthy; in 1870 only Charles LaFountain and Francis LeClair had real estate worth over two thousand dollars or a personal estate worth over eight hundred dollars. What they had instead was experience in leadership, organization, and community service. They had been trustees or building committee members for St. Joseph's church and were active in the affairs of St. François Xavier parish. It is also likely that they had been active members of St. Joseph's and the St. Jean-Baptiste societies.<sup>66</sup> In addition, all but Peter Desautels had been living in the area long enough and

were old enough to have encountered the ideas of *Patriote* exiles like Ludger Duvernay who had both explained and praised American republicanism in his newspaper.<sup>67</sup> From such sources these young immigrants may well have gained an understanding of the American government and an appreciation for the value of political activity.

While it is impossible to measure the influence of these Québécois reformers on Vermont's French Canadian community, it is apparent that their legacy of political activism lived on in the careers of these and other of Colchester's French Canadians. Beginning in 1852 with the election of Francis LeClair as a selectman for the town of Colchester, they applied the skills and self-confidence gained within their own ethnic institutions and, for the next years, entered both village and town government in such capacities as town clerk, auditor, selectman, fire warden, and village trustee.<sup>68</sup> In fact, Father Audet claimed that "there have always been Canadians at the head of both the Village of Winooski Falls and the town of Colchester."<sup>69</sup> By comparison, Burlington citizens did not elect their first French Canadian to a local position until 1873, when Alphonse Gravel was chosen alderman of the second ward, and in the next twelve years only had a total of four French Canadians in any city office, elected or appointed.<sup>70</sup>

The level of political activity demonstrated by Colchester's French Canadians, both in becoming citizens and in serving in local government, contrasts sharply to that of Burlington's émigrés and also to the general political values of the post-war French Canadians. In his "Profile of Franco-American Political Attitudes," Norman Sepenuk has summarized these values and their historical roots:

In sum, the many thousands of *habitants* who migrated to New England mill towns during the years following the Civil War brought with them the attitudes of a rural, clergy-oriented, anti-intellectual, anti-state society which did not see political action as very necessary and did not view politics as an honorable way to spend one's life. This, then, is the political ethos which the French Canadian *habitants* passed on to their Franco-American descendants in New England.<sup>71</sup>

Sepenuk's description of French Canadian political mentality seems a far cry from the opinions and actions of the Quebec *Patriotes* in the legislative assembly of Lower Canada. It seems an equally inappropriate description of the Quebec émigrés living in Colchester who, in 1874, elected Charles LaFountain as their representative to the Vermont House of Representatives, the first state legislator of French Canadian descent in Vermont's history.<sup>72</sup> By comparison, it was not until the late 1890s that every other New England state had at least one Franco-American in its legislature.<sup>73</sup>

The political activism, persistence, and high rate of property owner-

ship of the French Canadians in post-war Colchester, Vermont, are remarkable because they were uncommon among French Canadians living in the United States in the latter part of the nineteenth century. Even more surprising is that the community in which they lived, Winooski Falls, was in many ways similar to the industrial centers that attracted most of the post-war Québécois immigrants. In the course of the 1860s, while Burlington had focused its economic development around mercantile business and small industries, Winooski had become a typical New England mill town, dominated by a large, absentee-owned textile operation, the Burlington Woolen Mill Company. By 1870, Burlington could no longer hold onto most of the Quebec émigrés who passed through the city on their way to communities with more promise of employment for young sons and daughters as well as full-grown men. By contrast, Winooski with the woolen mill, offered ample unskilled jobs to many family members. Throughout much of the nineteenth century, a steady stream of new French Canadian immigrants came to Winooski and stayed.

In many ways Winooski was like other New England mill towns, but in one important way it was different, and this difference helps to explain the peculiar stability and activism of its otherwise poor and unskilled French Canadian population. Along with the steady factory employment of a textile mill, Winooski Falls also had a group of older, established Quebec-born residents with experience and leadership ability, which they used in service to their community — as members of the local government, as parish trustees, as church benefactors, even as local businessmen who catered to the particular needs of the immigrant population. This combination of available jobs and active French Canadian leadership made Winooski a place where an unusual number of immigrants from Quebec chose to stay, to purchase property, and to have their own representatives in local and state government.

#### NOTES

<sup>1</sup> Joseph Amrhein, "Burlington, Vermont: The Economic History of a Northern New England City" (Ph.D. diss., New York University School of Business Administration, 1958), 70.

<sup>2</sup> In 1862 the Burlington Mill Company was purchased by a group of Boston investors who changed the name of the corporation to the Burlington Woolen Mill Company. See David Blow, "Industrial Fluctuations in Winooski," *Chittenden* 5 (January 1974): 32.

<sup>3</sup> Mason Wade, "French and French Canadians in the U.S.," in *A Franco-American Overview*, ed. Madeleine Giguère, 4 vols. (Cambridge, Mass.: National Assessment and Dissemination Center for Bilingual/Bicultural Education, 1981), 3: 40.

<sup>4</sup> Peter Haebler, "Habitants in Holyoke: the Development of the French Canadian Community in a Massachusetts City, 1865-1910," (Ph.D. diss., University of New Hampshire, 1976), 54-55.

<sup>5</sup> Robert Rumilly presents the highest number of French Canadian soldiers in the American Civil War, 50,000. Yolande Lavoie, who has done research on patterns of emigration from Quebec, suggests that there were from 30,000 to 40,000 Québécois in the war. However, Mason Wade states that 20,000 is "probably nearer the truth." See Robert Rumilly, *Histoire des Franco-Américains* (Montreal: L'Union Saint-Jean-Baptiste d'Amérique, 1958), 37-38; Yolande Lavoie, *L'Émigration des Québécois aux États-*

*Unis de 1840 à 1930* (Quebec: Éditeur Officiel, 1979), 4; Mason Wade, "French and French Canadians in the U.S.," 40.

<sup>4</sup> W. S. Rann, *History of Chittenden County, Vermont* (Syracuse, N.Y.: D. Mason and Co., 1886), 330-336.

<sup>5</sup> Lavoie, *L'Émigration des Québécois aux États-Unis*, 21.

<sup>6</sup> Wade, "French and French Canadians in the U.S.," 40.

<sup>7</sup> Lavoie, *L'Émigration des Québécois aux États-Unis*, 25.

<sup>8</sup> Robert Rumlly, *Histoire des Franco-Américains*, 40.

<sup>9</sup> Alexandre Belisle, *Histoire de la Presse Franco-Américaine* (Worcester, Mass.: Ateliers Typographiques de *L'Opinion Publique*, 1911), 63-64.

<sup>10</sup> Wade, "French and French Canadians in the U.S.," 40-41.

<sup>11</sup> Iris Saunders Poole, "Quebec to 'Little Canada': the Coming of the French Canadians to New England in the Nineteenth Century," in *The Aliens: A History of Ethnic Minorities in America*, ed. Leonard Dinnerstein and Frederic Cople Jaher (New York: Appleton-Century-Crofts, 1970), 207.

<sup>12</sup> William MacDonald, "The French Canadians in New England," in *A Franco-American Overview*, ed. Madeleine Giguère, 4 vols. (Cambridge, Mass.: National Assessment and Dissemination Center for Bilingual/Bicultural Education, 1981), 3: 11.

<sup>13</sup> Wade, "French and French Canadians in the U.S.," 41.

<sup>14</sup> T. D. Seymour Bassett, "Urban Penetration of Rural Vermont, 1840-80" (Ph.D. diss., Harvard University, 1952), 580.

<sup>15</sup> Amrhein, "Burlington, Vermont," 74-75.

<sup>16</sup> There is no information on the employment of children between the ages of ten and fourteen in the 1860 census.

<sup>17</sup> Bassett, "Urban Penetration of Rural Vermont," 301-302.

<sup>18</sup> James Elliott Defebaugh, *History of the Lumber Industry of America*, 2 vols. (Chicago: American Lumberman, 1906-1907), 1 (1906): 171.

<sup>19</sup> Amrhein, "Burlington, Vermont," 245.

<sup>20</sup> *Ibid.*, 210.

<sup>21</sup> *Ibid.*, 241.

<sup>22</sup> One reason the Burlington Woolen Mill found the transition to a peacetime economy so easy was that by 1865 police forces in most cities were organized into municipal departments and wore uniforms. According to James F. Richardson in his history of police protection in America, "as the number of the unskilled and propertyless rose with immigration and farm-to-city movement, people who believed in the values of efficiency and authority succeeded in imposing uniforms upon policemen, servants and railroad conductors. New York's police became uniformed in 1853, Philadelphia's in 1860 and Chicago's in 1861." See James F. Richardson, *Urban Police in the United States* (Port Washington, N.Y.: Kennikat Press, 1974), 28; Rann, *History of Chittenden County*, 464.

<sup>23</sup> Rann, *History of Chittenden County*, 464.

<sup>24</sup> Bassett, "Urban Penetration of Rural Vermont," 633.

<sup>25</sup> Rann, *History of Chittenden County*, 440-442.

<sup>26</sup> *Ibid.*, 561.

<sup>27</sup> David Blow, "The Establishment and Erosion of French Canadian Culture in Winooski, Vermont, 1867-1900," *Vermont History* 41 (Winter 1975): 59.

<sup>28</sup> Blow, "Industrial Fluctuations in Winooski," 32.

<sup>29</sup> The estimate of \$1.09 as an average daily wage for the Burlington Woolen Mill Company is based on the total annual wages paid by the company in 1870 divided by the number of employees in 1870, 512. The annual per capita wages, \$327.16, were then divided by a fifty-week year at six days per week, or three hundred days. (The Woolen Mill was in operation 11½ months in 1870.) The \$1.09 average daily wage included payment to women and children under sixteen as well as men. In 1870, women made up thirty-six percent and children, twelve percent of the woolen mill's work force, while men made up the other fifty-two percent. Men were paid more than both women and children, so \$1.09 would be an underestimation of their wages. See U.S. Bureau of the Census, 1870, Manuscript Returns, Colchester, Vermont; Amrhein, "Burlington, Vermont," 72.

<sup>30</sup> Testimony before the Vermont House Committee on the ten-hour day revealed conflicting statements about the length of the work day. A representative of the operatives stated that mill operatives worked fourteen hours a day, while F. C. Kennedy, proprietor of the mill, claimed that "twelve hours work per day has been the established rule." See *Burlington (Vermont) Daily Free Press*, 26 November 1867.

<sup>31</sup> Textile mills did not necessarily run non-stop throughout the year. They closed down when supplies of raw materials were interrupted, as was the case during the Civil War, or when demand dropped for their goods. However, factories, protected from the elements, ran in any weather and throughout the winter months. Relative to day labor, therefore, factory work was steadier employment. In 1870, the Burlington Woolen Mill Company was in operation eleven-and-one-half months. See U.S. Bureau of the Census, 1870, Manuscript Returns, Colchester, Vermont.

<sup>34</sup> Frances H. Early, "The French Canadian Family Economy and Standard-of-Living in Lowell, Massachusetts, 1870," in *The American Family in Social-Historical Perspective*, 3rd ed., ed. Michael Gordon (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1983).

<sup>35</sup> Bassett, "Urban Penetration of Rural Vermont," 584.

<sup>36</sup> *Ibid.*, 584b.

<sup>37</sup> Blow, "The Establishment and Erosion of French Canadian Culture," 62-63.

<sup>38</sup> Jean-Frédéric Audet, *Histoire de la Congrégation Canadienne de Winooski au Vermont* (Montréal: Imprimerie de l'Institution des Sourds-Muet, 1906), 45-51.

<sup>39</sup> In keeping with his commitment to the idea of separate parishes for different ethnic and linguistic groups, Bishop de Goësbriand authorized the formation of St. Stephen's parish for the English-speaking Catholics of Winooski in 1872, only four years after the founding of St. François Xavier parish. See Rann, *History of Chittenden County*, 528-529.

<sup>40</sup> Blow, "The Establishment and Erosion of French Canadian Culture," 64-65.

<sup>41</sup> *Ibid.*, 70; Joseph N. Couture, "New England's First National Parish; or, the History of St. Joseph's of Burlington, Vermont" (M.A. thesis, St. Michael's College, Winooski, Vermont, n.d.), 30-31.

<sup>42</sup> David Blow, "Francis LeClair, Jr., Winooski Merchant," *Chittenden County Historical Society* 6 (June 1971): [1-2].

<sup>43</sup> Jean Audet, translated by Blow in "Francis LeClair, Jr.," [1].

<sup>44</sup> Blow, "Francis LeClair, Jr.," [2].

<sup>45</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>46</sup> Audet, *Histoire de La Congrégation Canadienne de Winooski*, 43.

<sup>47</sup> W. S. Rann, Father Jean Audet, and David Blow all make the comment that Francis LeClair offered generous credit terms to those to whom he sold houses. See Rann, *History of Chittenden County*, 561; Audet, *Histoire de la Congrégation Canadienne de Winooski*, 43; Blow, "Francis LeClair, Jr.," [2].

<sup>48</sup> Early, "The French Canadian Family Economy," 493.

<sup>49</sup> Information about French Canadian population and property ownership in selected New England cities in 1890 taken from MacDonald, "The French Canadians in New England," 6-15.

<sup>50</sup> Podesa, "Quebec to 'Little Canada,'" 118.

<sup>51</sup> William Bayard Hale, quoted in Podesa, "Quebec to 'Little Canada,'" 118.

<sup>52</sup> MacDonald, in his study of French Canadians in New England in the 1880s and 1890s, cites Grosvenordale, Connecticut, as an example of a town where the mill owners required their employers to live in company-owned housing. As a result of this policy, only twelve of the 2,400 French Canadians who lived in the town owned any property. See MacDonald, "The French Canadians in New England," 14.

<sup>53</sup> Bassett, "Urban Penetration of Rural Vermont," 585-586.

<sup>54</sup> Blow, "Industrial Fluctuations in Winooski," 32.

<sup>55</sup> The other "road to success" that Thernstrom identified was occupational mobility. From his research on the working class of Newburyport in the mid-nineteenth century, Thernstrom concluded that for workers occupational mobility seldom occurred within the same generation but was evident across generations. While a father usually remained a laborer all his life, for example, a son might open a small grocery store. See Stephan Thernstrom, *Poverty and Progress: Social Mobility in a Nineteenth Century City* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1964), 68-70.

<sup>56</sup> MacDonald, "The French Canadians in New England," 14.

<sup>57</sup> MacDonald pointed out that when French Canadians planned to return to Quebec, they would save money to bring back with them. Those who purchased real estate in the United States, on the other hand, put their savings into their new homes, which suggests that they no longer planned to return to Canada. See MacDonald, "The French Canadians in New England," 13-14.

<sup>58</sup> To the immigrant living in the United States, political activity was often a good way to benefit himself and his ethnic group. Philip Taylor in his study of American immigrants, *The Distant Magnet*, mentioned both direct payments and promises of "employment on the city payroll" as tangible rewards to those who campaigned and voted for local party leaders. In smaller towns like Winooski, if one ethnic group constituted the majority of the population, then politically active members of that group could hold offices in local government. See Philip Taylor, *The Distant Magnet: European Emigration to the U.S.A.* (New York: Harper & Row, 1972), 263-264.

<sup>59</sup> Leonard Dinnerstein and David Reimers, in their book *Ethnic Americans*, commented that French Canadians were tenacious in holding onto their cultural heritage, in part because they could "travel easily back and forth across the Canadian-American border." See Leonard Dinnerstein and David M. Reimers, *Ethnic Americans: A History of Immigration and Assimilation*, 2nd ed. (New York: Harper and Row, 1982), 137.

<sup>60</sup> MacDonald, "The French Canadians in New England," 15.

<sup>61</sup> By comparison, Humbert S. Nelli, in his study of Italian immigrants in Chicago, found that 28.3% of Chicago's Italians were naturalized citizens in 1910, thirty years after Italians first arrived in the city in large numbers. Italians and French Canadians both came from rural Catholic settings and arrived



in the United States poor and often illiterate. Nevertheless, Italians were three times as likely as French Canadians to become citizens. See Norman Sepenuk, "A Profile of Franco-American Attitudes in New England," in *A Franco-American Overview*, ed. Madeleine Giguère, 4 vols. (Cambridge, Mass.: National Assessment and Dissemination Center for Bilingual/Bicultural Education, 1981), 3: 24; Humbert S. Nelli, *The Italians in Chicago, 1880-1930: A Study in Ethnic Mobility* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1970), 116.

<sup>42</sup> MacDonald, "The French Canadians in New England," 15.

<sup>43</sup> U.S. Bureau of Immigration, Naturalization Records, Chittenden County, Vermont, 1870-1876, in Vermont, Division of Public Records, Middlesex, Vt.

<sup>44</sup> Dinnerstein, Nichols, and Reimers, in *Natives and Strangers*, commented that "no group proved more sophisticated or adroit in manipulating the system to its own needs than the Irish who had a keen understanding of political power and how to use it." The authors attributed the Irish immigrants' political savvy to the understanding of Anglo-Saxon law that they acquired when the law was used against them by the British. At the same time, Norman Sepenuk noted that the pattern of French Canadian-Irish conflicts over the formation of French national parishes persisted throughout the nineteenth century in New England and tended to make the French Canadians reluctant to enter politics anywhere where the Irish had established a political base. See Leonard Dinnerstein, Roger Nichols, and David M. Reimers, *Natives and Strangers: Ethnic Groups and the Building of America* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1979), 175; Sepenuk, "A Profile of Franco-American Political Attitudes," 215.

<sup>45</sup> Blow, "The Establishment and Erosion of French Canadian Culture," 71.

<sup>46</sup> *Ibid.*, 70.

<sup>47</sup> Among the numerous French Canadians in Colchester who served in local government between 1852 and 1900 were Francis LeClair, village trustee and town selectman; Bruno Pepin, village trustee and fire warden; Peter Villmaire, village trustee and fire warden; Charles LaFountain, town clerk and village trustee; Joseph Niquette, village trustee; Louis Baraby, fire warden. See Blow, "The Establishment and Erosion of French Canadian Culture," 71; Rann, *History of Chittenden County*, 530-533.

<sup>48</sup> Audet, *Histoire de la Congrégation Canadienne de Winooski*, 168.

<sup>49</sup> For information on local political and administrative offices held by French Canadians in Burlington, see the *Burlington City Directory and Business Advertiser*, 1867 to 1885 and Rann, *History of Chittenden County*, 530-533.

<sup>50</sup> No membership lists remain for either the Saint Jean-Baptiste or the St. Joseph Society. It seems likely, however, that men who took leadership roles in parish affairs would also have joined these organizations since the French Catholic church and the fraternal organization were both valued institutions in the ethnic community and often worked together on community projects.

<sup>51</sup> Sepenuk, "A Profile of Franco-American Political Attitudes," 223.

<sup>52</sup> John M. Comstock, *A List of the Principal Civil Officers of Vermont from 1777 to 1918* (St. Albans, Vt.: St. Albans Messenger Co., 1918), 111.

<sup>53</sup> Sepenuk, "A Profile of Franco-American Political Attitudes," 215.