

The American-Canadian Genealogical Society Library

By Sherry L. Gould

French Canadians have always been an integral part of the history of the Granite State. Many families of New Hampshire are comprised entirely of American Canadian ancestry. The history of the struggle between the colonies of New France and New Hampshire is well documented and goes beyond the scope of this article, but relations between these two areas eventually mended and French Canadian migration to the United States soared from 1860 to 1900¹.

An article entitled “[French Canadians in New England](#),” by Prosper Bender, originally published in the *New England Magazine* in 1892, ² describes the “noiseless” migration of large numbers of French Canadians into New England. New Hampshire was no stranger to this migration phenomenon. The mills in New Hampshire towns and cities were eager for the labor this new population provided and they actively recruited French Canadians to resettle there³. And settle they did, in large numbers. French Canadians are the third largest ancestry group in New England, following English and Irish, ⁴ and according to the last two New Hampshire censuses, this finding holds true in the Granite State. Three interesting New Hampshire Franco-American portraits can be found on the American Life Histories: The Federal Writers' Project website.⁵ These are "Franco-American Grandmother," "Reminiscences of M. Henry Lemay," and "The French Canadian Textile Worker." To view these stories click on the "List all New Hampshire Titles" link from the [New Hampshire](#) page of the website. For more on the conditions in Canada that contributed to the immigration of Franco-Americans see “[The French Canadian Peasantry](#),” by Prosper Bender⁶.

New Hampshire researchers have an incredible resource in the [American-Canadian Genealogical Society \(ACGS\)](#), and its [library](#). The ACGS Library, located at 4 Elm Street in Manchester, New Hampshire, is open Wednesday and Friday from 9 a.m. to 9 p.m. and Saturday from 9 a.m. to 4 p.m. Professor Roger W. Lawrence (St. Anselm College) and Lucille Caron-Lagasse founded the Society in 1973. The accomplishments of this society as it relates to research holdings in such a time are phenomenal.

The Society maintains one of the largest resource facilities for French Canadian research in the United States. While the library keeps an extensive collection of materials from outside the state, the purpose of this article is to identify resources that are specific to New Hampshire research. It is important to note that a study of the migratory patterns of early American Canadians shows frequent movement between the New England states and Canada. The availability of records in other areas of popular Franco migration is a great asset to the researcher in tracing their French Canadian lines back.

The staff volunteers are very willing and capable in assisting the researcher with their family search. Their collective knowledge and experience in the subject matter and their familiarity with the library's holdings have saved many the family historian hours of needless run around. They are very adept at “translating” the slaughter of French surnames by English speaking clerks in early New Hampshire times, which has led to many variations of spelling and pronunciation of the French family names we find today. As with any operation run by volunteers, the library hours of operation may not always be consistent. Visitors traveling any distance should call ahead to ensure that the library will be open. It is not unusual to close early in bad weather, for example. The library's phone number is 603-622-1554.

The ACGS Library's most valuable resource is their collection of parish repertories. The New Hampshire church record collection is housed in twenty-seven feet of stack space in the facility. These records cover the period from the second half of the nineteenth century through modern times. Additional repertories include those for the provinces of Québec, Ontario, and New Brunswick and the states of Maine, Massachusetts, and Rhode Island. They have limited resources for Alberta, Manitoba, New York, Louisiana, and many other states and provinces.

Their microfilm and microfiche holdings include vital records of New Hampshire to 1900. This gives the researcher with a day job an opportunity to search the New Hampshire vital record collection two evenings a week and Saturdays, whereas the State Office in Concord is only open during business hours. Among other holdings are the vital records of Vermont 1760-1908; index and registers of births and marriages in Massachusetts 1840-1895; the Loiselle file of Québécois marriages; the Moncton index; the St. Albans, Vermont Index of Border Crossings, and registers of Vital Statistics of South Eastern New Brunswick.

The Obituary Project started in 1979 and includes all obituaries from the *Manchester Union Leader*, the *Concord Monitor*, and the *Nashua Transcript* newspapers. The obituaries are photocopied and each year is bound in a three-ring binder and indexed. Collections for many pertinent out of state papers are also found at the library to assist the researcher with wandering family members. An important resource is Lowell Deaths from 1900, copied from the city clerk's report each year. With Lowell just over the border in Massachusetts, many families are tied to New Hampshire research. City directories for Manchester date back to 1866 and for Concord back to 1880. A growing collection of other city directories and town reports for many New Hampshire towns may be found there, as well as many from out of state.

Valuable reference anthologies include Arsenault's *Histoire et Genealogie des Acadiens*, Bergeron's *Le grand réarrangement des Acadiens*, the Drouin Institute's *Dictionnaire National des Canadiens Français, 1608-1760*, Jetté's *Dictionnaire généalogique des familles du Québec des origines à 1730*, Tanguay's *Dictionnaire Généalogique des Familles Canadiennes depuis la Fondation de la Colonie Jusqu'à nos Jours*, and White's *Dictionnaire Généalogique des Familles Acadiennes*. The *Relations des Jésuites 1610-1791* (Reuben Gold Thwaites: 1896) is an invaluable indexed collection of period Jesuit diaries. Most of these invaluable French Canadian resources are covered in more detail in Michael J. Leclerc's article, "[Introduction to French Canadian Resources](#)."

The usual assortment of family histories/genealogies (600+), how-to books, and general history books can also be found on the library shelves. Members of the Society donate their research findings to the library and these holdings are on file in the facility. The Society publishes a quarterly journal distributed to all members that includes articles of family research contributed by members, book reviews, queries, and items for sale by the Society (including many of their repertoires), to name but a few items. An extensive collection of periodicals from societies all over the United States, nearly all the Québec societies, some from the maritime societies (Nova Scotia, New Brunswick, Prince Edward Island), and even a couple from societies in France may also be found.

If you are among the group of New Hampshire's French-Canadian descendants, you cannot miss the opportunities that await you to build on your family history at the American-Canadian Genealogical Society Library in Manchester!

1. Chartier, Armand, *Histoire Des Franco-Américains*, (Québec: Septentrion, 1991) 13.
2. Bender, Prosper, "French Canadians in New England," *The New England Magazine* Vol 12, Issue 5, p. 569-577 (July 1892).
3. Phillipe Lemay, *The French Canadian Textile Worker*, no. 1801 of American Life History: New Hampshire Writers Project, Library of Congress, 1938-9.
4. Brault, Gerald J., *The French-Canadian Heritage in New England*, (Lebanon, NH: University Press of New England, 1986). [More information](#).
5. [American Life Histories Writers' Project](#) was compiled between 1936 and 1940 and is housed in the Library of Congress. The staff of the Folklore Project of the Federal Writers' Project wrote these life histories for the U.S. Works Progress (later Work Projects) Administration (WPA) from 1936-1940. The Library of Congress collection includes 2,900 documents representing the work of over 300 writers from 24 states. Typically 2,000-15,000 words in length, the documents consist of drafts and revisions, varying in form from narrative to dialogue to report to case history. The histories describe the informant's family education, income, occupation, political views, religion and mores, medical needs, diet, and miscellaneous observations. Pseudonyms are often substituted for individuals and places named in the narrative texts.
6. Bender, Prosper, "The French Canadian Peasantry," *The New England Magazine* Vol 11, Issue 1, p. 109-121 (September 1891).