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Community-Building in Uncertain Times: The French Canadians of Burlington and Colchester, 1850-1860

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By BETSY BEATTIE

The 1850s in Burlington and Colchester were years of economic change and insecurity. New industries rose tentatively out of the dislocations brought about by the arrival of the railroad, the changing lumber industry, and the failure of the Burlington Mill Company, which in 1850 had been the largest employer in the area. These new enterprises held out the promise of rekindled, redirected industrial development for the region, but by 1860 most of them were struggling just to survive. The financial panic of 1857 and the reduction of tariffs on textiles further retarded growth.

For French Canadians in the Burlington area, the future seemed even less secure. They had been entering Burlington and Colchester in sizable numbers since the 1820s and 1830s, and by 1850 totaled more than one thousand, the largest concentration of French Canadians in the state. While their numbers increased seventy-one percent across the decade of the 1850s, their overall economic status apparently declined, and the changing composition of the population caused by the constant influx and outflow of residents added to the general sense of instability. In spite of these serious problems, the decade of the 1850s was a momentous one for the area's French Canadians, a period during which they evolved from an ill-defined cluster of settlers to a self-conscious ethnic community. In the course of

these years, they founded institutions of cultural preservation — a French Catholic church, French language schools, fraternal, and mutual aid societies — with assistance from some church leaders but mostly by their own motivation and efforts.

FAITH REAFFIRMED: EARLY FRENCH CANADIAN RELIGIOUS LIFE AND
THE FOUNDING OF ST. JOSEPH'S PARISH IN BURLINGTON.

In the minds of the Catholic clergy in Quebec, it was axiomatic that those who abandoned their ancestral lands for brighter economic horizons in America would lose their faith as well. It simply could not survive transplantation to English-speaking, republican, and fiercely Protestant New England. Yet whenever a Canadian missionary or bishop visited the French Canadian settlements along Lake Champlain, he met French-speaking Catholics who welcomed his arrival and attended his services. As early as 1815, Bishop Plessis of Quebec and Father François A. Matignon came to the Burlington area and found about a hundred immigrant settlers who not only greeted them with enthusiasm but even asked the bishop to send a Canadian priest on a permanent basis.¹ At that time all of New England fell under one diocese, headquartered in Boston, and the bishop there could not spare a priest for such a remote and sparsely populated part of his district. Instead, he arranged with the church hierarchy in Quebec for a missionary priest to come from Canada from time to time to minister to the religious needs of the Canadians living in the Champlain valley. Abbé Pierre-Marie Mignault served the French Canadian settlers of Vermont in that capacity for the next forty years and found "the people of that district very eager" for his visits.² Even when infrequently served by a priest of their own nationality, these early immigrants held onto their faith with tenacity.

Bishop Benedict Joseph Fenwick, the second bishop of the Boston diocese, sympathized with the Vermont French Canadians' desire for French-speaking clergy. In 1828 he asked the bishops of both Montreal and Quebec if they would send priests to minister to their compatriots now living in New England.³ But members of the Quebec clergy, fearful of the weakening of the French church in Canada, had little motivation to encourage more emigration by supporting such churches in America. For the first half of the nineteenth century they resisted sending Canadian priests to serve these Quebec émigrés on a permanent basis. Some Canadian-born priests came as missionaries anyway, among them Father Zephyrin Levesque, who served French Canadians in central Massachusetts in the 1840s.⁴ In general, however, the French Canadian Catholics in New England, under the jurisdiction of the American church, had to attend churches served by English-speaking clergy.

The French Canadians living in the Burlington area were no exception. In the early 1830s the first Catholic parish of the region was established with the building of St. Mary's Church. The priest appointed to serve the parish was Father Jeremiah O'Callaghan, a native of Ireland.⁵ Father O'Callaghan did not ignore the needs of his French parishioners; he operated a parochial school for both French and Irish children and married and baptized the faithful of both nationalities.⁶ On the other



*Bishop Benedict Joseph
Fenwick, 1782-1846*

hand, he apparently looked with some scorn on the average French Canadian parishioner, especially those without money to donate to church collections. On one occasion, having received a Christmas contribution from Francis LeClair, one of the wealthiest French Canadians of the area, the priest commented to the assembled congregation, "Frank is a Frenchman, but not like the rest; he is a gentleman."⁷ Such remarks could not have won him much support among the Quebec émigrés who comprehended the meaning of his words.

The greatest problem for the French Canadians, however, was that most did not understand Father O'Callaghan's English, and he, in turn, understood none of their French. He could neither hear their confessions nor counsel them in their daily lives as the priests of the Quebec parishes had done.⁸ Even the liturgical practices of the American Catholic Church were unfamiliar and unappealing. In an effort to remove some of the more "popish" pageantry and thereby reduce anti-Catholic prejudice

among New England Protestants, the American clergy had dropped certain of the more solemn rites of the Mass such as the use of Gregorian chant.⁹ It soon became clear to the French Canadian community that the establishment of St. Mary's parish did not satisfy their spiritual needs. Even the periodic visits of Father Mignault were not enough to curb their desire for their own priest and their own services.

In the late 1830s the events of the failed rebellions in Canada brought two men to the Burlington area who offered to help these French Canadians obtain their first permanent French-speaking priest. Ludger Duvernay, the journalist, and R. S. M. Bouchette, a young lawyer, were both personifications of the belief that political liberalism and an abiding faith in Catholicism could coexist. They were anxious to help their Burlington coreligionists and, following their years as *Patriote* activists, were veterans in the skill of petitioning higher authorities. After St. Mary's Church had burned in 1838 and a new church had been dedicated in the fall of 1841, a group of French-speaking parishioners gathered on October 12, 1841, for a special meeting chaired by Duvernay. At that meeting, they "resolved to erect a church of their own and to obtain a priest acquainted with their language."¹⁰

Without the support of Father O'Callaghan and in the face of opposition from Irish parishioners, the group agreed to send a petition, carefully worded by lawyer Bouchette, to Bishop Fenwick in Boston requesting a French-speaking priest. Sympathetic to their cause, Fenwick wrote Bishop Ignace Bourget of Montreal asking him to send a Canadian priest to serve the French Canadians of Burlington and the surrounding towns. For a time Bourget balked at the idea, even suggesting that Fenwick request a priest from France rather than Canada. In February of 1842, however, he agreed and authorized Abbé François Ancé to come to Vermont.¹¹ Elated, the French-speaking community built a small church for its own use on North Gough (now Prospect) Street in Burlington, near the bridge to Winooski Falls. It was the first French Canadian church in New England.¹²

Neither the new church nor its priest lasted long. In 1848 Bishop Fenwick removed Father Ancé from his duties after the young priest had harbored three fugitives from Canadian justice, and Ancé was ordered to return to Montreal.¹³ Again the French Canadians petitioned the bishop of Boston, this time pleading that Ancé be reinstated. Fenwick refused. Without a priest the church building was useless, so it was sold to a local businessman for use as a store. Reluctantly, the French-speaking Catholics postponed their plans for a separate parish and returned to Father O'Callaghan's church.¹⁴

In the spring of 1850 they tried again. That year Abbé Mignault, who

still occasionally visited Vermont, brought with him another Canadian priest, Father Joseph Quevillon of Montreal. The arrival of a new priest from Quebec rekindled hope for a new parish. On April 28, a group of three hundred French Canadians held a meeting chaired by Abbé Mignault and drafted yet another petition to the Boston diocese requesting a permanent French-speaking priest and a separate parish. At the same time they formed a committee to select a possible site for a church and chose an unused portion of the land deeded to St. Mary's parish. As in past years, the Irish protested. They did not want to lose parishioners, and they justly claimed that land deeded to St. Mary's Church was for all Catholics, not just those who spoke French. But by now the Canadians were determined to have their own church. They abandoned claims to the St. Mary's land and purchased another plot at the end of Gough Street where the church could easily serve the Québécois of both Burlington and Colchester.¹⁵

Bishop John Bernard Fitzpatrick, the new Boston prelate, granted the request of the petitioners to build a new church, with Father Quevillon as its pastor,¹⁶ and the French Canadian community devoted the summer and fall of 1850 to raising revenues. French Canadian women in Burlington and Colchester were probably responsible for organizing church suppers, bazaars, picnics, card parties, and concerts to earn money for the church construction.¹⁷ Meanwhile, the men demonstrated their skills as joiners, masons, and carpenters in building this symbol of ethnic pride. At the same time the project also gave fellow French Canadian craftsmen and store owners an economic boost.¹⁸ The fruit of their labors was a brick and stone structure seventy-five feet long, forty feet wide and thirty feet high.¹⁹ On June 1, 1851, the completed building was consecrated as St. Joseph's Church and dedicated to that first patron saint of Canada.

The tradesmen, laborers, their wives and families, whose persistence and hard work built St. Joseph's church, did not realize it at the time, but their local achievement had far-reaching implications both for the American Catholic church and later immigrants. In founding a separate French church, these French Canadians had established the precedent of the ethnic-based or "national" parish.²⁰ Traditionally, parishes had been geographically defined districts, each of which was served by a separate church. Whenever the number of parishioners required it, the parish was divided into two or more units and churches provided for these new districts. St. Joseph's parish, however, served French Canadian communicants from all around the Burlington area and competed directly with St. Mary's Church for parishioners. The lines of separation were cultural and linguistic rather than geographical.

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In 1853 Burlington became the seat of a new diocese for the state of Vermont and Louis de Goësbriand, its bishop. Under de Goësbriand, the establishment of national parishes spread throughout Vermont and New England. A Frenchman himself, de Goësbriand was firmly committed to the concept of language-based parishes, believing that those who were taught religion in their native language would be less likely to abandon



Parishioners constructed St. Joseph's church in 1850-51 on Gough Street in Burlington. Around 1907 the structure was dismantled and rebuilt on Flynn Avenue where today it serves as the church for St. Anthony's parish. Courtesy of St. Joseph's Church, Burlington, Vermont.

the faith of their fathers or to be converted to Protestantism.²¹ Through his encouragement and the efforts of French Canadian communities throughout the Northeast, the founding of a national parish became a common occurrence; by 1890 there were seventy-four French-language parishes in New England alone.²² The American Catholic hierarchy was not altogether enthusiastic about dividing the church into such ethnic enclaves, which seemed to place nationality above the Catholic ideal of

universality. However, by the late nineteenth century linguistic and cultural differences among American Roman Catholics were so great that at the Catholic Conference of Baltimore in 1889, church leaders could only insist that such national enclaves were "temporary expedients."²³ Meanwhile, new Catholic immigrant groups from southern and eastern Europe continued the same pattern of parish formation that the small group of determined French Canadians in Burlington and Colchester had established nearly forty years earlier.²⁴

THE ESTABLISHMENT OF OTHER FRENCH CANADIAN RELIGIOUS AND CULTURAL INSTITUTIONS.

National parishes quickly became more than places to worship in a familiar tongue. A parish characterized by ethnic homogeneity soon became the center for celebrations where the community could gather to share the traditions that had been part of their lives in the old country. In addition, the founding of a parish church led to the development of other institutions dedicated to both cultural preservation and social welfare. Between 1850 and the early 1860s, St. Joseph's parish in Burlington blossomed from a single church to a whole network of interconnected social and cultural organizations. In the spring of 1854, less than three years after the church was consecrated, seven members of the Sisters of Providence, a religious order based in Montreal, came to Burlington and established an orphan asylum, which by 1866 housed 115 children. In addition, they ran a tuition-free school for Catholic girls in the area.²⁵ In 1857 Father H. Cardinal came to St. Joseph's parish and supervised the construction of a brick schoolhouse to serve the needs of French-speaking boys and girls.²⁶ Until 1863 the priest relied for teachers on young women in the parish.²⁷ Then, through his efforts, sisters from the Daughters of the Heart of Mary came to teach in the parochial schools of the parish.²⁸ From that time, French-language Catholic education — a cornerstone of *survivance* or cultural survival — was firmly established.

Another social institution that the French Canadians established for themselves during the 1850s was a mutual aid society. Mutual aid societies, common to every immigrant group in the nineteenth century, were what Maxine Seller in her study of American immigration has labeled "American solutions to American problems."²⁹ The financial and psychological support systems of old-world villages and parishes no longer operated in the unfamiliar and impersonal setting of urban America. Families were often far from the friends and relatives whose comfort and resources had once sustained them through lean or tragic times. To compensate for the loss of traditional community support, immigrants formed organizations that provided unemployment insurance for families out of work, sickness insurance for the ill or disabled, and coverage of funeral expenses for

members who died. Monies collected from initiation fees, monthly dues, and fund-raising events supplied the revenues for the society.³⁰ In August of 1859, Burlington-area French Canadians established their first mutual aid society, *La Société Mutuelle de St. Joseph*.³¹

The typical immigrant mutual aid society was more than just a source of social welfare, however. It also became an ethnic-based fraternal organization and a place committed to upholding cultural traditions. In 1859, the Burlington-area French Canadians established another such association, a regional branch of the *Société Saint-Jean-Baptiste*. According to Robert Rumilly, in his history of French Canadians in the United States, the Burlington organization had a distinct nationalist as well as economic purpose and actively encouraged both use of the French language and preservation of Canadian traditions.³² Its motto was "Outside, English for business, but, at home, nothing but French."³³

The Saint Jean-Baptiste societies in the United States patterned themselves after the original *Société Saint-Jean-Baptiste* established in Montreal in 1834.³⁴ Members of the Burlington organization probably felt a special kinship with the parent organization, for its founder was Ludger Duvernay, the journalist who had come to Vermont and helped them establish their first French church. The original association, like Duvernay himself, was closely linked to the activities of the *Patriote* movement, but the Canadian society survived the disruption of the rebellions and afterwards became what its American counterparts also would become: an organization committed to preserving French culture in an English-speaking environment.³⁵

In America, and in the Burlington area, membership in organizations like the *Société Saint-Jean-Baptiste* and the *Société Mutuelle de St. Joseph* also provided some valuable personal experiences for its male members. It offered opportunities for leadership and achievement for individuals whose experiences in America were often in positions of subservience to Yankee employers, landowners, and businessmen. In these societies, a factory operative could become an officer and exercise his executive talents. (For example, George Consigny, a laborer in the Burlington Cotton Mill, was elected president of the *Société Mutuelle de St. Joseph* in 1869.³⁶) They also offered a place where immigrants from every stratum of the community could come together and share opinions on issues that concerned them all. From such discussions ethnic bonds were formed and a sense of political as well as cultural identity emerged. As this nascent political consciousness grew, it became what one writer has called "a constituency in search of a spokesman."³⁷ The leadership opportunities that Burlington's Saint Jean-Baptiste Society provided would eventually produce spokesmen whose experiences in this smaller, more familiar setting

would give them the self-confidence to enter the Yankee-dominated world of Vermont politics.

All the institutions that Burlington-area French Canadians established during the 1850s—a parish church, French Catholic schools and social services, mutual aid societies—worked in concert to build ethnic solidarity and to restore some of the cultural traditions of Quebec that earlier settlers had been unable to preserve for lack of numbers or institutional support. Festivals in honor of saints or religious holidays became community-wide efforts with church sponsorship and financial and organizational help from fraternal societies.³⁸ On June 24, 1869, the *Burlington Free Press* described one such celebration, a procession honoring St. Jean-Baptiste, which included a parade of religious societies and marching bands, High Mass at St. Joseph's Church, and French language speeches in front of City Hall.³⁹ Moreover, ideals promoted by one institution were reinforced by others, thus recreating to some degree the integrity of community that had been the hallmark of the rural Quebec parish.⁴⁰ Life in urban, English-speaking America was a radical change from anything the French Canadian from a small rural parish in Quebec had experienced before, bringing with it unique problems and rewards. The religious and cultural institutions that the French Canadians established helped to ease the transition to this new life for future Quebec immigrants.

OLD INDUSTRIES, NEW STARTS: THE BURLINGTON-AREA ECONOMY,
1850 TO 1860.

The founding of Franco-American institutions and the reestablishment of ethnic traditions in Burlington and Colchester took place at a critical time in the lives of French Canadians, for these cultural forms brought a sense of stability in a decade marked by change. The Burlington area moved gradually and unevenly toward industrialization during the 1850s, causing an increasing demand for employment in some sectors of the economy and a declining demand in others. However, the gradual rate of growth, even in the healthier industries, was barely able to absorb the influx of new émigrés from Quebec.

As T. D. Seymour Bassett has noted, "Vermont industry was moving ahead on the eve of the Civil War, but much of it was moving one step ahead of its creditors. Insecurity was the keynote from the processors to the machinists."⁴¹ The tenuousness of these industrial ventures derived in large part from their newness and from the uncertain economic climate of the decade. The region had weathered the arrival of the railroads, the decline of the native lumber trade, and the failure of the Burlington Mill Company; entrepreneurs had rebuilt existing businesses and developed new industries to fit the changing economy. By 1860, however, few enterprises, new or rebuilt, were yet on a secure financial footing.

The most dramatic and most promising developments involved the area's lumber business. Not long after Vermont's timber resources had been depleted, two events occurred that transformed the nature of the lumber trade in the state. First, in 1851, the canal system that connected the Richelieu River with Montreal and the vast timber reserves along the Ottawa River was finally completed.⁴² Second, in 1854 Canada and the United States signed a reciprocity treaty that established free exchange of natural products including "timber and lumber of all kinds."⁴³ In such a favorable trade environment Canadian lumber businessmen turned to the populous and industrializing United States as their primary buyer. Burlington, with its excellent harbor and direct rail links from Lake Champlain to larger northeastern cities, was in an ideal position to be a major distribution center for their timber. By the end of the decade lumber shipping and processing had become the town's most important industry.⁴⁴



Burlington's waterfront lumber industry provided jobs for many French Canadian residents in the 1850s. The city continued as one of the major lumber shipping and processing centers of North America until the late nineteenth century. Photograph c. 1875. Courtesy of Special Collections, University of Vermont Library.

Lawrence Barnes had begun the trade when he shipped the first cargo of Canadian lumber to Burlington in 1850.⁴⁵ By 1860 woodworking and lumber-related industries employed 535 individuals.⁴⁶ In the intervening years, the community witnessed the construction of lumber sheds, planing mills and new wharves, all specifically designed for unloading, sorting, and dressing lumber.⁴⁷ This boom in processing and distributing lumber also led to the development of other wood-product industries,

such as chairmaking and the manufacturing of doors and wooden furniture.⁴⁸ Altogether, in 1860 there were twelve area companies that owed their existence to Burlington's revitalized lumber trade.⁴⁹

Another boost to the region's manufacturing, particularly to its craft industries, was the construction in 1852 of the Pioneer Shops. The Pioneer Shops originally consisted of a single four-story factory, built on the waterfront near the lumber yards, and a small separate structure that housed two 750-horsepower steam engines. Designed to support a number of small industries, according to Bassett, "at fullest occupancy it rented for \$3,400 to machinists, blacksmiths and manufacturers of wrought iron axles, matches, washboards, sashes and blinds, shoetrees and lasts, and chairs."⁵⁰ In April 1858 a fire destroyed the original structure, but three two-story factories rose in its place, and in 1869 the shops were again operating successfully.⁵¹

Even the textile industries of Burlington and Colchester were holding their own by the end of the 1850s, although the decade had been rocky for both the cotton and woolen mills. The Winooski Mill Company, which had employed only seventeen operatives in 1850 and suffered a devastating fire in 1852, rebounded gradually and in 1860 had a work force of sixty-two employees and an annual production of cotton goods worth \$57,200.⁵² The larger Burlington Mill Company, which had ceased operation in November 1850, was bought by three brothers from Oxford, Massachusetts, who were experienced in the production of woolen fabric. They moved to the area and operated successfully until the textile tariff reductions of 1857 and resulting low prices forced them to turn from native Vermont wool to the purchase of Argentine wool. The imported fleeces were less expensive but often arrived matted with burrs, an obstacle they overcame by inventing a special "burr crusher." In 1860 the mill was back in full operation, employing 340 operatives and producing two thousand yards of fine woolen cloth each day.⁵³

All around the region at this time were signs of apparent prosperity and development. Yet beneath the surface of activity was a shaky foundation. In terms of real economic growth, these budding industries were merely replacements for the businesses lost in previous years. The Burlington Mill Company, for example, although growing, still had a smaller work force in 1860 than the four hundred operatives it had employed in 1850. The cotton mill had expanded its operations during the decade but was still small by textile mill standards and no competition for the larger cotton mills in southern New England. Even the small manufactures in the Pioneer Shops, although powered by steam engines, were still largely craft rather than industrial operations. Such small-scale enterprises would not be able to last for long in the face of bigger, more

mechanized producers who could manufacture similar products in greater volume and at lower costs. On the eve of the Civil War, only Burlington's thriving lumber industry seemed beyond the threat of serious competition from larger companies. Perhaps the most telling indicator of the underlying tenuousness of the region's economy was the population which, from 1850 to 1860, grew from 10,160 to only 10,754.

OLD OPPORTUNITIES, NEW ARRIVALS: THE FRENCH CANADIAN WORK FORCE, 1850 TO 1860.

U.S. census figures for 1860 in Burlington and Colchester reveal another important aspect about the area's population: its changing composition (see Table 1). When compared to 1850 census statistics, the 1860 figures reveal that while neither the total population of the region nor the Irish population grew, the number of French Canadians increased across the decade. The Irish population actually decreased slightly from 1850 to 1860 as emigration from Ireland declined and many in Burlington and Colchester at mid-century moved on to places with more job opportunities.⁵⁴ Meanwhile, native-born Vermonters continued to move away from the short growing season and uncertain economic situation of their home state to more promising farms further west or to growing cities. According to Joseph Amrhein "by 1860, 42% of all persons born in Vermont were living outside the state."⁵⁵ Only the French Canadian community grew, its population increasing 71.2 percent from 1850 to 1860, as more children were born to young French Canadian parents and émigrés continued to arrive from Quebec.

TABLE 1
French Canadian and Irish Populations of Burlington and Colchester
(combined), 1850 and 1860.

<i>Year</i>	<i>Total Population</i>	<i>French Canadians</i>		<i>Irish</i>	
		<i>N</i>	<i>%</i>	<i>N</i>	<i>%</i>
1850	10,160	1397	(13.8)	2453	(24.1)
1860	10,754	2392	(22.2)	2327	(21.6)

A review of the industries that were operating in the Burlington area in 1860 would suggest that many of the same types of employment available in 1850 still existed ten years later. Skilled labor, especially in construction and woodworking, was still in demand in the lumber yards, in factory construction, and in the Pioneer Shops. Factory operatives in the textile mills still accounted for about four hundred jobs in the area, although those positions had not attracted many French Canadians in 1850. Certainly the wharves and railroad yards provided as many or more semi-skilled and unskilled jobs as were available a decade earlier. Given a similar employment pattern it seems logical to expect that French Cana-

dians in 1860 would have made occupational choices similar to those in 1850.

Table 2 reveals a small but significant change in the employment patterns of the 1860 immigrants. While there was an increase in the number of French Canadians in both white collar and skilled labor positions across the decade, there was a decline in the percentage of French Canadian males who were employed in those positions. In fact, only two types of occupations showed an increase in the percentage of Québécois workers from 1850 to 1860: semi-skilled and unskilled laborers and factory workers. The rise was not precipitous but does represent an overall decline in occupation status for Burlington-area French Canadians. The increasing number of men working in factories is particularly telling because factory wages, already lower than wages for unskilled labor in 1850, only rose 14.7 percent while wages for day labor rose a full 66.6 percent in the same ten-year period.⁵⁶

TABLE 2
Occupational Status of French Canadian Males in Burlington and Colchester
(combined), 1850 and 1860.

<i>Type of Job</i>	<i>Number of French Canadians Employed-1850</i>		<i>Number of French Canadians Employed-1860</i>	
	<i>N</i>	<i>%</i>	<i>N</i>	<i>%</i>
Merchant	4	(1.3)	2	(0.3)
Professional	2	(0.6)	0	(0.0)
Small Business	8	(2.5)	19	(3.1)
Other White Collar	3	(0.9)	4	(0.6)
Skilled Labor	120	(38.0)	175	(28.5)
Semi/Unskilled Labor	135	(42.7)	293	(47.7)
Farm Labor	40	(12.7)	55	(9.0)
Factory Labor	4	(1.3)	60	(9.8)
Personal/Domestic Service	0	(0.0)	6	(1.0)
Total	316		614	

Another indication that the French Canadian community, while growing in size, was losing economic status is the apparent rise in the number of family members besides the father who worked outside the home. Although the 1850 census did not include occupations of daughters, the overall trend revealed in Table 3 is clear: over the decade of the 1850s there was a sharp increase in the percentage of youthful dependents who held outside employment.⁵⁷ Sons in 1860 worked primarily as factory workers and day laborers; only five of seventy were employed in white collar or skilled labor positions. Daughters were twice as likely to be employed as mill operatives as in any other jobs, although four were tailoresses and one was a teacher. As a group, then, these young people

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held the lowest-paying jobs where they learned no special skills, thus sacrificing their own future economic status to provide for the present material needs of their families. By 1860 only wives and mothers consistently remained at home, and dependence on child labor was on the rise.

TABLE 3

Sons and Daughters in French Canadian Families, Age 15 Through 19, Employed Outside the Home, Burlington and Colchester (combined), 1850 and 1860.

<i>Year</i>	<i>Total Number Age 15 through 19</i>	<i>Number Employed</i>	<i>% of Total</i>
<i>1850</i>			
Sons (only information available)	56	10	17.9
<i>1860</i>			
Daughters	83	21	24.1
Sons	92	70	76.1

Given the increasing number of French Canadian families who needed the wages of several family members to subsist, it is not surprising that average family size grew during the 1850s. The average number of children in a French Canadian family in 1860 had risen from 2.8 to 3.4 children. For wives in their thirties and forties, years when the greatest number of children were likely to have lived at home, the increase is even larger: from 3.7 to 4.4 children for wives age thirty to thirty-nine and 3.9 to 5.1 children for women age forty to forty-nine. Moreover, this increase in family size ran counter to the national trend for fertility rates for white women in the United States, which declined in the same decade.⁵⁸

These statistical trends suggest that the decade of the 1850s was one of increasing financial hardship for the French Canadian community in Burlington and Colchester in spite of the employment opportunities available throughout the period. The reasons for the changing economic situation lay beyond the borders of Vermont in Canada. Throughout the 1850s more immigrants had arrived in the Burlington area, and fewer of them came with special skills to offer. Economic and agricultural conditions in Quebec had continued to deteriorate throughout the decade as the shipbuilding industry collapsed, the wheat and potato crops failed, and the economic downturn of 1857 produced high urban unemployment.⁵⁹ In such troubled times increasing numbers of émigrés had left their homes not for the promise of better economic opportunity in a growing United States economy but purely as a matter of survival. Any job, no matter how poorly paid, was better than hunger and unemployment in French Canada.

Table 4 illustrates vividly the seriousness of the impact of new immigration on the French Canadian community in Burlington and Colchester.

TABLE 4

French Canadian Families Who Came to Burlington or Colchester Between 1850 and 1860.

<i>Town</i>	<i>Total Number of Families in 1860</i>	<i>Number of 1860 Families Who Were Listed in 1850 Census</i>		<i>Number of Families Who Arrived After 1850</i>	
		<i>N</i>	<i>%</i>	<i>N</i>	<i>%</i>
Burlington	275	38	(13.8)	237	(86.2)
Colchester	141	36	(25.5)	105	(74.5)
Total	416	74	(17.8)	342	(82.2)

According to the census, less than twenty percent of the families living in the region in 1860 had lived there ten years earlier. These statistics must be viewed as suggestive rather than absolute because census takers in the Burlington area did not know French and wrote down French names the way they thought the names sounded. As a result, spellings of names varied greatly from census to census, and figures for families who remained throughout the decade may not include some families whose names were too dissimilar in the two censuses to be detected as the same.⁶⁰ Even if the number of ten-year residents is conservative, however, the disparity between the numbers of old and new families is still great. The newly arrived French Canadians outnumbered those more well-established in the area, and fewer of these new immigrants came with training in a specific craft. Instead, they began to swell the ranks of the unskilled and factory labor forces.

Another factor influencing the composition of the Burlington-area French Canadian population was the out-migration of immigrants who had been residents in 1850. Table 5 completes the picture of the changing nature of the region's French Canadian community, because it presents the number of families who had lived in Burlington or Colchester in 1850 but who left the area sometime during the succeeding decade. Again, while the changes in spelling of names probably have led to an underestimation, the trends are striking. Nearly three of every four families in the Burlington area at mid-century were no longer there in 1860. The causes of this exodus are not clear, but there are several factors that may have contributed to it. The completion of the railroad lines from Burlington to Boston and New York in late 1849 created an easy access to larger urban areas with more job opportunities. Also, the instability of the Burlington-area economy meant an uncertain employment picture. Many immigrants may have left to find more steady work. By 1860 small enclaves of French Canadians had begun to settle in the industrial towns of central and southern New England, so the French Canadians of Burlington and Colchester had new choices for settlement where traditions and language were familiar and jobs more plentiful.⁶¹

TABLE 5
 French Canadian Families Who Left Burlington and Colchester Between 1850
 and 1860.

Town	Total Number of Families in 1850	Number of Families Listed in Both 1850 and 1860 Censuses		Number of 1850 Families Who Left Before 1860	
		N	%	N	%
		Burlington	186	38	(20.4)
Colchester	96	36	(37.5)	60	(62.5)
Total	282	74	(26.2)	208	(73.8)

Geographical mobility, made easier by the railroad and necessary by the economic instability of the early years of industrialization, characterized French Canadian settlement patterns throughout New England in this period. Peter Haebler, in his study of French Canadians in Holyoke, Massachusetts, commented on the "migratory character of the French Canadian movement" and added that many expressed a "desire to return eventually to Quebec," a feeling that would have impeded the establishment of roots in any New England community.⁶² However, to isolate the French Canadians as particularly "migratory" is to ignore the mobility that characterized the entire American population in the middle years of the nineteenth century. Land in the West attracted New England Yankees; railroad construction kept many Irish and other immigrants on the move. As employment demands fluctuated, so did the number of laborers in any one place. In his research on the town of Newburyport, Massachusetts, for example, Stephan Thernstrom found that the Panic of 1857 caused the town's population to drop by more than one thousand persons, most of whom were manual laborers.⁶³ In fact, Thernstrom discovered that "of the 2025 families recorded in 1849, only 360 [or 17.8 percent] were to be found in Newburyport in 1879."⁶⁴ Geographical mobility was the rule, not the exception, in mid-nineteenth century America; the 308 French Canadian families in Burlington and Colchester in 1850 who had gone by 1860 were just part of a whole population on the move.

With new families arriving and others leaving throughout the 1850s, the composition of the Burlington-area French Canadian community was constantly changing. While the deepening crisis in rural Quebec forced greater numbers of émigrés from Canada into the United States, the Burlington region, experiencing a decade of economic uncertainty, could not hold these émigrés for long. As the composition of the French Canadian community changed, the nature of the community also was

transformed. The new Québécois immigrants brought larger families and fewer job skills than the French Canadians had who were living in the region in 1850. Lower occupational status and more children meant a growing dependence of local French Canadians on the wages of several family members, a situation that forced more of them to leave the Burlington area and move to larger New England cities to find adequate employment.

In the light of the instability of the region's French Canadian population, the immigrants' success in building their own church and parish institutions is even more remarkable. The cultural cohesion provided by familiar religious practices, French-language schools, ethnic-based fraternal societies, and revived traditions encouraged a sense of unity among French Canadian residents at a time when the economic conditions in Quebec, New England, and even the Burlington area fostered geographical mobility and disrupted the continuity of community growth. By the eve of the American Civil War, these institutions of *survivance* were well established in the Burlington area. By the end of that conflict, similar French Canadian institutions, patterned after those in Burlington, would appear throughout the Northeast, just in time to bring the comforts of cultural familiarity to a whole new group of immigrants arriving from Quebec.

NOTES

¹ Mason Wade, "The French Parish and *Survivance* in Nineteenth Century New England," in *A Franco-American Overview*, ed. Madeleine Giguère, 4 vols. (Cambridge, Mass.: National Assessment and Dissemination Center for Bilingual / Bicultural Education, 1981) 3:236.

² Pierre-Marie Mignault, quoted in Wade, "The French Parish," p. 236.

³ *Ibid.*, p. 236.

⁴ *Ibid.*, pp. 238-239.

⁵ W. S. Rann, *History of Chittenden County, Vermont* (Syracuse, N.Y.: D. Mason and Co., 1886), p. 525.

⁶ 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.), *passim*.

⁷ Jeremiah O'Callaghan, quoted in Jean-Frédéric Audet, *Histoire de la Congrégation Canadienne de Winooski au Vermont* (Montréal: Imprimerie de l'Institution des Sourds-Muet, 1906), p. 40.

⁸ Couture, "New England's First National Parish," p. 19.

⁹ Wade, "The French Parish," p. 237.

¹⁰ Couture, "New England's First National Parish," p. 25.

¹¹ Wade, "The French Parish," p. 236.

¹² Couture, "New England's First National Parish," p. 26.

¹³ According to Joseph Couture, in his history of St. Joseph's parish, Father Ancé harbored Louis Bourdon, Jean-Baptiste Denis, Jean-Baptiste Mailet, and Anthony Lincourt "who had fled from Canadian justice" for unspecified crimes. These men robbed and injured Ancé, then reported him to Vicar General Pierre Marie Mignault who, in turn, told the incident to Bishop Fenwick. Apparently, the affair caused dissension within the French Canadian Catholic community, so the bishop decided to remove the priest. It is not clear why the priest's protection of these fugitives created division among the French Canadians. See Couture, "New England's First National Parish," p. 27.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 27.

¹⁵ E. Hamon, *Les Canadiens-français de la Nouvelle Angleterre* (Québec: N. S. Hardy, 1891), pp. 184-187.

- ¹⁶ Couture, "New England's First National Parish," p. 31.
- ¹⁷ While there is no documentation that specifies that Burlington's French Canadian women sponsored money-raising events like bazaars, picnics, and concerts, Father E. Hamon, who visited French Canadians living in New England in the 1880s, wrote that it was common for Quebec immigrant women to contribute to the building of parish churches by organizing such charitable activities. See Hamon, *Les Canadiens Français*, pp. 90-92.
- ¹⁸ Couture, "New England's First National Parish," p. 33.
- ¹⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 32.
- ²⁰ Robert Rumilly, *Histoire des Franco-Américains* (Montréal: L'Union Saint-Jean-Baptiste d'Amérique, 1958), p. 31.
- ²¹ 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) 3:16.
- ²² *Ibid.*, p. 3.
- ²³ George F. Thériault, "The Franco-Americans of New England," in *A Franco-American Overview*, ed. Madeleine Giguère. 4 vols. (Cambridge, Mass.: National Assessment and Dissemination Center for Bilingual / Bicultural Education, 1981) 3:150.
- ²⁴ There are numerous examples of other immigrant groups who followed French Canadian precedent and formed national parishes. Leonard Dinnerstein and David Reimers, in their book *Ethnic Americans*, wrote that "in the late nineteenth century a burning issue in American Catholicism was the nationality parish supported ardently by, among others, German, French-Canadian and Polish Catholics." Humbert Nelli, in his study of Italian immigrants in Chicago, listed parishes that the Italians formed in that city in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. These parishes had names such as Santa Maria Addolorata and St. Anthony of Padua and presumably were also ethnic-based. See Leonard Dinnerstein and David M. Reimers, *Ethnic Americans: a History of Immigration and Assimilation*, 2nd ed. (New York: Harper and Row, 1982), pp. 133-134; Humbert S. Nelli, *The Italians in Chicago, 1880-1930: a Study in Ethnic Mobility* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1970), p. 31.
- ²⁵ *Burlington City Directory and Business Advertiser* (Burlington, Vt.: Published by Hiram S. Hart, 1865).
- ²⁶ Abby Maria Hemenway, *Vermont Historical Gazetteer* (Burlington, Vt.: A. M. Hemenway, 1868-1891), 1:551.
- ²⁷ T. D. Seymour Bassett, "Urban Penetration of Rural Vermont, 1840-80" (Ph.D. dissertation, Harvard University, 1952), p. 593.
- ²⁸ Couture, "New England's First National Parish," pp. 51-52.
- ²⁹ Maxine Seller, *To Seek America: a History of Ethnic Life in the United States* (Englewood, N. J.: Jerome S. Ozer, 1977), p. 152.
- ³⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 153.
- ³¹ Couture, "New England's First National Parish," p. 52.
- ³² Rumilly, *Histoire des Franco-Américains*, p. 44.
- ³³ Translation of the motto of the *Société Saint-Jean-Baptiste*, "Au dehors, l'anglais pour des affaires, mais à la maison, rien que de français," quoted in Couture, "New England's First National Parish," pp. 52-53.
- ³⁴ Rumilly, *Histoire des Franco-Américains*, p. 35.
- ³⁵ Florence Maria Chevalier, "The Role of French National Societies in the Socio-Cultural Evolution of the Franco-Americans of New England from 1860 to the Present" (Ph.D. dissertation, Catholic University of America, 1972), pp. 49-53.
- ³⁶ *Burlington City Directory and Business Advertiser* (Burlington, Vt.: Free Press Association, 1869), p. 15.
- ³⁷ Lauren-Glenn Davitian, "The 'Frogs Across the Pond': Perceptions of Change in a Vermont Mill Community" (Undergraduate research paper, University of Vermont, 1983), Wilbur Collection, Bailey-Howe Library, University of Vermont, Burlington, Vt., p. 40.
- ³⁸ Thériault, "The Franco-Americans of New England," p. 141.
- ³⁹ *Burlington (Vermont) Daily Free Press*, 24 June 1869.
- ⁴⁰ Thériault, "The Franco-Americans of New England," pp. 146-147.
- ⁴¹ Bassett, "Urban Penetration of Rural Vermont," p. 300.
- ⁴² Joseph Amrhein, "Burlington, Vermont: the Economic History of a Northern New England City" (Ph.D. dissertation, New York University School of Business Administration, 1958), p. 126.
- ⁴³ James Elliott Defebaugh, *History of the Lumber Industry of America* (Chicago: The American Lumberman, 1906-07), 1:172.
- ⁴⁴ William G. Gove, "Burlington, the Former Lumber Capital," *The Northern Logger and Timber Forester* 19 (May 1971): 38-39.
- ⁴⁵ Amrhein, "Burlington, Vermont," p. 42.
- ⁴⁶ Bassett, "Urban Penetration of Rural Vermont," p. 297.

⁴⁷ Amrhein, "Burlington, Vermont," p. 218.

⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 227.

⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 245.

⁵⁰ Bassett, "Urban Penetration of Rural Vermont," p. 293.

⁵¹ Amrhein, "Burlington, Vermont," pp. 204-210.

⁵² *Ibid.*

⁵³ For a concise, informative article on the history of the Burlington Mill Company while in the hands of the Harding Brothers, see David Blow, "Industrial Fluctuations in Winooski," *Chittenden 5* (January 1974): 32. For information on the number of operatives employed by the Burlington Mill Company in 1860, see Bassett, "Urban Penetration of Rural Vermont," p. 302a.

⁵⁴ These population figures are based on a count taken from the 1850 and 1860 U.S. manuscript censuses for Burlington and Colchester of all the members of families having at least one parent born in Canada and who were French-speaking. To determine whether or not a Canadian-born person was French, I followed a series of steps. First, I determined if the surname was French, an Anglicized spelling of a French name (e.g. "Johndro" for "Gendreau") or an English translation of a French name (e.g. "White" for "Leblanc" or "Stone" for "Desroches"). Since there are English-speaking families with names such as "White" or "Stone," I then looked for a French given name such as Napoleon or Philomene among family members. If none of these procedures clearly determined the Frenchness of the name, I consulted a list of Anglicized names that appears in the records of St. Joseph's parish, the French Canadian parish in Burlington, to see if the name was included. This procedure, while careful, was not foolproof. When in doubt of the language of a Canadian-born person I assumed that he / she was not French-speaking, so these figures are underestimations.

The count of Irish immigrants is also taken from the 1850 manuscript censuses for Burlington and Colchester and included the members of every family having at least one Irish-born parent. Families having a French Canadian father and Irish mother were counted as French Canadian; those with Irish father and Canadian-born mother were counted as Irish.

⁵⁵ Amrhein, "Burlington, Vermont," p. 70.

⁵⁶ Comparative figures on wage rates for factory work and unskilled labor are based on Amrhein's reporting of combined census statistics for 1850 and 1860 for Burlington, South Burlington, and Colchester. Because the percentages of change over the decade given for each type of work are figured differently (on annual wages for factory labor and on daily wages for common labor), the comparisons are inexact. Even allowing for the difference in measurement, one can assume that a 14.7 percent rise in annual factory wages and a 66.7 percent rise in daily wages for unskilled work represent a marked difference. See Amrhein, "Burlington, Vermont," p. 74.

⁵⁷ There are no available statistics for employment of children under age fifteen in either the 1850 or 1860 censuses.

⁵⁸ According to Linda Gordon's statistics on fertility rates, the average number of live births for women in the United States declined from 5.42 to 5.21 between 1850 and 1860. See Linda Gordon, *Women's Bodies, Women's Lives: a Social History of Birth Control in America* (Harmondsworth, England: Penguin Books, 1977), p. 48.

⁵⁹ Ralph Dominic Vicero, "Immigration of French Canadians to New England, 1840-1900: a Geographical Analysis" (Ph.D. dissertation, University of Wisconsin, 1968), pp. 105-106.

⁶⁰ Two of the most glaring examples of the misspelling of names by census takers were for the French names "Courbet" and "Niquette." "Courbet" appeared as "Kirby" in 1850 and "Curby" in 1860 while "Niquette" became "Neequith" in 1850 and "Nigget" in 1860.

⁶¹ According to Ralph Vicero, in Massachusetts alone, six towns—Millbury, Southbridge, Webster, Spencer, Worcester, and Grafton—all had at least one hundred French Canadians in 1860. See Vicero, "Immigration of French Canadians to New England," p. 156.

⁶² Peter Haebler, "Habitants in Holyoke; the Development of the French Canadian Community in a Massachusetts City, 1865-1910," (Ph.D. dissertation, University of New Hampshire, 1976), p. 46.

⁶³ Stephan Thernstrom, *Poverty and Progress: Social Mobility in a Nineteenth Century City* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1964), p. 87.

⁶⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 168.