CHAPTER 11

Migration, Myth, and History: A Cross-Border Case Study

Barry H. Rodrigue

Geographic barriers have served to mark boundaries between groups of people since ancient times. Mountains, rivers, and seas are still used as borders between nation-states and ethnic groups. Such physical and social demarcation is well-known in geography, anthropology, and history. What is often less considered is how boundaries also serve as markers for

An article that included some of the materials discussed in this chapter appeared in a regional American journal over twenty years ago. It has been updated and expanded, in part to address modern global contexts. Barry H. Rodrigue, 'The Cultural Trigonometry of Franco-American Stereotypes', *Maine History: The Maine Historical Society Quarterly*, Orono: Maine Historical Society, vol. 34, no. 1, 1994, pp. 40–57.

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ethnic stereotypes. Even when migration spills across frontiers, stereotypes persist for centuries and infiltrate our feelings about modern-day peoples. An antidote to this problem of superficial stereotypes is that deep ethno-historical study can mitigate the negative effects of shallow characterizations.

A classic work on this process is, *The Invention of Tradition* (Hobsbawm and Ranger 1992). Other examples abound (Mohanty 2006; Shohat 2006; Stein 2006). What I present here is a case study, one focusing on cross-border relocation in North America, between the province of Quebec (Canada) and the state of Maine (USA). It was a ten-year effort to reconstruct its history, a process that employed unarchived documents, archaeology, oral history, cartography, geographic analysis, and the integration of a diverse array of data from multiple sources (Rodrigue 1997). The result was a revision of the region's history, one that began to change views of the transborder experience and challenged enduring stereotypes.

Today, there is a global crisis of relocated peoples that effects every nation-state on Earth. Although the plight of the Rohingya in Burma, the Syrians in the Middle East, and People of Colour in the United States dominate the media today, such issues have been an adjunct to global events for centuries (Rothenberg 2006). They persist today and will do so in the future. My proposition is that re-evaluation of the history of the migratory experience and its wide deployment among the affected people can help to heal old and new misunderstandings.

French America

The first well-documented French visit to North America was the Verrazano Expedition of 1524. Jacques Cartier's expeditions in the 1530s and 1540s in the St. Lawrence Valley failed, but Samuel Champlain's efforts in the first decade of the next century succeeded. The colony of New France grew from the Atlantic coast and the St. Lawrence Valley to the interior of North America and the Gulf of Mexico. Its hinterlands were a sketched entity—a few trading posts, fortifications, and missions scattered among allied indigenous tribes. The English colonies coveted these lands, as their own population grew along the Atlantic seaboard. The French population numbered less than 100,000 in a vast domain, while over a million English crowded onto the coastal plain. A series of colonial wars erupted from 1675 until the British capture of New France in 1763 (Map 11.1).

Map 11.1 French and British colonial claims in eastern North America. New France is shaded; the British claims are not; the Appalachian Highlands run between them. John Lodge, *A Map of the British and French Settlements in North America*, circa 1750 (Courtesy of the U.S. Library of Congress)

Although the British held title to the new colonies after their conquest, they had challenges attracting and keeping English-speaking settlers in the Province of Quebec. Various strategies failed, so the Crown came to better control affairs by funding the Catholic Church to assume management of the Province's social services after the Rebellions of 1837 and 1838. In return for money and royal sanction, the Church's assignment was to keep the French-Canadian population under control. This alliance led to an empowered Church, which adopted a conservative traditionalism that was highly visible on the landscape with its proliferation of stone churches, convents, schools, orphanages, asylums, seminaries, and hospitals (Fig. 11.1).

Nonetheless, British power gradually eroded in Quebec, as the Catholic Church and its French-Canadian allies promoted a clerico-nationalist government and new commercial enterprises that gradually

Fig. 11.1 Mount St. Louis Secondary School, Montreal, Quebec. Begun in 1888 by the Brothers of Christian Schools, it was one of the edifices reflecting the new Catholic power after 1838 (Courtesy of the Frères des écoles chrétiennes and Héritage Montréal)

took control of the province. English Canadians came to increasingly concentrate their finances and authority, first in Montreal and then in the neighbouring province of Ontario. During this time, the Quebec population began to naturally grow and spread to other parts of the continent.

The Industrial Revolution was beginning in the United States, but the American entrepreneurs did not have enough resident workers (this was before major migrations from Europe and Asia), so it was natural for them to seek help from the well-populated farming villages of nearby Quebec. One of the principal destinations for the French Canadians was to New England, an adjoining part of the United States that was a centre of factory development. At first, only a few thousand seasonal workers crossed back and forth over the frontier, using mill wages to supplement farm incomes in Canada. Over the course of the next century, as American industrial development radiated, up to a half-million French Quebec residents permanently settled in the United States (Rodrigue 2017).

However, when European migration to the United States began to rise in the mid-nineteenth century, it led to an influx of Irish, Polish, Italian, and other ethnic Catholics. As a result, fearful American Protestants began attacks on the migrants, including the French Canadians who had helped establish the Industrial Revolution. These views were reflected in an 1889 *New York Times article*, which concluded that 'French Canadians do not give promise of incorporating themselves with our body politic' and that US citizens should 'insist upon maintaining American political principles against all assaults' (Fig. 11.2).

By the mid-nineteenth century, after decades of conflict and animosity, many English Canadians, French Canadians, and English Americans developed a stereotypical view of themselves and of each other. French Canadians saw their parishes as protection from foreign intrusion, while their leaders saw themselves part of a wider mission to civilize North America. English Canadians derided French Canadians as backwards and lacking entrepreneurial acumen—the product of a deficient society that could only be remedied by Anglo-assimilation.[1] English Americans saw the French maintain a dangerous allegiance to Papal authority, which they feared would undermine democracy. This situation resulted in a cultural

New-York Times, Friday, July 5, 1889.

ongress have the October will be pro- ates of the The case of but it will ns, and no ations upon d are based n due time. a discussion, e little but ort the prop- the Union. oblem, from practically people of a ns, who cling lygamy. n of South ne extent as es, and they of the Con- of all the

and steel architectural beams, columns, roofing, gas pipes, water pipes, and sewer pipes are made in Pennsylvania. The iron stores and workshops in which New-England men transact their business and do their work are built with Pennsylvania iron, machined by Pennsylvania mechanics, and are erected by Pennsylvania Superintendents, in accordance with plans made by Pennsylvania engineers. Our heavy machinery is also made in gigantic Pennsylvania foundries and fitted up in spacious Pennsylvania workshops."

This state of things is due solely to the tariff. There is no natural obstacle to iron working in New-England. The obstacles are artificial and arbitrary. A tax has been placed on raw material and on fuel. If these were admitted to New-England ports free of tax, the iron ore or the pig iron of England and Scotland, with the bituminous coal of the Canadian Dominion, could be used in New-England to as good advantage as native ore, iron, and coal are now

many years and was recently declared to be sound by the unanimous vote of the Senate Committee on the Judiciary.

THE FRENCH CANADIANS.

The French Canadians do not form a very conspicuous element in the population of this city or of this State, although it is rather startling to be informed that some twenty-five thousand of them are living and working in Clinton County. In those New-England States which adjoin Lower Canada the influx of French Canadians is much more interesting and important. The immigrants, tempted by a more genial climate than their own and a higher rate of wages, have swarmed into the factories and taken up the farms abandoned by the natives as unprofitable. They are so much more prolific than their neighbors that the proportion of them to the whole community, wherever they have established themselves, tends to increase with surprising rapidity.

Fig. 11.2 Excerpt of an article on French-Canadian migration into the United States (*New York Times*, vol. 38, 5 July 1889, p. 4)

trigonometry of stereotypes, a mythical historicism dominated by political agendas.

Historical Trigonometry

Lord Durham, a progressive British official, famously wrote in his report on British North America that the French Canadians were 'a people with no history, and no literature' (Lambton 1839: 95). This declaration was written sympathetically, but it set in motion antagonistic ethnic dynamics, as nationalist histories were developed as a tool to bolster assumptions of English-Canadian, French-Canadian, and English-American elites.

As the French-Canadian Catholic hierarchy achieved new powers in the mid-nineteenth century, they developed a new vision of themselves. When historian François-Xavier Garneau produced the first volume of his *Histoire du Canada* in 1845, the Bishop of Quebec forced him to rewrite it to emphasize the role of the Catholic Church … or be proscribed from publication. In this way, Catholic power was extended into the past under the threat of censorship[2] (Gagnon 1982: 9–43). The myth of Catholic power in New France was an exaggeration repeated in subsequent confessional-driven histories, such as those of Henri-Raymond Casgrain, a historian-priest who lauded Garneau's prelate-approved works—in contrast to American Protestant historian Francis Parkman (Casgrain 1912).

Parkman echoed the populist stereotypes of French Canadians seen by English Americans in the United States, as in his series, *France and England in North America* (1865–1892). Although very popular, these works were led astray not only by inherent bias but because Parkman had believed the new historical propaganda from Quebec describing the Catholic Church as dominant in the settlement of New France. He also saw the new migration of French Canadians to New England mill towns in his own time as an expression of that power. This caused him to describe a civilizational struggle in North America between Catholic and Protestant societies (Eccles 1961) (Fig. 11.3).

In English Canada, Parkman's histories were widely read and seen as representing the popular view of themselves and French Canada. As elsewhere at this time, self-taught historians produced histories. In this way, retired surveyor William Kingsford produced his ten-volume *History of Canada* (1887–1898), which he developed from research in the newly formed Dominion Archives in Ontario. His works followed Parkman's

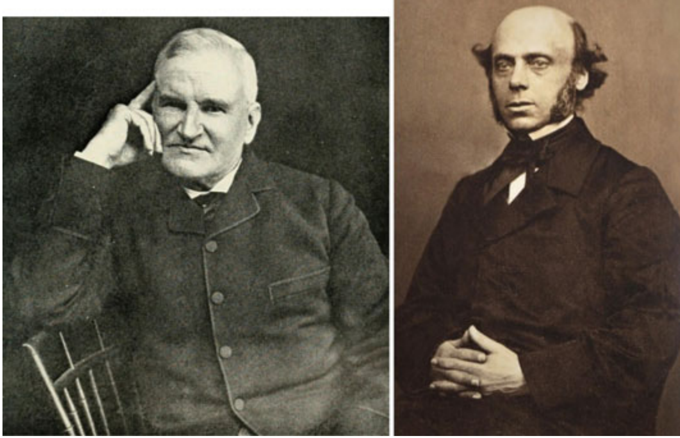


Fig. 11.3 Francis Parkman (left) and François-Xavier Garneau (right). Parkman portrait, circa 1890 (Parkman Portrait courtesy of Wikimedia Commons. Garneau portrait, circa 1864, by Ovila Desmarais & Company, Montreal, courtesy of M. Bibaud/Library and Archives Canada/PA-074097)

vision and described the need for the assimilation of French Canadians, for 'their own good' and for the good of the new Canadian nation.

These three visions—French Canadian, English Canadian, and English American—played off of each other to create a political caricature of what it meant to be French in North America, as the variety of actual French-Canadian experiences and their multiple identities were clouded and ignored. That being said, we must keep in mind that this polarized historiography was of the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, when uncritical bias was prevalent and fluid boundaries existed between populist notions and academic work. But, the process continued into modern times and embroiled well-known historians in a variety of schools of North American historiography.

The Anglo bias against French Canadians was obliquely incorporated into the Laurentian/Staples Thesis of Canadian historiography (Creighton 1937), while a similar bias entered the Chicago School and was applied to French Canadians (Miner 1939). Quebec Catholic nationalism peaked in the works of historian Lionel Groulx, who founded the Institut d'histoire d'Amérique française (Institute of History of French America) at the University of Montreal in 1946, along with the journal,

La revue d'histoire de l'Amérique française (Review of the History of French America) the next year.

This is a broad-stroke and simplified background of a complex dynamic and, as such, it passes over efforts that sought to create harmony within these geographic areas (Osborne 1995; Courville 2001). There are excellent historiographies that detail these issues in a nuanced fashion (Berger 1976; Gagnon 1982, 1985; Taylor 1989). My point here is to briefly describe populist assumptions and the influential historicism that came to incorporate negative stereotyping.

Nonetheless, an independent historical tradition wound through this partisan hotbed. It existed at the Institut Canadien (Canadian Institute), a library/discussion group in Montreal (1844) and Quebec City (1848). Isolated scholars also spotted the academic landscape, steering a non-partisan course, such as historian William Eccles, economist Albert Faucher, and geographer Raoul Blanchard. With the rise of secular modernism in Quebec in the mid-twentieth century, an opportunity for historical accuracy opened, but it was a slow process.

My point of entry into these issues came in 1990, when I began graduate school in Canadian-American Studies at the University of Maine and in French North American Studies at Laval University. My research focused on the French-Canadian migrant experience into northern New England. I found that Franco-American society had been obscured by a similar set of stereotypes that had existed for a century and a half about French Canada, even in new publications that sought to chart progressive scholarship (Brault 1986; Weil 1989; Roby 1990; Chartier 1991).

My master's thesis was an industrial biography of the Franco-American shoe manufacturer Thomas G. Plant (1859–1941), which was published and went through several editions (Rodrigue 1992, 1994, 2018). In the process, I discovered that Plant had been rejected as Franco-American because of his very success and his later cultural milieu. English Americans could not believe that the child of French-Canadian immigrants could be so successful, therefore they imagined him to be a New England Yankee. The Franco-Americans ignored him because he operated outside of the system of a Catholic parish, in a national and international sphere. This conundrum caused me to wonder about the social dynamics of that period … and the present, where the stereotypes of the past two centuries persisted and coexisted with modern historical thought.

It became a theme of my doctoral research, which I pursued at Laval University in Quebec. As fortune would have it, I joined geographer Serge Courville's new Centre interuniversitaire d'études québécoises

(Interuniversity Centre for Quebec Studies), which was engaged in a re-evaluation of Quebec's history in Canada. I then expanded their work into Quebec's southern frontier with the United States (Rodrigue 1999, 2000, 2001).

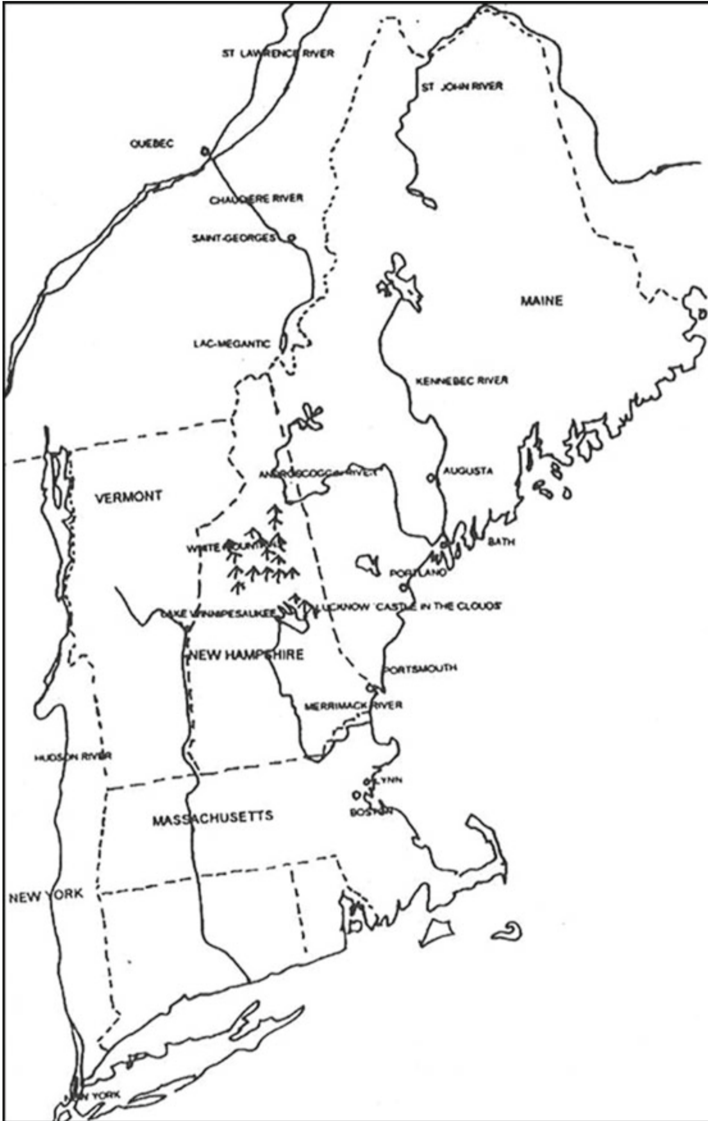
Tom Plant: Case Study

The life of Thomas G. Plant illustrates the need for a general re-evaluation of the French experience in North America. Plant was born in Bath, Maine in the United States in 1859. His mother, Sophie Rodrigue, had 'travelled through the woods' with her family from Quebec to Maine in the 1820s. His father, Antione Plante, came to Augusta, Maine in 1834. Antoine and Sophie settled at the mouth of the Kennebec River in Bath, married, and had children. Antoine worked as a sailor and was wounded during an assualt on an enemy position by the Seventh Maine Infantry during the American Civil War (1861–1865). His father being an invalid, Tom grew up in poverty in a French-Canadian neighbourhood called 'Canada Hill' and 'French Hill' (Rodrigue 1994, 2018) (Map 11.2).

Tom left school at fourteen, during the depression of 1873, and took work as a boilermaker and ice cutter. He was known as one of the best baseball players in Maine. At this time, Massachusetts shoe manufacturers had begun to establish factories in Maine as a strike-breaking tactic against their home shops, and he became an apprentice shoe laster in one of these 'country factories' (Fig. 11.4). In 1880, young Tom departed Maine for Lynn, Massachusetts—the 'shoemaking capital of the world'. At the age of twenty-five, he founded a cooperative shoe venture with money from a baseball wager (Rodrigue 1994, 2018).

Over the next three decades, the Thomas G. Plant Company grew to become the world's largest shoe factory (Fig. 11.5). Plant became an advocate of enlightened capitalism and a supporter of President Theodore Roosevelt and the Progressive Party. He sold his business to the multinational United Shoe Machinery Company in 1910 and retired as the wealthiest Franco-American of his era (Fig. 11.6). Some estimate his fortune as high as $26 million—almost $1 billion in today's money (Rodrigue 2018).

Plant built a 6500-acre (2630 hectare) estate on Lake Winnipesaukee, an exclusive golf club, and an old-folks home for impoverished workers in Bath. However, just before the stock-market crash of 1929, his investments began to go sour. He had speculated in Russian bonds just before



Map 11.2 'The World of Tom Plant', the eastern borderlands of Canada and the United States (Cartography by Raymond Estabrook, Belfast, Maine, 1993)

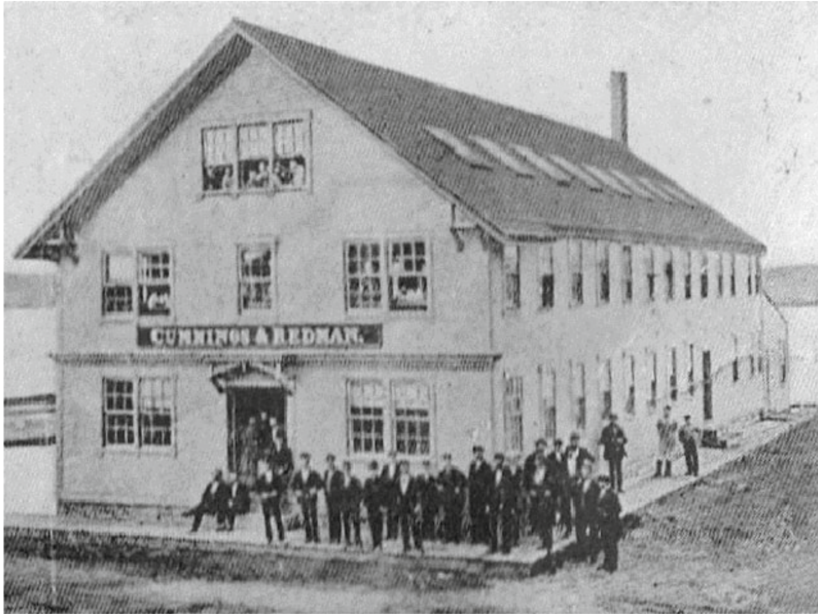


Fig. 11.4 Cummings & Redman Company, Bath, Maine, circa 1874. This factory was where Tom Plant apprenticed as a shoe laster (Courtesy of Kenneth Plant, Minneapolis, Minnesota)

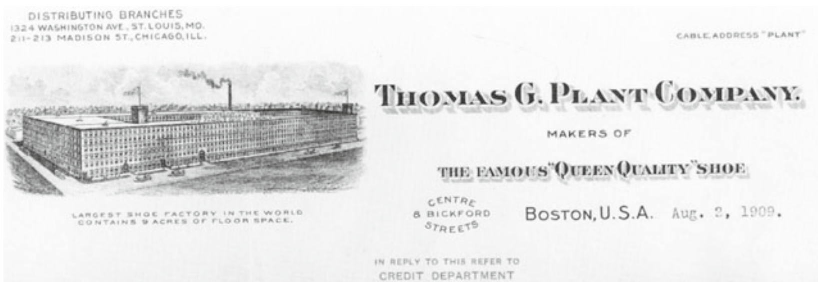

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Fig. 11.5 Letterhead, Thomas G. Plant Company, Boston, Massachusetts, 1909 (Courtesy of Historical Collections, Baker Library, Harvard University, Cambridge, Massachusetts)

the October Revolution, in sugar just before its collapse after World War I, and in unproductive lands during the Jazz Era. He did not successfully make the transition from industrialist to financier and was forced to borrow money from neighbours and business associates. He died broke in 1941, just before creditors auctioned off everything he owned (Rodrigue 1994, 2018).

Although Plant never appeared in elite Franco-American directories like *Le Guide Officiel*, he would be considered a Franco-American by any yardsticks used to measure ethnicity. His parents were French Canadian, he was raised in a French-Canadian neighbourhood surrounded by family

Fig. 11.6 Tom Plant, circa 1910 (Courtesy of Kenneth Plant, Minneapolis, Minnesota)

and friends from Quebec, he spoke French, spent his leisure time studying French history and travelling in France, and was identified by colleagues as French Canadian. He is representative of a group of what I call 'lost Francos', descendants of French Canadians who came to the United States prior to the great mill migrations of 1870–1920. The timing of this early migration was a significant factor in his success and is representative of a different and often overlooked group of Franco-Americans who defy the cultural stereotypes of their societies (Rodrigue 2018).

Early Crossing of Borders

There are no hard figures about the numbers of French Canadians who left Quebec before 1840, but a majority are known to have entered New England by way of the Richelieu River and Lake Champlain. Farm work in Vermont, New Hampshire, and Massachusetts maintained the travellers as they moved to southern New England factory towns like Worcester or Woonsocket (Vicero 1971; Roby 1990: 18–19). In addition, the Chaudiere-Kennebec route into Maine provided a significant alternative for a different population of French Canadians.

In the early nineteenth century, north-western Maine and south-eastern Quebec were still wilderness regions. The two rivers in this area connect the St. Lawrence valley to the Atlantic seaboard. The Chaudiere flows northwest for 185 kilometres from Lac-Megantic to the Saint Lawrence River. A portage over a narrow and marshy 'height-of-land' joins the Chaudiere with the Kennebec River system, which drains central Maine south for 241 kilometres from Moosehead Lake to the Atlantic Ocean. This route had been used by Indigenous, French, and English travellers long before the industrial revolution attracted *habitants* to Maine (Fig. 11.7).

Geographer Ralph Vicero estimates that 2500 French Canadians immigrated to Maine by 1840, 2680 by 1850, and 7490 by 1860 (Vicero 1968: 148). Comparing these numbers to demographer Yolande Lavoie's calculations, this represents about ten percent of the total number of French Canadians migrating to the United States in those decades (Lavoie 1989: 24). Why did it occur?

As Yankees moved up the Kennebec River valley above Waterville in the early nineteenth century, they found themselves closer to Quebec City than to Boston. The capital of Lower Canada, Quebec City, was a port, military garrison, and administrative centre. It needed provisions,

Fig. 11.7 Appalachian Highlands, Canada Road region, Metgermette, Beauce, Lower Canada. Grayscale of colour *camera lucida* image from the Talcott Survey (1840) (Courtesy of the U.S. Library of Congress)

notably livestock and their products (Courville and Garon 2001). Farmers in north-western Maine gravitated towards this market, and by 1810 surveyors laid out a Kennebec-Chaudiere Road which was to connect Somerset and Beauce counties (McKechnie 1811; McKechnie and Neal 1811; Goodwin 1876; Rodrigue and Faulkner 1995).

Although the Canadians began to build their part of this road by 1815, most of the early effort emerged on the American side of the border. As an exporter, Maine stood to profit most from this international connection. Two years later, the state legislature authorized construction of the Canada Road. Trees were to be taken up by the roots to a width of fifteen feet (5 metres) and a 'traveled path' was to be made suitable for the passage of loaded carts, sleds, and other such conveyances (Massachusetts 1817). It was a rough passage for settlers, drovers, and travellers alike (Fig. 11.8).

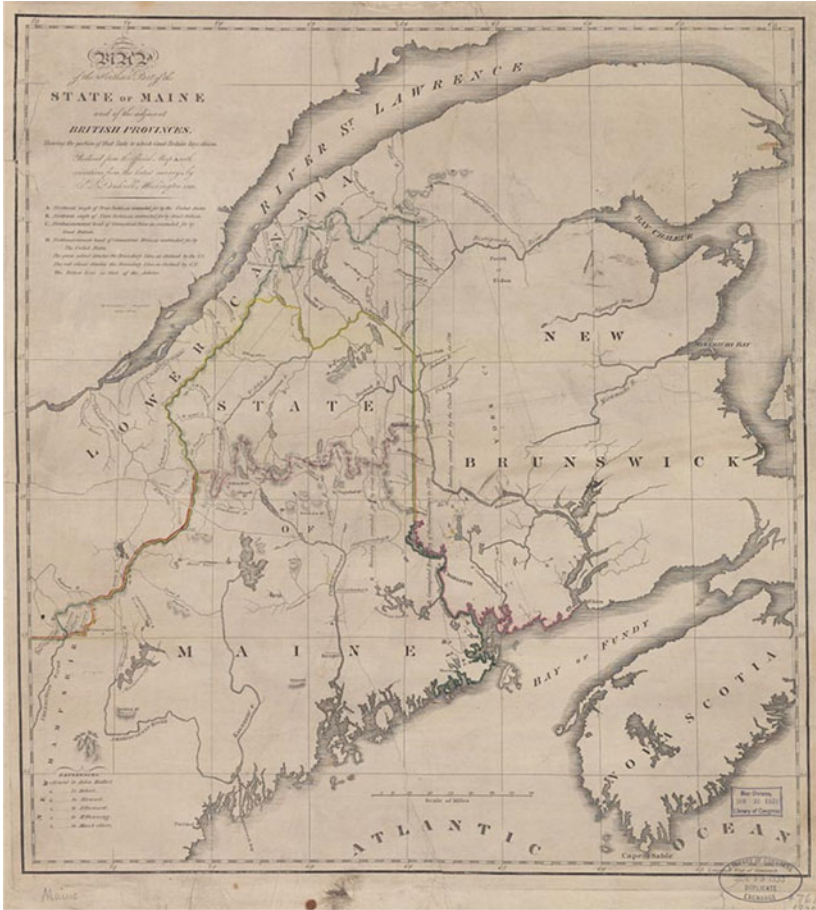
The District of Maine became a state in 1820, separating from Massachusetts. The new legislators mandated an upgrade of the Canada Road to a carriageway in 1828, a reflection of the increasing trade north (Map 11.3). In 1831, it was reported that 1394 beef cattle, 249 horses, 956 sheep, and 14 tonnes of fresh fish passed over the road bound for Quebec City. These products came from several agricultural districts of Maine, and a considerable portion were articles that had glutted local markets. Lower Canada thus became an economic safety valve for Maine's overproduction (Maine, Joint Standing Committee on State Roads 1832: 5–6; Locke 1832; Smith 1832).

Fig. 11.8 Winter stagecoach sleigh on the Canada Road at Moose River, Maine, 1915. This was an upscale conveyance between central Maine and Quebec City; most travellers went on foot. Photograph by Zilla Holden (Courtesy of Ruth Reed, Jackman, Maine)

Events in Maine began to encourage a return traffic over the road. In 1829, administrators in Augusta, the state's new capital, began construction of a statehouse and laid plans for a hospital for the insane and a federal arsenal. Residents hoped for not only a bureaucratic future, but also for new industries, which led to plans for a dam across the Kennebec River to power mills. It was in response to the need for workers in towns like Augusta that the first French Canadians migrated into Maine. Many came from the Beauce.

The Beauce is a rectangular county abutting the north-western corner of Maine. It had been settled in the mid-eighteenth century by *habitants* who had developed a distinct regional culture. Their isolation from government centres made them highly independent (Fig. 11.9). Yankee merchants enroute to Quebec City brought the *beaucerons* information from the United States, and the Beauce residents gained a reputation for being shrewd traders (Garant 1985; Bélanger 1988; Courville et al. 2003).

The Beauce's economic base was agriculture, which left farmers vulnerable to weather. A brutally cold year in 1815–1816, a destructive hailstorm at harvest in 1829, and untimely frosts and excessive rains in 1834 caused crises, as elsewhere. The economic problems leading into



Map 11.3 S. L. Dashiel, 'The Northern Part of the State of Maine and Adjacent British Provinces', Washington DC, 1830. The Canada Road Corridor traversed the disputed boundary from the St. Lawrence River at the top left to the Atlantic Ocean at the bottom centre. Map Division, Library of Congress, Washington DC

Fig. 11.9 Grayscale of James Drummond's 'Canadian Wedding', 1840 (Courtesy of André Gladu, Montreal, Quebec)

the Panic of 1837 compounded natural disasters with poor market conditions (McCallum 1981: 3–8; Garant 1985: 109–110; Little 1989: 17–18; Roby 1990: 14–17, 19; Courville 1990: 241–256). The Quebec newspaper *Le Canadien* reported St. Georges and St. François suffered 'une excessive misère'. In the 1820s, we find the first recurring references to French-Canadian settlements in the Kennebec valley (Fecteau 1952: 10–14; Violette 1976: 20–21). The reports are sparse, but this was about to change, as the Yankee migration from the south met the French-Canadian migration from the north.

The Canada Road had mostly drawn Yankee settlers who hoped to make a living from increasing commerce between the two countries. The family of Elisha Hilton settled on the Maine side of the border in June 1831 and built a roadhouse for travellers. Their nearest neighbours were 18 kilometres away. Hilton hauled supplies to his farm from the Maine town of Concord, 97 kilometres to the south, and he had to go 32 kilometres further to grind his grain. He maintained a portion of the road on his own, removing blowdown trees in the summer and breaking

out snow in the winter. His expectations for making a living were disappointed, in part, by an unexpected influx of people. This was the result of many factors, including a large number of Irish immigrants into the St. Lawrence valley, a cholera epidemic that entered with them, and a decline of industrial jobs in Quebec City. Hilton estimated that he provided 1400 meals to immigrants during his first three-and-a-half years on the border. Others living on the Canada Road also sought state assistance for the relief they provided travellers, characterizing their efforts as public service (Hilton 1836; Shaw 1832).

The French Canadians who came to Maine in the 1820s and 1830s were no less wilderness travellers than those on the Oregon Trail at the far side of the continent. Their frontier lay to the southeast and the construction of the Canada Road in 1817 and its upgrading after 1828 helped workers migrate (Fig. 11.10). This first migration was indecisive: Some came and stayed, some left. A majority seem to have been sojourners, making money in Maine to take back to Canada to help maintain or acquire farms. It was by no means a one-way need. Maine employers needed workers and actively encouraged the migration of Quebeckers.

The distance from the Canadian frontier settlements to the nearest Maine town was about 80 kilometres, and travel could be treacherous. John Delano, from Quebec City, came down with smallpox just over the border on the Canada Road, forcing him to stop for two months at Seth Stewart's house. Stewart was a poor man with a large family and was hard-pressed to care for another person. James Jackman, from Maine, had first gone to work on the Canada Road as a labourer in 1828. Although an experienced woodsman, he encountered difficulties. On a return trip from Quebec City in February 1832, he froze his feet on the Height-of-Land and remained out of work for six months. In the summer of 1836, a woman carried a dead child on her back for 19 kilometres to Hilton's house before anyone would take her in or help bury the little one. Cemeteries along the Canada Road contained markers like 'One stranger found frozen along the road between Hilton Farm and the Canada Line' and 'One skeleton found while clearing a back field on the Hilton Farm' (Jackman 1835; Hilton 1836; Jackman Bicentennial Book Committee 1976: 132).

Those who moved up and down the Chaudiere and Kennebec rivers in the 1820s and 1830s were the first generation of the new industrialism—*oiseaux de passage* (migratory birds). They provided a reference point for later migrating kin, as their homes facilitated chain migration

Fig. 11.10 Canada Road, Sandy Bay Mountain, Maine, near the Quebec border, 1913. A dirt road, the difference between this image and the route in the early nineteenth century was that farms and cleared land had increased. Photograph by Zilla Holden (Courtesy of Ruth Reed, Jackman, Maine)

and chain employment, where relatives, friends, and neighbours secured housing and jobs for their French-Canadian compatriots (Roby 1990: 19, 23). The newly opened Canada Road made such travel more practical for entire families and temporary migration for seasonal jobs more attractive (Whitney 1830). As the economic situation improved in Maine, many sojourners decided to stay. None of Sophie Rodrigue's seven brothers and sisters married in Quebec (Eloi-Gerard 1946: 251; Gilbert-Leveille 1986: 220–227). This pattern increased as the century progressed.

One of the more complete English-language views of early French-Canadian settlement along the Kennebec River came from the pen of author Nathanial Hawthorne. In the summer of 1837, the thirty-three-year-old Hawthorne visited his old college friend, Horatio Bridge, for a month in Augusta. The son of a local politician, Bridge had begun construction of an extensive dam across the Kennebec River and was learning French in order to deal with French-Canadian workers on the project (Hawthorne 1932: 3–24; Mellow 1980: 27) (Fig. 11.11).

Hawthorne described the city in a state of construction. Quarrymen blasted rocks two or three times a day, and the roar echoed through the

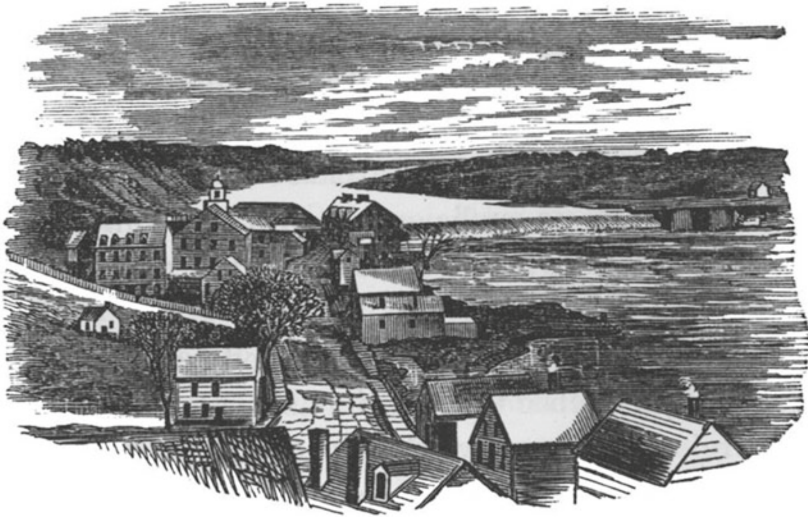


Fig. 11.11 Kennebec River and dam at Augusta, Maine, looking northward in 1858 (Lithograph of a photo by Simon Wing in James North's *The History of Augusta*: Augusta: Clapp & North, 1870, p. 777)

valley; chaises and wagons stopped to allow their passengers to view the dam, while rafts of boards navigated through a gap left mid-stream; a constant hammering mingled with the voices of the French and Irish workers. Mansions under construction contrasted with 'board-built and turf-buttressed hovels' that were 'scattered about as if they had sprung up like mushrooms' (Hawthorne 1932: 4–5, 8–10, 15, 20).

Augusta, like all of central Maine, was in the early stages of the Industrial Revolution, and developers welcomed the migrating French-Canadian and Irish workers. Hawthorne thought it peculiar to hear Gaelic and French intermixed there 'on the borders of Yankeeland', as children went from door to door selling strawberries (Hawthorne 1932: 10). He described his encounters with workers and their families in a sympathetic but condescending manner, projecting an elite Yankee view of these recent arrivals.

> It was about dusk—just candle-lighting time—when we visited them. A young Frenchwoman, with a baby in her arms, came to the door of one

> of them [the workers' houses], smiling, and looking pretty and happy. Her husband, a dark, black-haired, lively little fellow, caressed the child, laughing and singing to it; and there was a red-headed Irishman, who likewise fondled the little brat. Then we could hear them within the hut, gabbling merrily, and could see them moving about briskly in the candle light, through the window and open door. (Hawthorne 1932: 7)

The Irish and French lived together in three small hamlets on the outskirts of Augusta. Their houses could be built in three days and were valued at four dollars. Up to twenty people would occasionally live in a hut six by six metres in size. Earth would be piled up to a meter thick against the outer walls and occasionally sod covered the roofs, making an almost subterranean dwelling. Clay-covered boards or an old barrel, smoked and charred by a cooking fire, would serve as a chimney. The heavy construction on the dam was winding down. Many of the people occupying these villages during Hawthorne's visit were lodgers who moved in after the 1836 work season. These families sold and exchanged rights of occupancy between themselves (Hawthorne 1932: 7–8, 11–12; Coffin 1991).

Completion of the dam did not end the need for French and Irish workers in the Kennebec valley. Fires, floods, and other disasters called for almost continual maintenance and repair. Workers were needed in the mills powered by the dam. Sawmills and machine shops grew and, in 1846, the first cotton mill was built, as well as a flour mill (Diocese of Boston 1838). Those *habitants* who penetrated into urban Maine knew that they had come to a new land with a different language, a different religion, and different opportunities.

However, not all the immigrants on the Canada Road were recently arrived Irish, poverty-stricken *habitants*, or diseased travellers. Over a period of nearly twenty years, Elisha Hilton reported having served hundreds of 'ship-wracked' sailors from the Saint Lawrence River, many being citizens of the United States. Hilton probably did not recognize the work pattern of seamen. When the great river froze in the fall, it was typical for mariners who had been caught in Canada to go on the tramp for winter jobs in Downeast ports or further south (Hilton 1848; Fingard 1982: 205, 210). Hilton's report might provide a clue to Antione Plante's migration to Bath.

The life of a sailor was not easy, especially if one had the desire for a home. This was doubly true for a Canadian on the Saint Lawrence River.

Lumber ships and newly made vessels from Quebec usually left the river on a one-way voyage, being sold or rerouted upon their arrival in Europe. Once in Europe, Canadian sailors had to compete for a berth back to North America. This prospect did not encourage settled French Canadians to follow a sailor's life (Fingard 1982: 17). Perhaps this situation motivated Tom Plant's father, Antoine Plante, to settle in Bath, Maine, where he could go to sea and have a family too. Bath's rise as a preeminent Atlantic port provided a good alternative to hard times on the Saint Lawrence.

After the War of 1812, Bath became a centre of industry and the busiest port to the east of Portland. It was said to have had its vessels wrecked on the coast of every continent in the world. A joke ran that Bath shipwrights built their vessels by the mile, just sawing them off to fit on a bow and stern. The 'Shipbuilding City' developed a thriving economy based on the West Indies and European trades (*Portland Times* 1947). So it was only natural, after the Rodrigue and Plante families came down the Canada Road, that they would have been attracted to Bath, where they and their children found work in its energetic and growing industries.

Although dominated by the carrying trade, Bath attracted many support industries, such as foundries, lumber mills, brick yards, sail lofts, ropewalks, and shops for making ship components. The city was a booming manufacturing centre, offering a diversity of employment (Fig. 11.12). Early records show that Antoine Plant worked as a sailor and Levi Roderick (Olivier Rodrigue) as a brass moulder—occupations not usually associated with French Canadians in Maine, while their names became anglicized (Greenough, Jones and Company 1876: 67; United States Census 1850, 1865).

French Canadians and Irish Catholics intermarried, but such marriages were difficult to arrange, because of the small Catholic ministry in Maine. The entire state had only two Roman Catholic parishes before 1830, and only six more by 1850. Until a parish was established, Catholic rites were performed by travelling priests, *missionaries de passage*, who made circuits from their home parishes through unorganized regions (Allen 1970: 64, 67). Fr Moïse Fortier of St. Georges, in the Beauce, reported in 1841 that some of the French-Canadian Catholics he met in Maine had not seen a priest for twenty years (Fortier 1841). It would appear that Catholics also had another alternative—conversion to Protestantism. The first interethnic marriage in Plant's family took place in 1844

Fig. 11.12 Riverview of Bath, Maine, 1858. Drawn by A. C. Warren, wood-block engraving by F. E. Fox (Courtesy of the Maine Maritime Museum, Bath, Maine)

between Levi 'Rodring' (Rodrigue / Roderick) and Mary Hart. Protestant minister John Deering performed the ceremony. After St. Mary's Catholic Church was established in 1857, the Plant family joined the parish (Rodrigue 2018).

As the Plant and Roderick families were establishing themselves in Bath, anti-Catholic feeling in the United States was coming to a head. The 'Know-Nothing' movement was made up of White, Anglo-Saxon Protestants born in the United States, who blamed economic hard times after the Panic of 1837 on immigrant and Catholic workers. Cities in New England experienced a sharp rise in mob violence (Anbinder 1992).

In 1854, a street preacher in Bath excited crowds with an anti-Catholic message in a series of open air meetings. A mob broke away from one of his gatherings to converge on the Old South Meeting House, a Protestant church recently rented by local Catholics. The church was ransacked and then burned (Fig. 11.13). The riots continued for five days, mostly in the evenings. Catholic families were threatened. Their houses were

Fig. 11.13 Burning of the Old South Church, Bath, Maine, 1854. Oil painting by John Hilling (Courtesy of Patten Free Library)

pelted with sticks and stones, and some destroyed. City officials, police, and militia did little, although there were some heroic acts by individuals to halt the mob. Only one person was arrested for the violence, and he was not convicted (Mundy 1990: 135–162; Owen 1936: 206–210).

Others of Tom Plant's extended family more accurately represent the mobile lives of the immigrants in this era. Tom's uncle, François-Xavier Rodrigue (Meserve Rodrick), was born in Maine in 1835, while his family was likely working on the Kennebec dam. They returned to Canada, but some of them came back to Maine by the late 1840s. Meserve married Harriet DuRocher in Skowhegan and they went to Bath in 1855. They left Bath around 1860 to work on the Penobscot River, where he ran a livery stable. He then migrated to Augusta in 1876, where he worked as a teamster and his descendants remained for the next century (*Daily Kennebec Journal* 1914: 11; Rodrigue 2018) (Fig. 11.14).

Prior to the Civil War, a few thousand French-Canadian settlers in Maine found themselves adrift in a sea of Yankees. The pressure to assimilate was strong—indeed, assimilation was a matter of survival. Small

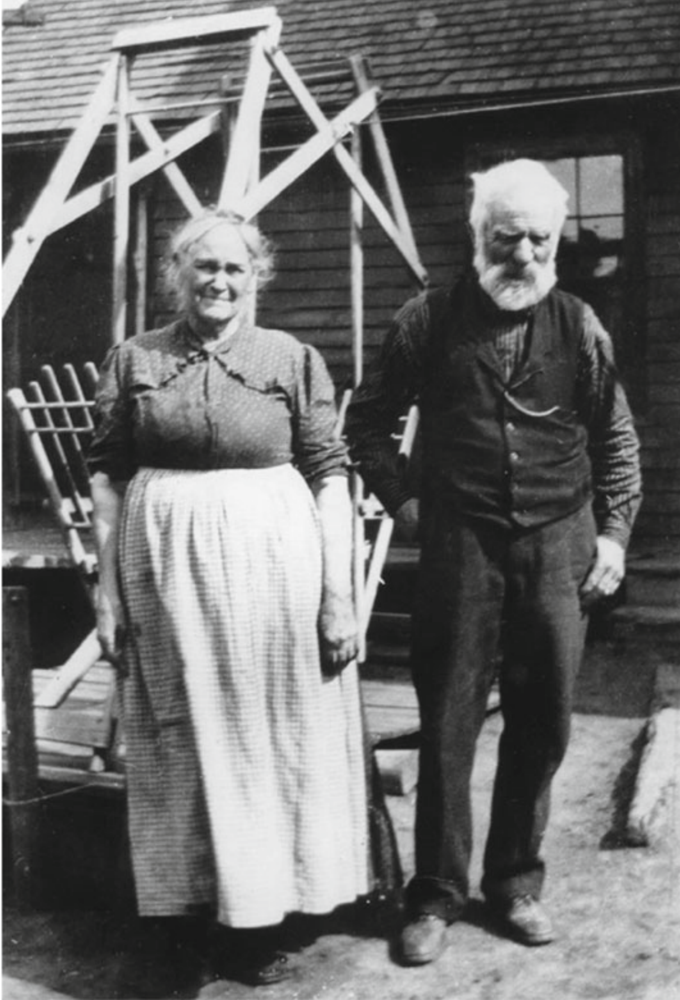


Fig. 11.14 Henriette DuRocher and François-Xavier Rodrigue (Meserve Rodrick), circa 1910, Augusta, Maine. Both their families had come to Maine from Quebec in the 1820s and 1830s (Courtesy of J. Peter Grenier, Augusta, Maine)

French clusters began to grow in Maine cities, but they were not fortresses against the Anglo world. These early newcomers learned English, changed their names and religion, took 'atypical' employment, and patriotically participated in US events. Tom Plant was among these early families, and his assimilation was a significant factor in his rise to success.

The above narrative is limited, but it points to the need for better study of French North American cultural stratigraphy. The French-Canadian experience in the United States was diverse. Within two generations of the Plante and Rodrigue settlement in Maine, industrial expansion created a huge demand for workers. The subsequent influx of a half-million French Canadians brought about the development of a new Franco-American society and identity with new challenges. A wide gulf stands between these French migrations; different circumstances created different societies from the same culture.

Franco-American Conundrum

The term 'Franco-American' has come to refer to a specific ethnic experience—the families of French-Canadian immigrants who came to the United States between 1870 and 1920, grew up in the *petits Canadas* (Little Canadas) of New England mill towns, spoke French, worshipped in the Catholic faith, endorsed conservative political agendas, and did not assimilate into Yankee society until after World War II. This became a hidebound stereotype that collapsed the various waves of French-Canadian immigration into a single narrow identity and distorted a rich heritage into a fossilized image of what has been and continues to be a diverse social phenomena[3] (Louder and Rodrigue 2002).

While some scholars have attempted to diversify this view, notably historian C. Stewart Doty (1989, 1993, 1994, 1997, 2007), many surveys of Franco-Americans generally follow the antiquated models. In respect to the earlier half of the Quebec migration to New England (1820–1870), authors often state 'little is known of the early migration', add a few token pages of scattered anecdotes, and then devote most of their text to the mill-migration period (1870–1920). Both periods were fifty years in duration, but the disproportion of coverage is significant.

This imbalance is understandable, since historians favor easily accessed texts, such as those by Lionel Groulx, Robert Rumilly, and their Franco-American counterparts (Groulx 1919; Rumilly 1958; Trépanier 1992;

Quintal 1993; Bélanger 2003; Bock 2004). Even more modern, progressive Franco-American work falls into this traditionalist trap to greater or lesser degrees, as with the publications of the Franco-American Centre at the University of Maine (Forum 1974) and the French Institute at Assumption College (Quintal 1993).

We cannot fault these authors too severely, since a thematic choice is their prerogative. It is much easier to access the later mill-migration source material, and source-driven histories are a common path for professional and amateur scholars alike. Two of the major archive collections used by scholars have been those of the Franco-American assurance societies—the Association Canado-Américaine (1897) and the Union Saint-Jean-Baptiste d'Amérique (1900). Both formed in the later mill-migration period and focused on the collection of Catholic-oriented documents. Since this filio-pietic tradition persists in the Franco-American community, it is no surprise that we find it repeated in English North American and French Canadian histories.

What is not acceptable is the ostracism of groups of people and the distortion of their history based on stereotypes. This exclusion has by no means been for just Tom Plant but has involved other Franco-Americans, like social activist Joseph Labadie and electrical engineer Cyprien Mailloux (Ferland 2018). It has also involved sizable groups of people, such as the French Huguenots, who came to North America in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries.

In the spirit of this critique, historian Nelson Madore and I produced an anthology of this more diverse Franco-American experience. It included a wide variety of topics, from secularists, the LGBTQ community and social activists to women and Huguenots as well as those of the Catholic mill-migration era (Madore and Rodrigue 2007). The collection was cited for that year as the 'the most important book published in American Studies' by a reviewer in Canada's *University Affairs* (Laberge 2008), and the text was presented to Nicolas Sarkozy, President of France, at a ceremony in Washington DC in November 2008.

By understanding the first French Canadians who migrated to Maine and the alternative routes to success that they took, we can see the many possible paths that were open to Franco-Americans. Indeed, the Franco-American exceptions of the mill-migration era should be scrutinized more closely to re-evaluate the larger picture. The stereotypes were not universal or all-encompassing. By revising our view of the past, we can change the present. As French North Americans come to appreciate

the diversity of their experiences, they will discover they do not need to feel ashamed about either fitting or not fitting into stereotypes imposed upon them, and can liberate themselves from unnecessary definitions.

Conclusion

The reconstruction of cross-border histories often requires a significant interdisciplinary effort, but the struggle can be fruitful in promoting new understandings. An example is sociologist Nachman Ben-Yehuda's study of the popular and academic notions surrounding the fortress of Masada, in which he sorted myths from facts. What is perhaps the most engaging part of his work is the way in which he explains the process of selection used by the myth-makers as well as the historical contexts that motivated their choices. The result is not so much a condemnation of the 'inventors of tradition', but an understanding of their times, an explanatory technique that generates sympathy in a reader. In this way, people come to be understood in a nuanced way and the record begins to be set straight (Ben-Yehuda 2002).

In this spirit, historian Charles Allen has reconstructed the complex process by which colonial and indigenous scholars in Asia brought together data in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries that led to the startling recovery of the Buddhist history of India, a history that had all but been erased from the geographical and mental landscape. The struggles of these dedicated scholars with myopic officials, mercenary administrators, and biased religious leaders read much like the struggles surrounding French North American identity—struggles that persist globally even today (Allen 2003).

As science philosopher Peter Kosso describes it: '[B]efore applying the methods and structure of history and archaeology to an understanding of knowledge in general, we should revise our understanding of the former and tidy it up in light of the case studies just completed' (Kosso 2001: 171). In my own work, I had to articulate archaeology, history, and geography into a new conceptual framework, which allowed me to access a wider melange of data, in order to recover a historical profile of the northern Appalachian borderlands and its peoples (Rodrigue 1997).

Certainly, such integration of disciplines is not new in human studies, as has occurred with ethno-archaeology and ethno-history. Taking the logic of integrated human studies to its widest possible realm has led to the 'super-interdisciplinary' field of big history (Rodrigue 2020). One of

the take-aways of big history is its emphasis on global humanity. While ethnicity and other identities are important, we are ultimately all human beings with more in common than what divides us. The revision of inaccurate history facilitates the present, especially when we face the global challenges of today.

In a global landscape that is rapidly transforming, climate changes like drought and inundation will make many humans into migrants. We will have to establish a process that emphasizes the common humanity of the world's people, so as to accommodate the disruption. Nor is it just an issue of humanizing cultural history to promote social coexistence, it is a matter of maximizing human interaction so as to bring out the best ideas from everyone for solving problems. Our very survival will depend on it.

Notes

1. One of the ironies pointed out by historian C. Stewart Doty was how Anglo bias against French Canadians coexisted alongside an appreciation for continental French 'civilization' (Doty 2007). In modern globalization studies, the economic arguments for assimilation has been referred to as 'the myth of catching-up development' (Mies 2006).
2. The French-Canadian Catholic Church had participated in the settlement of New France, but their role in this colonization movement was but one of many participants. Its priests, brothers and nuns were spread over a vast area, so its cumulative effect in the seventeenth and eighteenth century was as marginal as other sectors of the society. The settlers were indeed Catholic, but, until the mid-nineteenth century, with British funds and support, the Church was largely a family-based spirituality.
3. Even in the later period, the characterization of the Franco-American mill migrants suffered from extreme simplification. The actual diversity of experience within the *petits Canadas* is seen in works like Félix Albert's 1909 memoir about his complex migrations between Quebec and New England, a work that was well edited and annotated by historian Frances Early (Albert 1991).

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