

2017

# Being & Not Being Franco-American: The Perspective of One 21st Century Millennial

Maegan Maheau  
*University of Maine*

Follow this and additional works at: [https://digitalcommons.library.umaine.edu/francoamericain\\_undergradpub](https://digitalcommons.library.umaine.edu/francoamericain_undergradpub)

 Part of the [Ethnic Studies Commons](#), [Oral History Commons](#), [Other History Commons](#), [Other Languages, Societies, and Cultures Commons](#), and the [Women's Studies Commons](#)

---

## Repository Citation

Maheau, Maegan, "Being & Not Being Franco-American: The Perspective of One 21st Century Millennial" (2017). *Franco-American Centre Franco-Américain Undergraduate Scholarship*. 1.  
[https://digitalcommons.library.umaine.edu/francoamericain\\_undergradpub/1](https://digitalcommons.library.umaine.edu/francoamericain_undergradpub/1)

This Presentation is brought to you for free and open access by DigitalCommons@UMaine. It has been accepted for inclusion in Franco-American Centre Franco-Américain Undergraduate Scholarship by an authorized administrator of DigitalCommons@UMaine. For more information, please contact [um.library.technical.services@maine.edu](mailto:um.library.technical.services@maine.edu).

**Being & Not Being Franco-American: The Perspective of One 21st Century Millennial**  
Presented at the American Council for Quebec Studies biennial conference,  
Nov. 3-6, 2016, Portland Maine

Maegan Maheu, Undergraduate Researcher, Franco-American Centre, University of Maine

1.

I am attempting to share a collective analysis of self-explored thoughts as to where and why I have certain viewpoints or biases on whether “this” or “that” might account for my understanding of what a Franco-American is. The question of being and not being a Franco American is a collection of observations and inductions, both through my socially crafted subjective lens and by relating such matters beyond personal experience.

I have lived most of my life to date in Waterville, one of the larger cities of central Maine. For me, the city represents a Franco community with 7.7% French Canadian and 15.5% French, totaling to 22.5%; according to 2013 population data. From an overall feel for the city, I would have initially thought that more than a third of the population is French/Franco based on surrounding demographics. This especially in regards to the older generations, as it contributes to most of the people I was surrounded by on a day-to-day basis. This also I think has to do with my own heritage.

2.

Growing up in Waterville, I took a Franco-American to be someone with U.S. citizenship who has ties with other Americans who identify themselves as sharing an ancestry ultimately determined from France, via indirectly through French-speaking Canada. As a member of the millennial generation, I describe myself as of U.S. nationality with a mostly Canadian-French ancestry via my patrilineage, the branch of the family and ethnic community I grew up in.

I felt that I could confirm my stance not only because I meet my own, subjective ‘minimum criteria,’ but also because I have given thought and appreciation towards this matter as an active member of my community, a mostly Franco community. And I held to certain practices

that an ‘outsider’ might expect of a Franco, e.g. certain religious practice, work ethic, overall appreciation for my current community and its history, since the historical mass is the same as my own -engulfing me in a sense of kinship. Thus, I am Franco.

But this definition has been challenged by others, whether in person or in publication.

3.

The U.S. Census Bureau’s primary population survey tool, the American Community Survey (ACS), asks, “What is the person’s ancestry or origin?” (Part III, Question 13). The surveyor is provided a blank box in which to write a respondent’s answer. This open-ended question allows respondents to individually determine their ethnicity. It is a self-identifying process. Perhaps this helps shed light why in the State of Maine, in 2013, respondents chose 2:1 to identify as French rather than French Canadian. Yet it seems highly likely that most of the respondents who self-identified as ‘French’ actually have a French-Canadian heritage. But the ACS survey does not include any follow-up questions about self-identification. And respondents are prompted to declare a single ethnic group, which seems especially flawed for U.S. majority where mixed ancestries are to be expected. Why might persons self-identify as ‘French’ rather than ‘French-Canadian,’ even if they know their ancestry is to some extent Canadian? One thing is clear: Maine’s population hosts the largest state percentage of Francos as its largest ethnic group compared to other state demographical data; with 16.6% ‘French’ and 7.6% ‘French Canadian’, for a total of 24.3% of the population.

4.

Where I was born in Utah, my younger sister was born in Maine. We both grew up in Waterville, within the same Franco community. In high school, I took French; she is taking Spanish. Out of curiosity, while pursuing this research I raised the questions of ancestry/origin and of being “French” versus “French Canadian” with her. She quickly replied by email:

I'm more Canadian than French. I like poutine, I like maple syrup, I think moose are cool, free health care [etc]. And I think Franco American means that you are fully, or almost fully, of French descent but was born and still live in America...Canada is a different place than France...the cultures of French Canadian and actual French people are very different. Canadians are heavily influenced by the Americans, therefore shaping their culture. Although Canada is...inhabited by "French" people, they are not actually French. They are not from France, which is very different from Canada. France is more influenced by European conflicts and whatnot. ....Canadians are descendants of immigrants from long ago who have shaped and changed their personalities, beliefs, and culture since they got [there]." (*Used with permission.*)

This millennial strongly identifies herself as not a Franco, not a French American, but specifically as a Canadian American. Apparently to her, Canadian culture and its inhabitants are distinctly different from French. I seem to base my identity on bloodline first, however my same bloodline begs to differ, it first must do with sociological interactions and pressures. When does a state in the international system able to define its own nationality the same as ethnicity for its citizens' identity? I personally don't think or don't want to think that it begins the same time the state is officially announced. Justifying my reasoning as to why I consider the older French label before the newer Canadian label. However, I cannot argue against my younger sister's viewpoint that Canadian and French cultures are different and so cannot be compared as an apples- to- apples complex.

## 5.

How else do people identify themselves as being/not-being Franco? For some, a French last name is the strongest qualifier for membership. For instance, 75-year-old Sidney, Maine resident Betty DeBlois, who first identifies her nationality as "always American first" and then specifies as Franco-American, however making very clear "I love my French heritage," claims that for her, "You are Franco American if your last name is [a] French name and you were born in the United States." To support her view, she cites the "Claremont Club," a club whose membership, according to her, requires the individual to possess a French name for admission. Furthermore, Betty relates how, before the 1970s, if you were born in the United States and your parents held a

French name, specifying French ancestry, your birth certificate would recognize your nationality as “Franco-American.” (I was unable to find any records of this sort.)

Whether most Franco-Americans would agree with her stance I don’t know, yet in some sense, as I learned it, tradition says that a person living in the U.S with a French surname *suffices* to be called Franco. And while at one time I might have affirmed this view based on my experience, today I am confused by it. In the simplest way, how can one decide whether a child of a man (with a French surname) who weds a woman with a non-French maiden name is any more or less “Franco” than the child of a woman with a French maiden surname who marries outside of the French/Franco culture? Judging Franco-ness merely by last name potentially reduces the recognized Franco population by half! And yet some self-declared Francos I know reserve the right to judge that because an individual in their community has a French last name, they are immediately *welcomed* into the Franco club. I didn’t ask at the time of our discussion and I wonder how Mdme. DeBlois would take into account Franco descendants who “lost” their last name, traditionally through marriage of a Franco mother.

But also, certainly not all American families with French ancestry have French names, for several reasons. For instance, it is evident in central Maine how many last names of French Canadian families were changed by or for patrilineal ancestors. The reasons vary, from illiteracy to Anglofying to avoid economic prejudice. The inability to write one’s own name often meant a witness unfamiliar with the French language and its phonology would attempt to decipher how to spell it from its pronunciation. The result often determined how generations of descendants (mis)-spelled their own last name.

My surname, “Maheu”, serves as an example. The name “Maheu” is spelled correctly in accordance to French tradition, and can still be seen in Canada and France. However, many families who share this patronym spell it “incorrectly,” including “Maheux” and “Mayo” and everything in between. The additional ‘x’ of “Maheux” was added by a certain branch of the family line sometime in the last two centuries, whether to escape prejudice and or because this

sign (“x”) was their literal signature, “Maheu” being provided by some literate witness to the signing. The more extreme spelling, “Mayo,” suggests an attempt to make the name both sound and appear less French.

Growing up I always thought that my family line had dropped the ‘x’ to read as more English. It wasn’t until recently I discovered that this was not the case. My father and grandmother (Maheu line) were both dismayed when I asked when our family’s name became more ‘English.’ To my surprise it was traditionally ‘correct’ all along. I think now that a potential reason as to why I was so misinformed was because I noticed from texts and from the various people whose last names were French in origination tended to have a lot of spellings ending with the ‘x’ here in the U.S. (and specifically Maine). So, I assumed that it was “a French thing.” Turns out these names are the Anglo-versions of the original! And now that I think about it more, whenever I visited Quebec City or Montreal, there were businesses who featured the Maheu name; not too many, but they were all spelled the same as my own. I saw no ‘x’s.

## 6.

Betty DeBlois also voiced concerns about how the surrounding Anglo community used to express disapproval of Francos simply based on European ancestry (and its political strife). Her tone became somewhat tense when describing how people coming into the U.S. from Canada during her childhood “had to learn English in order to go to school and get a job.” Previous to this I had heard similar, albeit occasional, remarks from older French/Franco persons. A personal example involves a high school memory where I was returning from a tennis meet late one spring. My coach was discussing various matters with the bus driver.

Coach explained that because he had a French name and spoke French (with his parents and some friends) he experienced crude prejudice and discrimination when he was young, not only from his peers but from many older people in Waterville. Coach explained that he would get into trouble at school if he spoke (Canadian)-French on the grounds. “We were the scum of the city all because we spoke *that* language.” This prejudice against Francos, according to my coach,

did not stop when he became an adult. If I remember correctly the driver agreed, though he was not French but rather Irish-American. Estimating Coach's age, I would say this must have occurred before and into the 1960s.

7.

Generations of mill-working French- Mainers through the 1960s and beyond fostered a cultural icon for Francos. Many Francos in central Maine in the mid- to late 20th century worked in mills to support a living and a certain lifestyle associated within the Franco community found here. But changes in the U.S. and on a global scale, due to big business, laws and ordinances regarding working restraints and tariffs allow for the disappearing mill crisis seen increasingly as of late. From 2000 to 2013, employment in the papermaking sub-sector (Maine) alone saw a drop from 2,473 employees to 1,450.

As a young Franco in Waterville, I saw many community people of the two prior generations who were out or temporarily out of work, and not by choice. I remember, while in high school working as a cashier at the local Hannaford Supermarket, an older gentleman who came to my register wearing a Huhtamaki branded cap and shirt. I asked him what it was like working in the paper products manufacturing plant. He quickly explained that he was very fortunate to have gotten his job back after being laid off for quite some time. After my senior year of high school, looking for summer work before leaving for University, I called the plant asking if they were hiring seasonal workers. The secretary on the phone explained that not only were no new workers being hired, but that whenever they needed seasonal help they referred to a whole list of people previously laid off to hire.

This unfortunate circumstance for the working class of Mainers does and has influenced a percentage of young Maine millennials (such as myself and my family) to leave the state in search for jobs once we graduate from college. Of course this is not just due to the disappearance of mills. No surprise, current Maine students, who are mainly composed of Franco heritage,

increasingly see the value of obtaining post-secondary schooling and/or professional degrees so to achieve at least the same standard of living of our parents' and grandparents' generations.

8.

But to me this rise in educational achievement is not a new phenomenon in the Franco community. I am the first female in my direct lineage to attend University. My father and uncle (previous generation) represent the first generation of the family to attend University. Their parents' highest level of education was high school. And their parents' schooling concluded at the elementary/middle level. The generation that came before them had no formal schooling. I can only think that this applies to most families in the area.

I remember my father explaining to me that even when he was a young kid he “knew” that he was one day going to attend college. Where did he get such certainty of this idea if his parents didn't go? Inspirations for this occurred in the familial unit. His parents wanted to financially guarantee this level of education for him (and his brother) “because we didn't have a chance to go, we wanted them to have this ability.”

Farm and blue-collar do not currently apply to my family line, though I know that many Francos used to—and still do—work such jobs in mills in the area. Even though this does not apply to my family I still see this as a core component in the Franco identity. Why? Most likely from all the stories told to me when I was little, from so many older people whose livelihoods consisted of millwork. I found out that both Betty DeBlois and her husband were mill workers during the late 20th century. “It's just what you do [for work]... coming down from up north.”

Also, it would be false to say that no one in my direct line ever worked for a mill company. My father worked at Huhtamaki seasonally while attending college. And today, being a chemical engineering major at University of Maine, I have accepted an engineering co-op at Huhtamaki. So ironically, perhaps even the current Franco generation will partake in the famous millwork associated with the Franco community! It seems you can't get away from it. However, I am very appreciative that such a path/opportunity still exists in my community.



So what else might be characteristic of Franco cultural identity or experience? More specifically, as a Franco woman? Perhaps related to this question, Juliana L'Heureux (2000) lists what she considers to be ten characteristics of a Franco-American mother:

- The ability to keep religious traditions in practice within the family unit
- Absolute cleanliness
- A strict methodology
- A sound sense of organization
- Skill in handicraft
- Excellent gardening skills
- Upholding an appearance of quiet modesty
- Mastering cuisine on a frugal budget
- Appreciative wit and humour
- Being able to demand and secure family affection/love<sup>5</sup>.

L'Heureux also lists other traditions, practices, and ideologies that Francos generally maintain: a taste for regional/familial delicacies such as touché, plois, and salmon prés, a strong work ethic, the French language, a positive creed on education, and a shared appreciation for a common background.

But how important are these traditions and traits in defining oneself as Franco? And have they or will they remain a strong core of this identity?

The list reminds me of common conventions that stereotypically serve through 1950s U.S. media. Are these considered desirable qualities associated with Franco women? I don't think that was what L'Heureux was getting at, rather as a general sum of her own observations seen in her Franco community (and through research). I was not surprised by all the qualities L'Heureux listed for Franco mothers. It reminded me of stories about my meme (great grandmother) and her simple, yet hard working way of life. Modern societal attitudes reflected in my own thinking would suggest that I should feel surprised by the matter. However, when I imagine Francos I envision an older couple who suits the classic traits L'Heureux listed. Must be because I feel surrounded by the older French demographic in this state -as it is the majority. As expected, I do not agree with these terms for my generation. And yet, my personal experience confirms that

many Francos of my community (even some of my own peers) hold up some of these features/practices to some extent. Especially the part of mastering your cooking on a frugal, University budget. But does this *make* them Franco?

I've attended and partaken in forms of some of the characteristics listed above. During Christmastime for example, my family and I enjoy keeping up the old family tradition of serving touché (a meat pie). But for almost as long as I can recall, no one actually made the pie, it was usually pre-ordered from a market or bakery. Although, I do believe that there were a few instances where my aunt hand-prepared the pie (but she is not blood related and would not be considered Franco by this criteria). On the other hand, growing up I never heard of other dishes such as the plois (ploys) or salmon prés that Mmes. DeBlois and L'Heureux mention.

I will also admit I am a converted Roman Catholic. Within my branch of the Maheu family, I am the only officially baptized, catechized, and confirmed member of my generation within the family (to this date). This is a new frontier for my family line! For as early as can be seen in genealogical records down through the next-to-youngest generation, anyone with any records was a Roman Catholic and had become one while an infant or young child—but not my generation. Different factors apply here. You could say it's due to changing times. But in my case, another factor is that both men of the last generation (uncle and father) married outside the Franco community. This does not imply that none of the listed Franco characteristics do not still apply.

10.

My French bloodline may only be 50%, but I grew up around many others who are, or at least self-identify as French/Franco. I personally do not feel threatened from any social consequences when I say aloud to others, "I identify myself as Franco-American." I can say this (even though it usually never comes up in conversation) with absolute certainty and fear no prejudices.

Apparently, this confidence is a recent phenomenon, one that, as a millennial, I have until recently taken for granted. We, the current generation, have time and a new freedom to

collectively decide whether to take responsibility implementing or not implementing the heritage of practices, customs, creeds, and attitudes of previous Franco generations. For instance, the last generation (parent's) seem to have all decided not to speak French to their kids. Since I know of no one from my peers who grew up with (Canadian)-French as their (or one of their) first language(s). What is deemed as important and not important shifts at the niche level between individuals but perhaps more noticeably at the macroscopic level through generational change.

If the question is asked today, whether identifying as a Franco American is or ever was important, it is addressed mostly to persons between the Baby Boomer generation and the Millennial generation. It seems that older generations would agree it is important, while the younger generations are more likely to be indifferent to the matter. Perhaps when we're the old ones, we could change our minds. I can't see it yet.

This is my impression of the Waterville area. But perhaps the older generation felt the same way a while back as many millennials do today? This might suggest that person's need to self-identify with their heritage becomes more crucial at some stage of life, or that the education needed to become aware of one's heritage is not typically learned at any stage of formal schooling. One thing is clear to me, self-identity and the processes associated to its development are malleable and abstract, be it social, conventions that can have no correct answer since what can be determined as evidence or not is subject to individual perceptions. Not to say it is a made-up construct, for the Franco-American exists simply because those people feel and proclaim it so!

## APPENDIX:

### BEING & NOT BEING FRANCO-AMERICAN

*May-June 2017*

A more concise recollection of Waterville Franco-American history is at focus in the following discussion. Later, the relationship between Franco culture and Catholicism is further developed.

The early 1600s gave first site of Franco (French)-Americans emigrating from Canada to the U.S. However, the first known French Canadian to settle in Waterville was seen travelling down the Indian Trail in the 1820s. His name was Jean-Baptiste Mathieu. It was in 1827 when he relocated a wood frame building from Fairfield to "The Plains." This area reminisces around the east side of Water Street (Waterville.) Mathieu had previously transported food items to villages between Bangor and Jackman, and to lumber camps as well. Most French-Canadian families who came to Waterville in this era settled in "The Plains" area. Around 300 of which were living there between 1830-31, and were poverty stricken. For work, these immigrants could later be seen clearing the wooded areas that has become known as Pine Grove Cemetery (1851), or working for Waterville Iron Works, or the sawmills W.W. Getchell, and Smith & Meader; the "Shank Shop" near Messalonskee Stream. Francophone immigration began to catalyze in 1835 when a stage coach was constructed. This boosted population for Augusta, Skowhegan, and Waterville. The main reason why Waterville settlers took to "The Plains" area was because a man named Frederick Pooler (Poulin) began in 1838 to subdivide and reasonably sell *Pointe a Petit*, or smaller lands. This covered throughout much of the area. Later on in the 1860s, a greater influx of workers was seen in Waterville, during the times of the Civil War and the Industrial Revolution. However, the largest number of Francos was demanded by the Lockwood Cotton Mill in 1874; which also provided incentives such as homes, or "*maisons de la compagnie*." Or lived in red-painted Bang estate apartments known as "*cio a Bang*." Most of these immigrants came from "la Beauce" region of southern Quebec, (St. Come, St. George, St. Victor, and Beauceville.) Maine was offering vastly better working/economic, political, and social conditions to that of Canada at the time. An educational system in "The Plains" was established sometime around 1846. It was through Jesuit missions, that Fr. Jean Bapst had Waterville's first Catholic church, St. John's, constructed. Yet as employment opportunities increased with the construction of a railroad (1855), Franco population exhibited a directly proportional relationship. By the 1860s, Frederick Pooler (Poulin) and Peter Bolduc opened the first grocery stores on lower Water Street of Waterville. It was not until the first French Canadian Minister in Quebec took power that Franco immigration slowed down (1896). Providing means for economic opportunities in this region of Canada. Nonetheless the Franco population in Maine had economic prosperity with textile mills such as the Hollingsworth & Whitney Pulp Mill in Winslow, the Furbish Sash and Blind Mill, BibreWare Co., along with Noyes Stove Company, and the Webber and Philbrick Foundry. Also, seen in the early 20th century was the establishment of various Franco firms throughout Waterville.

Concerning politics, Frederick Pooler (Poulin) was the first elected Canadian-Frenchman in Waterville (late 1800s). Known as the "Father" of French Waterville politicians, he received power at the Board of Selectmen. And was also on the city's first Board of Aldermen, overseer of the poor, and later on the Board of Education, and then elected to the Maine Legislature. Another notable figure is Fred W. Clair, who established a legal practice and later became City Clerk, City Solicitor, and Clerk of the Executive Committee of the Centennial Celebration.

Franco-American culture in Waterville has flourished since the early days. Religious, social, and financial institutions are evident, providing the Franco community services for social and mutual insurance benefits and funding for the sick, widows, and children. Such societies include but not limited to examples as "la Société de Bienfaisance Saint Jean-Baptiste de Waterville, Richelieu Lodge #4, Waterville Council #148, Knights of Columbus, Catholic Order of Forresters, La Societe des Artisans Canadiens-Francais, Macabees, L'Union St. Jean-Baptiste d'Amérique, Conseil Charland, L'Union St. Joseph Conseil Francoise, L'Association d'Épargnes de Waterville, and l'Assumption." Other cultural influences on the city, such as music, was seen in the late 19th century. A band of Franco-American musicians known as The Boulette was formed from "The Plains" area, and performed in the Waterville centennial celebrations. Another Franco band would provide trained musicians to R.B. Hall's Military Band. And Miss Martel was a concert artist and opera singer who first began singing through her church. What has been observed, is that with increasing Franco population, theatrical celebrations such as music and dramas took on a higher position in the social entertainment of Waterville. Franco performers occupied the Pelletier and Pomerleau Halls, as well as the Waterville Opera House (which is still in operation today.)

Pertaining to culture, the religious element has always been generally viewed as secondary nature to the Franco-way of life. The institution mainly functions for spiritual guidance, education, social structure, and welfare. Because of the increase in Franco population, as previously mentioned, the first church that fostered as a cultural icon for the Waterville Francos was relocated from St. John's Chapel to the newly-then constructed St. Francis de Sales (1874). The older of which being used as a school. Over a decade later St. Francis opened a parochial school as well as a boarding home for students and the Ursuline nuns (1888). At about this time, the French Baptist, or Second Baptist, Church had been constructed; this institution was commonly called "mi Haine" or "meeting place." The church(es) helped act as a segway from child labor, illiteracy, and aided large, poverty stricken families -then, mainly composed with French-Canadian immigrants of the Catholic faith.

When researching Franco-American culture, a generalized relationship between such people and religious faith is commonly mentioned. "Religious traditions [are] in practice in the family unit" -L'Heureux (2000). Many scholars, including Juliana L'Heureux, lists religion as a characteristic of Franco culture, yet fail to stress as to what extent of authority existed, or still exists between the church and these people. Let alone any attempt to explain this topic through the church's perspective. If it plays such a major role in the Franco identity, then why is it so important, and how does it function? Rather, how has this relationship significantly transformed both the Francos and the church? It

can be doubted that it functions asymmetrically, where only the people are affected. A bilateral effect must be present between these two parties. To investigate, an interview was conducted with a Waterville priest to help give insight as to what role does the (Waterville Roman Catholic) church feel it plays with Waterville history, specifically in regards to the Franco population. Within minutes, this discussion/interview developed a new (historical) mindset of thinking on the nature of the relationship between the Notre Dame parish and the (Franco) people of Waterville, as well as means of new sources of information that became critical research in this assessment. This includes an address and short summary of an old relic of Waterville history. This "Museum in the Streets" is still standing on 134 Water Street. Referencing to the first Franco-American house built in the city, which according to the priest's humble word, hosted the first French- spoken mass in Waterville. It even has a plaque posted in the front yard indicating its cultural significance to the city. Having driven down Water Street a few times one would not notice this building unless walking up to it. Surprise, surprise, the plaque reads "Home of Waterville's first permanent French-Canadian settler, Jean-Baptiste Mathieu."

*When did this pop up?!*



*134 Water St. Waterville, Maine*



134 Water St. Waterville, Maine

Almost as if hidden in plain site by means of location. Exhibiting an aura of nonchalant-nostalgia given its old simple stature. This exhibit is part of a heritage discovery trail designed for Waterville. It is part of a free walking tour that "foster a sense of historical identity, educate, encourage preservation of local historic sites and promote knowledge of stories, events and traditions."<sup>1</sup>

To identify its significance a front-yard plaque is visible. Part of which reads facts relevant to the religious discussion. "Rev. Moise Fortier, Pastor of St. George's Parish of Beauce County, Quebec, was the first priest to serve the French-Canadian Catholics in Waterville. He said the first Mass in the Mathieu home on July 16, 1841 and during his four-hour stay, heard confessions and baptized twenty-four children before returning to Quebec."

*When did Waterville begin this "tour"? Perhaps I had simply forgotten? Definitely a discovery to be had. However, visiting "The Museum in the Streets" site alone explained not only how it pertains to my hometown, but how it is a type of public museum that features many towns throughout U.S. states; where Maine towns have its own category. Waterville took part of this mission in 2004 to preserve its local identity and history. "Waterville's strong French roots and rich cultural history were long unrecognized by inhabitants. Local historians wanted to bring the town's francophone past to light and honor their ancestors' contribution to the development of the town and its industry. Their collaboration with The Museum in the Streets became the basis of an annual Franco-American Festival."<sup>1</sup> What could be said more is that the only other nation to use this system outside the U.S. is France. Given the circumstances, it was not out of the ordinary to notice that the text's language also had the (sole) ability to be converted to French. How old can 134 Water Street be? Roughly 190 years! Knowing*

*that the original French-American house in Waterville has not been forgotten, nor torn down, arguably, it manifests ideas of local identity and longevity to the public.*

At the start of the discussion, the first question asked to the priest was whether he had heard of the term 'Franco-American' and how he would define it. After explaining how he felt he had no real authority on the matter he first replied, "From what I understand, a Franco-American is from Canada initially" in search for a better lifestyle in the States. Today, however, that is no longer the case. Explaining how the influx of French-Canadian migrants relaxed when Canada began to offer sustainable, economic, as well as other, opportunities. Especially seen when Maine's employment options do not exist in comparison. No work here means to stay in Canada. Although this was not the whole 'definition' discussed. Rather, Franco-Americans were a communal society of peoples. "What bonded them was their sense of community...[they] all lived in "The Plains"...it was a part of [their] culture" in Waterville. For Waterville, the Francos seemed to act as a local culture that stemmed, what can be said for Waterville, a specific community type. From the discussion, economics seemed to have drove majority of the population to first come down into Waterville. Given the famous millwork that could be had. Given time, "the culture of mill towns changed. The young don't stay." Implying the current shutdowns of such mills in the state. What was asked is if and how "has the Church been affected by these changes?" The answer is yes; the Church has responded to the needs of the people. "The need is greater, we're able to help meet [the] needs of people, not necessarily Catholics." This statement reverts to the question of whether the Church functions as welfare for the people; and if majority of which could be considered Franco or not. Reasons as to why this was a question has to do with the idea that 'back in the day' when there were no federal or state welfare programs and how many (Franco) households in the state hosted large, poor families.

*Such ideas most likely fostered due to not only research but also from stories told from the oldest living generation in the family.*

In response, the priest exclaimed that the Church always had and still has "concern for the poor." It just so happens that a significant percentage of people who may be considered Franco were part of this category. It may be exaggerative, but the general relationship of which seems to be an exponential effect when reverting time. In other words, the farther you go back in time, to the start of (the Franco) immigration to Maine, the higher percentage of such people sought financial assistance due to lack of options. This idea of course greatly generalized and basic in thought. The priest also explained that credit unions and societies such as the 'Knights of Columbus' were a response to the economic stresses seen with the Waterville people. Local insurance companies were created in support of the community. "Now not so much because there (are so many other) insurances." Of course social welfare is not necessarily the agenda of the Catholic parish in Waterville, but remains a definite characteristic given the nature of the religion's foundations. What could be said of the current relationship between the Church and the Waterville people? 'Waterville people' encompassing a still distinct Franco population. "Today, not to the extent (of the past), their sense of community is elsewhere than church." Why? It is an "individualistic society...no longer needing social community" in the respect as before. "People are falsely satisfied." Technology and social frequencies



are greatly intertwined, of which takes the attention away from community, its problems, as well as aspects of daily life, such as religious devotion. Of which is more characteristic travelling back in time. Such a characteristic though still persists as 'Franco' today. Does it truly still apply or have changed in any way? Of course what can be said by any priest, "God and our relationship [to Him/It] is number one. [It/He] invites us a relationship with one another...every one another." Is this an age thing? "Clearly not just youth [but] any age [can and] don't think that they need what the church can offer." Is it because many say that today is more stressful and work is harder and longer due technology advancements? It's "not because of working harder or longer, you can always find time or a way for church...and (for focusing on) your relationship to God." Computers seem to want to entertain us and keep us distracted, as if fostering a new digital culture for people. Leading to a current observation of an "individualistic and secular" culture. Of which underlies the suggestion that this 'culture' is also exhibited in the Franco population. Specifically, does the Church cater in any way to this demographic, be it any French-spoken masses? "No, French-spoken mass' haven't been done for years." Is or was there a mass that celebrates the French/local heritage? No not exactly. A French-spoken mass used to be practiced once a year, however the it was not spoken in French in its entirety. Most of the dialogue continued to be spoken in English, with some of the hymns/songs sang in French. This special mass was celebrated in response to the cultural festival that initially focused its attention towards Waterville/regional Francos. This festival has not operated that way in many years. Now it is an annual festival that celebrates the cultural diversity of the many, of which still encompasses Franco-American heritage. Perhaps as the people relied less on their old tongue (French) and practiced English to substitute for daily societal operation, this indirectly influenced the Waterville Catholic parish to decide against French-spoken masses. Since the main attendance is no longer a (daily) French speaker. Also, considering that priests cycle in a fashion that does not necessarily entail a French-speaker as well.

Waterville has and still hosts a significant population of Francophones, whose culture has shaped through and influenced the city. Recognition has been made by the city. Where actions have been taken to preserve its historic roots. "The Plains" is a part of this history and old buildings such as Jean-Baptiste Mathieu's old home relevantly stands with its story up for display. Franco-Americans have always had religion characteristic to the culture, as expressed by the many scholars on the matter. Catholicism making up the majority. Undoubtedly, the discussion had with a Waterville priest gave an introductory insight as to how the Waterville Catholic parish has been influenced by the city's demographics and vice versa. As societal changes occur within time, both the people (of attendance) and the church mold accordingly with each other. A shift in attitudes due to technology advancements greatly limits the overall picture yet gives a sense of perspective as to how the relationship between Francos and the regional Catholic church have and still bilaterally influence each other. Whether a statement could be said that Franco heritage is a characteristic of the Catholic church, yes, the Franco culture has had influence on it given majority of mass attendance used to be this minority. Although, that can only be assumed true for the Waterville area based on historical trends. At least in this discussion. Undoubtedly the Catholic faith is a general, core Franco value. And it could be assumed that Waterville's Catholic parish still offers many functions to the (Franco) people. It is with great thanks to this Waterville priest that a discussion

revolving around the Franco identity and history could be had. Suggesting that Waterville Franco culture and its people are still in folk's thoughts and is an active idea in the region.

#### CITATIONS

<sup>1</sup> Cardon, Patrick. "The Museum in the Streets © Creates Heritage Discovery Trails for the Benefit of a Community's Inhabitants and Tourists." *The Museum in the Streets Welcome*. N.p., n.d. Web. 14 June 2017.

<sup>2</sup> "Franco-American and Lebanese-American History and Organizations." (n.d.): n. pag. Web. <https://www.waterville-me.gov/content/1262032696franco-american-history-by-chenard.pdf>.

<sup>3</sup> "Google Maps." *Google*. N.p.: n.p., n.d. N. pag. Print.

<sup>4</sup> "The Museum in the Streets." *Corner of Water & Grove Street* (n.d.): n. pag. Web. <https://www.waterville-me.gov/content/13184323351303992787tour-brochure-8-23-10-english.pdf>.