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A rare first-hand account of Franco-American migration to New England, Immigrant Odyssey: A French-Canadian Habitant in New England, has been newly published by the University of Maine Press.

The account is by Felix Albert who, in 1881, moved to Lowell, Mass. with his wife and nine children from his family farm Quebec in search of a more secure future. Albert was one of an estimated 300,000 French Canadians who migrated to New England between 1860 and 1900, looking for work in the many textile factories of the area. Today, Franco-Americans represent the third-largest ancestry group in New England.

Albert's account of his life is unique. According to Frances Early, associate professor of history at Mount St. Vincent University, Halifax, Nova Scotia, "Great men and women often write their memoirs; illiterate North American immigrants almost never do." Albert, illiterate and unable to speak English throughout his lifetime, dictated his life's story to an unknown transcriber, published it himself, and stood on street corners selling copies of his Histoire d'un Enfant pauvre (A Poor Lad's Story).

Immigrant Odyssey contains the original French text of the Histoire with a complete English translation and a 24-page introduction by Early, who places the work in its historical context.

The Dictionnaire de l'Amerique francaise says of Albert's Histoire, "The book is a first-hand account, perhaps the most important one, of the conditions which pushed the Quebecois to immigrate to the United States, the conditions which awaited them in the Petits Canadas of New England, and the social and family relations of first-generation Franco-Americans."

The new edition is a valuable addition to Franco-American historical studies and is the second book on Franco-Americans published by the University of Maine Press. A third book, Acadian Hard Times, by C. Stewart Doty, is scheduled for publication in May 1991. Immigrant Odyssey: A French-Canadian Habitant in New England (\$19.95) is available in hardcover from area bookstores or from the University of Maine Press, (207) 581-1408.