"Ici on parle français"

REPORT OF THE COMMISSION TO STUDY THE DEVELOPMENT OF MAINE'S FRANCO-AMERICAN RESOURCES

Chapter 83, *Resolves of* 1997

December, 1997

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1 PURPOSE AND MEMBERSHIP

The Commission to Study Maine' s Franco-American Resource was established by an act of the Maine Legislature and Governor in the spring and summer of 1997. The Commission was charged with studying general demographic, language and educational trends in Maine's Franco-American community; and with identifying the unique economic development opportunities which the presence of a strong French-speaking community makes possible for Maine. This is the Commission's report.

Members of the commission include:

Chair		
Connie LaPointe Brennan	Portland	Peoples Heritage Bank
Vice-Chair		
Raymond Lagueux	Lewiston	Forum Francophones des Affaires
Members		
Perry Newman	South Portland	International Trade Center
Julie Carrier	Belgrade	Co-Enterprise Maine Chamber & Business Alliance
Madeleine Giguère	Lewiston	Business and civic
Yvon Labbé	Orono	Franco-American Center
Tony Brinkley	Orono	Franco-American Center
Doris Bonneau	Lewiston	K-12 academic community
Rachel desGrosseilliers	Auburn	Tourism
Judy Paradis	Frenchville	Maine Senate
Richard Bennett	Norway	Maine Senate
David Madore	Augusta	Maine House
Patricia Lemaire	Lewiston	Maine House
John Jenkins	Lewiston	Forum Francophones des Affaires
John Martin	Eagle Lake	Aroostook County
Andre Lacasse	Augusta	Kennebec County
Peter Daigle	Bangor	Penobscot County
Susan Huseman	Bangor	University of Maine System
Joyce Hedlund	Bangor	Maine Technical Colleges
Adrian Brochu	Stratton	Forest Products
Severin Beliveau	Augusta	Maine Chamber & Business Alliance
Dean Busque	Millinocket	Business & Industry/Agriculture
Michael Cantara	Alfred	Business & Civic/York County
Edmund Guay	Auburn	Business & Industry/High Technology
Raymond Giroux	Bangor	Academic/Private K-12
Edward Youngblood	Bangor	Business & Industry/Financial Services
Greg Nadeau	Augusta	Ex officio, Governor's Office
Staff		
Sharon Boucher Albert	Bangor	
Frank O'Hara	Hallowell	

2 THE GLOBAL FRANCOPHONE OPPORTUNITY

The Osher Map Library of the University of Southern Maine has a 1556 map of our region. On it our area is called "La Nuova Francia" – or "New France." Today, in the aftermath of Wolfe's victory over Montcalm at the Battle of Quebec in 1759, it is called "New England."

But culture and civilizations do not change so easily as names on maps. Two centuries after Montcalm's defeat, French culture remains vital on the entire northeastern corner of our continent – from Quebec and the Maritimes through New England. However, the line that French culture has traveled to get to where it is today, particularly in Maine, has been roundabout. First they came from the east, as Samuel de Champlain led a group of hardy French settlers to an island on the St. Croix River, just below modern-day Calais. This was 1604, three years before the Jamestown settlement. The winter was harsh. The settlers went back across the Bay to Port Royal. Next they came from the south-east, as French-speaking Acadians from the Maritimes were expelled by the English and moved up to the St. John Valley in Aroostook County. This was in the late 1700's; the winters were still harsh, but this time they stayed. And finally, in the mid to late 1800's they came from the north, thousands of Quebecois heading south to find work in the expanding mills of Sanford, Saco, Biddeford, Westbrook, Lewiston, Auburn, Rumford, Jay, Augusta, and Waterville. By 1900 French Canadians accounted for almost half of the labor force at Maine's textile mills.

Today, in all, there are approximately 300,000 Maine residents, or about 25% of the total population of Maine, who have an ancestry which is primarily French[1]. Of these, about 80,000 live in a home where French continues to be spoken.

Maine's story is not that unusual. There are many countries around the world where France once exerted political or cultural dominion, and where the official connection has long since ended, but where, beneath the surface, French language and cultural currents run strong. Such is the case in Caribbean countries like Haiti and French Guyana; in Southeast Asian countries like Vietnam and Cambodia; in Muslim countries of Africa and the Middle East like Algeria, Tunisia, Morocco, and Lebanon; in sub-Saharan African nations of the Congo and Senegal; and even in European countries like Belgium, Luxembourg, and Switzerland.

France itself is a nation of 60 million people. When all of the countries with some French language and cultural ties are added in – the nearly 50 "Francophone" nations – the total population balloons to over 500 million people. Of these, about 130 million speak French. This is a major economic market.

More precisely, the French-speaking countries divide into two different markets. The northern tier, countries like Canada and France and Switzerland, have developed economies. Maine's trade opportunities with northern tier countries include high-technology goods, business services, and the attraction of "cultural" tourists. The southern tier of countries, like Vietnam and Algeria and Madagascar, have developing economies, often with natural resource bases similar to Maine's. The opportunities to the south include the export of Maine skills in aquaculture, food processing, wood products, and professional service.

This is how Maine's participation in the global Francophone network can be a source of important jobs and economic growth.

[1] Unless otherwise noted, all data about the French-speaking population is from the 1990 U.S. Census.

3 CURRENT STATE INITIATIVES

Economic development, at the level of high finance, can be very sophisticated and complicated. Yet, economic development, at its most basic level, is quite simple. Every business trade begins with human communication and trust.

Norm Renaud of the Androscoggin Chamber of Commerce described how it works to the *Sun Journal*. While at a recent meeting with people from Maine and French-speaking parts of Canada, Renaud observed: "I was in a room full of economic developers, and only two of us from Maine spoke French. When the Quebec developers discovered we could speak their language, the tone changed. There was freedom of conversation. The next day I got a call from one of them who said a company wants to relocate in Maine and 'could you help us.' If you speak to someone in their language, you automatically become their friend."

Peter Daigle, a Bangor businessman, had a similar experience. He introduced himself to some Quebec business people in French, and carried on a short social conversation. They immediately relaxed. The conversation didn't go much further – since Peter's French consisted largely of what he remembered from his mother when he was growing up, and she didn't talk too much about business deals. This didn't matter – the connection was already made.

Peter's business connection was made through the Bangor Regional Chamber of Commerce/University of Maine Partnership Project with the region of Beauce in Quebec. The cooperative effort involves providing language immersion experiences – in English for Quebec businesses, in French for Bangor area businesses. In the future, a directory of area businesses who can conduct business in French, an Intemet web page, and tourism initiatives around French culture will also be developed.

This is but one instance of many public and private efforts going on in Maine. Statewide, the Maine Chamber and Business Alliance has cooperated with Quebec businesses to sponsor a series of Co-Entreprise conferences in recent years. In the St. John Valley, the Maine Acadian Heritage Council and the St. John Valley Chambers of Commerce are working with their counterparts in New Brunswick to create a unified marketing and tourism attraction program around the theme of ***"Experience Our Acadia."*** There are successful and growing annual Franco-American festivals in Biddeford ***(la Kermesse)***, Lewiston ***(Le Festival de Joie)***, Jackman, Madawaska ***(Acadian Festival)***, and Augusta ***(la Festival de la Bastille)***.

In the private sector, major Maine businesses like UNUM, LL Bean, MBNA, Peoples Heritage Bank, Bangor Savings Bank, the Sitel Corporation, St. Mary's Regional Medical Center, and Central Maine Medical Center have all identified and trained French speakers within their companies to be available to French-speaking customers. Fleet Bank has installed 40 bilingual ATM machines in Maine, and Key Bank has 7-10 bilingual ATM locations.

At the University of Maine, the ***Maine Franco-American Center*** has been providing technical assistance for three decades to Franco-Americans throughout Maine. Beneficiaries include ***Le Club Francais, Save Our French, the Maine Acadian Preservation Commission,*** the ***Maine Heritage Council,*** and the ***Acadian Archives.***

The Franco-American Center and a coalition of Maine business, community, and government leaders have combined forces to establish the offices of the United States Bureau of the Francophone Business Forum, called the ***American Association of Forum Francophone des Affaires*** (AAFFA), in the Lewiston-Auburn area. The AAFFA is being supported in its start-up by $45,000 from the City of Lewiston, $20,000 from the City of Auburn, and $35,000 from area businesses. AAFFA has the potential to become a valuable partner for the Maine International Trade Center in developing Maine's role in the global market.

The Forum Francophone des Affaires is a global network of businesses and governments in 37 French speaking nations. Its potential is demonstrated by a ***trade mission to Vietnam*** held in October of 1997. Eleven business, academic, and economic development officials from Maine traveled to Ho Chi Minh City and Hanoi to attend the biennial meeting of FFA and explore potential areas for economic cooperation between Maine and Vietnam.

Among the possibilities identified during the trip, and being pursued at present, are the provision to Vietnam by Maine companies of computerized mapping programs, environmental pollution management services, market research, composite materials development, potato processing, aquaculture, shipbuilding, and legal/banking services. The trip has created the possibility of a long-term, mutually beneficial relationship for Maine with Vietnam, a country of 75 million people.

These efforts are being assisted by the ***Maine International Trade Center.*** The Center has contracted with French speakers to assist in translation on foreign trade missions, participated in the trade mission to Vietnam, engaged a bilingual business consultant to assist in its Bangor office start-up, assisted in organizing a variety of Maine-Canada trade events, prepared informational packets in French and English, and trained two of its staff in French language studies.

4 THE RESOURCE – MAINE'S FRENCH-SPEAKING POPULATION

French language and culture have come to Maine as a pure gift. The gift may now require a special effort to preserve. The gift is the 300,000 Maine residents of primarily French descent, of whom 80,000 live in homes where French is spoken.

People of French descent live throughout the state. York County has the most, 49,000. Androscoggin is next with 45,000, then Cumberland with 37,000, Aroostook and Kennebec each with 32,000, and Penobscot with 30,000 (Appendix A). The county with the highest proportion of people with French descent is Androscoggin (42%), with Aroostook second at 37%.

Thirty-one cities have more than 1,000 persons of primarily French ancestry. Lewiston, with 23,000, has by far the most. Biddeford is second with 12,000. Other towns on the list are as far south as Springvale, as far west as Rumford, as far north as Fort Kent, and as far east as Presque Isle (see Appendix B). So the language, the people, and culture, stretch all across Maine.

How are they doing? The ***language*** skill is declining. In 1980, 94,000 Maine residents over 5 years of age spoke French in the home. In 1990, the number was 81,000, a decline of 14%. The reasons,

according to Professor Madeleine Giguère, include the aging of the French-speaking population; an increased out-migration (and declining in-migration) of French speakers; lack of support in the community for using French; lack of transmission of the language between generations within the family; and intermarriage.

This is to be expected. It follows the normal pattern for any non-English speaking ethnic group in the United States. It can best be countered by the schools. However, French language instruction in Maine schools is not at nearly the scale needed to offset the trend.

Of all students in grades kindergarten through senior in public and private high schools in Maine in 1995-96, only *one in eleven* is currently studying a foreign language (source: Don Reutershan, Foreign Language Association of Maine, Department of Education). When considering secondary grades alone, the picture improves. Here 45% take a foreign language, and of these 37.5% study French. Put another way, *one in six* high school students takes French, or 17,000 in all. Considering that not every high school student taking French will remember what has been learned, and not every student who remembers will stay in Maine after high school, this is not a level of instruction which can insure a strong French-speaking presence in Maine in the Future.

There are other issues here as well. Commission members report that some educators devalue the French spoken in Maine, and do not hire native French speakers, or teach students the cultural value of their own language. While French is the language taken most often in high school, one Commission member reported that Spanish language study is chosen twice as much by students at his school than is French – even though the students are primarily of French descent. This is not unusual in either Maine or New England. Finally, the recently adopted Learning Results proposes mandatory school district compliance in math, science, and English skills – and only "voluntary" compliance with foreign language skills.

More generally, how are the ***people*** of French descent doing? In one respect they are doing better than others in Maine; their 1989 median income of $27,400 (as reported by the Census) was $500 higher than the rest of Maine's households. In other respects, however, they are doing less well. Maine people of French ancestry are less likely to have any education beyond high school, and they are less likely to hold executive or professional jobs than other Maine people.

In summary, we still have the gift of the French language, French culture, and families of French descent; but we're not nurturing them as we should.

5 THREE LONG-TERM STRATEGIES

Our Commission has chosen to recommend three major strategies for the State of Maine. These steps must be implemented in a collaborative partnership, with educators and the business sector and French cultural groups and government all involved, as happened in the case of the Forum Francophones des Affaires (FFA). Our recommended strategies are three:

STRATEGY #1: *Include the French language and cultural heritage of Maine as an integral part of the way we define Maine's economic competitive advantage to the outside world.*

Maine is known for its work ethic, quality of life, natural beauty, access to ocean and forest, low crime, and accessible political leadership. All of these have been a steady part of Maine's economic development message which has been marketed to the outside world over the past twenty years. We now recommend that Maine's French heritage – its bilingual citizens and cultural riches – be marketed as an essential component of that message. As a model for how this might be done, New Brunswick has used its bilingual population, coupled with investments in telecommunications, to establish itself as the telemarketing center of Canada.

Suggestions for implementation:

a) *Develop French language brochures marketing the state 's bilingual capacity – "Ici on parle Français;"*

b) *Create a directory of businesses and services with French-language capabilities and interests. This directory will be used to market Maine to businesses and visitors to our state, as well as build a statewide network of French-language capacity businesses;*

c) *Establish a 1-800 hot line to Maine staffed by people who speak French, for the benefit of tourists and foreign businesses;*

d) *Implement an advertising strategy for "cultural tourism" to be aired in France and French-speaking Canada;*

e) *Conduct continued high-level trade missions to Francophone countries; and*

f) *Assist businesses, such as those in the health fields, by providing French language immersion programs for their staffs.*

STRATEGY #2: ***Give a high priority to the preservation of Maine's traditional bilingual capability in French and English by the state's education systems.***

Without a concerted effort, the language capability and advantage Maine presently enjoys will slip away in future years.

Suggestions for implementation:

a) *Give foreign language learning an equal priority as math or science in the implementation of the Learning Results – and, in particular, focus on beginning language education in the primary grades;*

b) *Remove any remaining prejudice against the Maine French accent in the teaching of students and the hiring of teachers in Maine's public schools;*

c) *Expand the role of the University Franco-American Center at Orono to provide services and training for all University of Maine campuses;*

d) *Build on the very successful St. John Valley Immersion program for preparing bilingual students;*

e) *Develop a strategy for working with French cultural, religious, and neighborhood organizations to systematically raise the educational aspirations of French ancestry youth;*

f) *Foster renewed interest in the Franco-American resource by providing a means of obtaining state financial support for various research and culture initiatives in the state.*

STRATEGY #3: ***Monitor the condition of Maine's Franco resource – its language and people – on a regular basis. Establish a data-base.***

At present, no statewide survey of French-ancestry people exists outside of the official Census conducted every 10 years. The Census questions are not targeted enough to give clear and precise data about French speakers or French ancestry. A better understanding of the needs, aspirations, and potential of Maine's French-ancestry population is important to developing future strategies to ensure their cultural and linguistic health.

Suggestions for implementation:

a) *Support a research effort by the Franco-American Center at Orono to develop and implement a statewide survey and to maintain a statewide data base;*

b) *Attempt to change the Census survey to include more information about French language citizens.*

6 TWO IMMEDIATE ACTIONS

In order to begin the process of implementing the strategies above, we recommend two immediate actions for the Governor and Legislature this year.

ACTION #1: ***The Governor should establish by Executive Order a one-year interagency task force to begin the implementation of the above strategies.***

Membership might include the Maine International Trade Center, the Department of Economic and Community Development (both tourism and business development sections), the Department of Transportation (for signage issues), the University of Maine System, the Department of Education, the Maine Chamber and Business Alliance, and others. The group could incorporate the Francophone strategy described above into existing state plans and policies, attraction brochures and literature, and targeted marketing efforts. The task force would not be expected to be permanent; after a year its work should be finished, and further follow-up would be done by individual agencies.

ACTION #2: ***The Legislature should allocate the balance of funds not expended by this Commission to Study the Development of Maine's Franco-American Resources back to the Franco-American Center at the University of Maine.***

This Commission has been thrifty in conserving taxpayers' money. The money which now remains in the Commission's account should be allocated to the Franco-American Center at the University of Maine to promote the strategies recommended in this report.

APPENDIX A

French Ancestry by Maine County

Source: 1990 *Census*

County	1st Ancestry French	Percent of County
Androscoggin	44,502	42.3%
Aroostook	32,243	37.1%
Cumberland	37,373	15.4%
Franklin	5,408	18.6%
Hancock	4,416	9.4%
Kennebec	31,973	27.6%
Knox	3,211	8.8%
Lincoln	3,013	9.9%
Oxford	9,977	19.0%
Penobscot	29,561	20.2%
Piscataquis	3,132	16.8%
Sagadahoc	5,371	16.0%
Somerset	12,174	24.0%
Waldo	3,657	11.1%
Washington	2,686	7.5%
York	48,816	29.7%
MAINE	**277,413**	**22.6%**

APPENDIX B

French Ancestry by Maine Place

(with more than 1,000 population)

Source: 1990 *Census*

	1st Ancestry	Percent of Place
Auburn	8,853	36.4%
Augusta	6,585	30.9%
Bangor	5,708	17.2%
Biddeford	12,314	59.5%
Brewer	1,700	18.8%
Brunswick	2,617	17.8%
Caribou	4,081	43.3%
Fort Kent	1,799	84.2%
Lewiston	22,756	57.2%
Lisbon Falls	1,134	24.3%
Madawaska	3,084	84.4%
Madison	1,035	35.0%
Milford	1,061	46.6%
Millinocket	2,207	31.9%
Old Orchard Beach	2,353	30.2%
Old Town	2,833	34.3%
Orono	1,765	18.0%
Portland	8,914	13.9%
Presque Isle	3,010	28.5%
Rumford	2,307	42.8%
Saco	5,922	39.0%
Sanford	4,692	45.5%
Skowhegan	2,075	29.9%
South Portland	3,337	14.4%
South Sanford	1,306	33.2%
Springvale	1,212	34.8%
Topsham	1,191	19.4%
Van Buren	2,266	82.1%
Waterville	6,590	38.5%
Westbrook	4,544	28.2%
Winslow	2,584	47.5%
Maine	**277,413**	**22.6%**

APPENDIX C

Resources for further Research and Reading

Archives

Acadian Archives	***University of Maine at Fort Kent*** ***Pleasant Street, Fort Kent, ME 04743***
Centre Franco Américain	***University of Maine*** ***Orono, ME 04469***
Franco-Américain Heritage Reading Room	***Lewiston-Auburn College*** ***University of Southern Maine*** ***51 Westminster Street, Lewiston, ME 04240***

Selected Publications

G. Stewart Doty. *The First Franco-Americans: New England Life Histories From the Federal Writers Project*. 1938-1939. Orono, Maine: The University of Maine Press, 1985.

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APPENDIX D

Acknowledgements

This report, and the legislative mandate it responds to, are the result of a sequence of developments in the last two years. The developments all stem from one basic recognition – that Maine's Franco-American culture can be an economic resource which can benefit all of the people of Maine.

The resource was formally recognized first in December 1995, when the Bangor Region Chamber of Commerce and the University of Maine signed the Franco-American Partnership Agreement, endorsing a project which (in the language of the agreement) "takes as its premise that Maine s French culture and French language speakers are fundamental resources in developing ties with Quebec, the Maritimes, and France." The Partnership Agreement led in turn to a meeting at the University of Maine in May 1996 in which business leaders from around the state agreed to establish the American Association of the Forum Francophone des Affaires (AAFFA) in Maine. From this meeting came the seeds for a Franco-American Partnership Project in Lewiston (October 1996), for incorporation of the American Association of FFA (January 1997), for the passage of L.D. 1603 (June 1997).

A related event gave added recognition to the resource. In April 1997, at the 3rd annual meeting of Co-Entreprise, Maine's French reality was recognized as crucial to future relations between Maine and Quebec; Governor Angus King and Premier Lucien Bouchard announced the creation of a Maine-Quebec Committee to develop tourism based on the cultural heritage that Maine and Quebec share. Following the passage of L.D. 1603, in September 1997, Lewiston became the site of the national headquarters of the American Association of FFA and pledged $100,000 to support the Association. At the beginning of October 1997, a delegation from Maine represented the United States in Viet Nam at the biennial world conference of FFA.

This report is simply one further step of an ongoing process.