

**Grouper, Unir, Protéger - Elite Strategies and the Formulation of a French Identity  
in Western Canada, 1870 to 1930**

by

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## ABSTRACT

It has generally been assumed that the marginalization of French communities and identity in western Canada was the result of widespread English and Protestant immigration to the West, combined with an absence of support from Québec. My research, however, has established that French and Catholic elites, both from the Church and elsewhere, did as much to transform French settlements into Franco-Manitoban, Fransaskois and Franco-Albertan communities through the settlement period of 1870-1930. It is this process of western French settlement building and identity formation that I explore in this dissertation.

Driven by mass immigration of a mostly English and Protestant population, French communities already in place or those yet to establish themselves were challenged to survive. While studies of assimilation examine the ways in which local communities and cultures were subsumed by larger outside forces and groups, this dissertation examines the values and structures based in Catholicism and the French language that helped to group, unite together and struggle.

This process or these strategies have been little analyzed. Historians have long acknowledged the French-Catholic presence in the Canadian west, but there has been little scholarship on the settlement of these groups and their process of community and identity construction. They do not examine French-Catholic settlement and identity as a larger (provincial or regional) phenomenon, nor do they consider the strategies to achieve them.

My research project examines the origins of French-Catholic immigration to the prairies, their settlement patterns, and the ways in which these groups constructed identities and communities in the building years of the late nineteenth and early twentieth century. I focus on three representative French localities, including: south of Winnipeg along the Red River

(including the communities of Saint-Joseph, Letellier, Saint-Jean-Baptiste), the southern plains of Saskatchewan (and Gravelbourg), and the central and rural communities of Alberta (with emphasis on Morinville and St. Paul des Métis).

My approach to this research is sequential. First, I place French-Catholic immigration in context. I outline a chronology and geography of French-Catholic settlement to the Canadian West after 1870, I examine the process of colonization and community construction. I identify particular colonization efforts and how these utopian schemes attempted to transform existing areas into French-Catholic cultures and settlements. I then focus on ways these communities, and their leaders, were able to construct their own identities through their relations with the majority English-Protestant population. I conclude that a regional French identity evolved throughout the settlement period of 1870-1930, and that this evolution can be attributed to the struggle of the French leadership group intent on defending their language and ethnic identity.

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## List of Abbreviations

Association des Commissaires d'Écoles Franco-Canadiens (of Saskatchewan)	A.C.E.F.C.
Association Canadienne-Française d'Alberta	A.C.F.A.
Association Catholique Franco-Canadienne de la Saskatchewan	A.C.F.C.
Association Catholique de la Jeunesse Canadienne-Française	A.C.J.C.
Association d'Éducation des Canadiens-Français du Manitoba	A.E.C.F.M.
Association Franco-Canadienne de la Saskatchewan	A.F.C.
Association Interprovinciale (of Saskatchewan)	A.I.
Catholic School Trustees' Association (of Saskatchewan)	C.S.T.A.
The Missionary Oblates of Mary Immaculate	O.M.I.
Société Saint-Jean-Baptiste	S.S.J.B.
Société du Parler Français au Canada	S.P.F.C.
Saskatchewan School Trustees Association	S.S.T.A.
United Farmers of Alberta	U.F.A.



## Chapter 1 Introduction

On December 12, 1878, a young French-Canadian priest sat in a dark jail cell. He was bloodied, tired and sore from recent events. The Abbé M. Charbonneau had been arrested at gunpoint while sleeping at the bishop's residence in Saint-Jean-Baptiste. One day prior, this same priest had been enjoying the provincial election victory of his new friend M.E. Taillefer, Franco-Catholic incumbent in the riding of Ste. Agathe, Manitoba. This victory meant a great deal to the area's French-Catholics, as did Charbonneau's arrest.

The Catholic Church, by way of the Manitoba Act and the *Dominion Lands Act of 1872*, would work to acquire land along the Red River south of Saint Boniface. With the help of l'Abbé J.A. Fillion and the Archbishop Alexandre Antonin Taché of the Saint-Boniface Archdiocese (now Winnipeg), the Catholic Church had put in place a strategy to give the Franco-Catholics of Manitoba every opportunity to settle here and make it their own 'little Québec.'<sup>1</sup> While some French-Catholics realized this early advantage, the rapid influx of English-speaking Protestants soon outnumbered them in the new province. French-Canadiens quickly became a minority in the West, and l'Abbé Charbonneau's arrest became a symbol for present and future generations of the changing face of western Canada and the challenges the French would face.

On December 11, 1878 Edmond Burke Grant of Rivière-aux-Marais (later Letellier), and George Klyne of Saint-Agathe applied to the elector's office at Emerson to register themselves as candidates for the upcoming provincial election in the Saint-Agathe riding. The incumbent,

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<sup>1</sup> The phrase 'Little Québec' appears first in the biography of Archbishop Taché by Dom Benoît, *Vie de Mgr Taché : Archevêque de St-Boniface* (Montréal: Librairie Beauchemin, 1904, 1904). Other historians, including Arthur S. Morton, *A History of the Canadian West to 1870-71* (London: T. Nelson, 1939), and Robert Painchaud would repeat the phrase. Robert Painchaud, "The Catholic Church and the Movement of Francophones to the Canadian Prairies 1870-1915" (Ph.D. dissertation, University of Ottawa, 1976).

Taillefer, however, would retain his seat through acclamation. Joseph Turenne, the Franco-Catholic returning officer in the riding, reviewed Grant's and Klyne's applications, denying them both. A *Le Métis* article reported that Grant's registration fee was paid in American currency instead of Canadian as was required, and Klyne failed to obtain the appropriate signatures on his application. Both men, upset with the arbitrary decisions, blamed Turenne and the governing priest in the riding (Fillion) for denying their candidacy based on their own race and religious affiliation (both Grant and Klyne were Anglo-Protestant). After a brief and peaceful protest that afternoon by some Grant and Klyne supporters outside Turenne's office, they disbanded, with the disagreement seemingly at an end. Grant and Klyne, however, remained adamant that they had been done an injustice. They took their complaint to Judge Edward Wood of nearby Morris County. Wood (also an Anglo-Protestant) approved a warrant for the arrest of Turenne for obstruction of a provincial election. The following events have been reconstructed according to available sources: *Le Métis* and *Le Devoir* newspapers, court testimony and private letters from Charbonneau and Fillion.<sup>2</sup>

At eleven o'clock on the night of December 11, 1878, Mr. Charles Taylor and Mr. Tim Bell, charged with carrying out the arrest order for Turenne, arrived at the Bishop's residence at Saint-Jean-Baptiste, Manitoba. L'Abbé Fillion answered the door, advising Taylor and Bell that Turenne was in fact there but had already retired for the night. Undeterred, they insisted that Fillion retrieve Turenne from his room. Bell and Taylor then advanced toward Turenne

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<sup>2</sup> This story was told over a period of weeks in *Le Métis* newspaper from 1878-1879, *Le Métis*, vol. VIII, ed. 24-31, 12 dec 1878 to 30 jan 1879, 2-3. See also, "letter from Archbishop Taché", 29 dec 1878, Centre du Patrimoine, Archives de la Société Historique de Saint-Boniface (SHSB), Collection Générale de la Société Historique de Saint-Boniface, Folder Saint-Jean-Baptiste Centenaire Historiques. The story was also recreated in a program 'La Bagarre' at the event's centennial anniversary. "La Bagarre", 9 oct 1977, SHSB, Collection Générale de la Société Historique de Saint-Boniface, Folder Saint-Jean-Baptiste Centenaire Historiques. See also "Pastors of the Parish of St. Jean-Baptiste", n.d., SHSB, Fonds Yolande Rheault, Folder L'abbé David Fillion. Rosemarie Bissonnette popularized the story in her publication during the centenary celebrations of the event. Rosemarie Bissonnette, *Une Bagarre Très Politique* (Saint-Boniface, Manitoba: Éditions des Plaines, 1981).

announcing; "...vous avez fini de jouer des mauvais tours. Apportez les fers".<sup>3</sup> Fillion and Taillefer intervened, preventing Turenne from being subjected to what they thought to be an assault (Charbonneau was also there but reading in another room at the time). Promising to return, Bell and Taylor did so at 6 a.m. the next morning with guns and "...a half dozen English friends"<sup>4</sup> as well as a second warrant, this one for Fillion for his interference the night before.

At the trial, it would be claimed by the prosecution that during this first confrontation Fillion had been quite aggressive toward the appointed sheriffs, kicking one of them and, with Taillefer's help, forcibly removing them both.<sup>5</sup> Fillion, for his part, would defend his actions declaring that at no time did Taylor or Bell produce the warrant they supposedly had for Turenne. Fillion instead assumed these intruders were attacking his invited guest. Fillion would add that both Taylor and Bell smelled of alcohol, furthering his claim that his friend needed to be defended.

The second confrontation at the Bishop's residence at Saint-Jean-Baptiste quickly turned violent when Taylor pointed at Fillion and claimed aloud to his party of over half a dozen men; "That's the man who put me out last night." A second and this time more heated confrontation ensued. François Xavier Beauchamp, sacristan for the church, retrieved a gun from his room. This made matters worse.<sup>6</sup> Shots were fired and fists were thrown. During the melee, both Taillefer and an unnamed English man were shot. Charbonneau was eventually apprehended and stuffed into the back of one of the constable's carriages, suffering both physical and verbal abuse along the way. Taillefer would spend a few hours in a nearby hospital to tend to his gunshot

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<sup>3</sup> Translation - "...you have finished playing your tricks [from the election]. Bring the guns." This version of the story was also retold by Annette Saint-Pierre. It was unclear which, either Bell or Taylor, issued the directive to the other to return with guns. "La Bagarre... à Saint-Jean-Baptiste", 1977, SHSB, Fonds Yolande Rheault, Folder L'abbé David Fillion.

<sup>4</sup> Others in the troupe included Mr. William Henderson and Mr. Martin.

<sup>5</sup> Fillion also received support from a Métis employee and groundskeeper, Prosper Ducharme.

<sup>6</sup> Aside from Ducharme and Beauchamp, others got involved in the fight, including: Madame F-X Beauchamp (house manager), Charles and Elise Lamoureux (colonists), and M. Joseph Dubuc (who would be the defense lawyer for Fillion and Turenne).

wound. The extent of the injury to the unnamed English person shot was not reported in the French newspapers. A few days later, l'Abbé Charbonneau would be released from his Morris jail cell and brought back to Saint-Jean-Baptiste.<sup>7</sup> Both Fillion and Turenne, against whom the original complaint was made, were still to be arrested.

The events of the night of December 11 and the morning of December 12 would become known to the French in the area as 'la Bagarre'.<sup>8</sup> The French newspaper *Le Métis* would update its readers on recent events and the subsequent court case, claiming throughout unfair treatment of its clergy and provincially appointed employee in Turenne. After further communication between Taché and county officials, the charges against Charbonneau were dropped. The arrests of Fillion and Turenne were eventually carried out. On December 23, 1878, Fillion and Turenne stood trial in provincial court in Winnipeg (Fillion for obstruction of justice and Turenne for interfering with the provincial election). Fillion, in his defense, noted that he always respected the laws of Canada and that he would do everything to ensure his parishioners continued to obey the laws. At the same time, Fillion also made clear that the country was his. In essence, Fillion asserted that the area south of Saint Boniface belonged to the Franco-Catholics, and that while they would comply with the government's laws, the land itself and the rights to occupy them in their own language and culture belonged to the Franco-Catholics. "Vous connaissez, Monseigneur, mes sentiments; je profess respect et obéissance aux lois de mon pays."<sup>9</sup>

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<sup>7</sup> According to Fillion's memoirs and following the sequence of events, Charbonneau would have been released sometime between December 12 and 23, 1878. "Mémoires de Monsieur L'abbé Joseph David Fillion – par M. le juge L.A. Prud'homme, M.S.R.C.", n.d., SHSB, Fonds Yolande Rheault, Folder L'abbé David Fillion, 14-17.

<sup>8</sup> Translation – 'the fight'. "La Bagarre Program", 1977, SHSB, Collection Générale de la Société Historique de Saint-Boniface, Folder Saint-Jean-Baptiste Centenaire Historique.

<sup>9</sup> Translation - "You know, Monseigneur, my feelings [in respect to French rights]; I profess respect and obedience to the laws of my country." L'Abbé Fillion to Archbishop Taché, n.d., SHSB, Fonds Yolande Rheault, Folder L'abbé David Fillion.

‘La Bagarre’ was about finding a place of equality in Manitoba and western Canada for French-speaking Catholics. Judge Wilde, who presided over the case, would eventually throw out the charges because the arresting officers failed to produce warrants or identify themselves as officers of the court, and a re-election was ordered. The result was the same. Taillefer won a majority.<sup>10</sup> This victory, however, produced a sobering realization. The communities in and around Saint-Jean-Baptiste understood that what had transpired at ‘la bagarre’ represented the challenges the Franco-Catholics in the West would face and which would have to be overcome if they were to succeed in settling the West. ‘La Bagarre’ was the first shot in a long struggle for French rights in the West, and as such serves as a good entry point for the questions I wish to raise in this thesis.<sup>11</sup>

‘La Bagarre’ was told and retold in all French regional (and a couple French National) newspapers. It was retold in *Les Cloches de Saint-Boniface*, the western Catholic Church’s own publication, and used as an aid to raise solidarity among French-Catholic settlements and districts. Before the end of that decade, a traveling troupe performed a play dealing with their interpretation of this event in Franco-Canadian history. The play ran for years in and around the French parishes of Manitoba. Eventually, songs, poems, and a published play would add to this newly created and French-Canadian tradition. ‘La Bagarre’ became a symbol for the unjust Anglo-Protestant attacks on French (and Catholic) rights in the West. At Saint-Jean-Baptiste’s

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<sup>10</sup> This newspaper clipping copied from *Le Métis* was used as part of a program for the running play ‘La Bagarre’. Taillefer would garner 53% of the total vote compared to 32% for Grant and just over 12% for Klyne. In 1879, only Emerson supported the majority of non-French-Catholics, the other communities being wholly French and Catholic. “Elections de Ste. Agathe et de St. Charles”, *Le Métis*, vol. VIII, no 31, 30 jan 1879, 2.

<sup>11</sup> Charbonneau would soon after request and receive a transfer back to his Québec homeland, never to return. Curé Charbonneau fell curiously ill after the ‘event’, causing Taché to replace him with Abbé Pelletier. “La Petite Histoire”, mar 1998, SHSB, Collection Générale de la Société Historique de Saint-Boniface, Folder Fillion, J-David (abbé) 1907-1963, 8.

100<sup>th</sup> anniversary celebration in 1977, a book was published to commemorate this critical event in western Franco-Catholic history.<sup>12</sup>

‘La Bagarre’ raises questions of whether a French resistance to English-Protestant aggression was common in the West in the decades after 1870. If so, did it signal a regional French identity? The answer to this question is probed through the use of community histories and French language newspapers. Newspapers are critical to my research, but they are not without their problems. Their editors were almost all the elites and the leaders of communities and churches. As such, this study examines the strategies these leaders devised to protect French language communities and the French language in the West. The idea of a regional French identity, however, is also problematic in definition. While French settlements were established from Manitoba to the Rocky Mountains, and from the U.S. border to the Mackenzie Basin, there are few criteria to decide if these far-flung settlements held common ideas as to their identity. Given this problem, my study focuses less on the cultural content of this identity than on the struggle to retain it. I argue that a distinct regional French identity evolved in the struggle to retain Frenchness in the face of overwhelming English and Protestant immigration, political efforts to assimilate the French, and laws intended to eliminate the French language. These restrictive laws and political battles across the prairies included: the Manitoba Public Schools Act (1890), the Laurier-Greenway Compromise (1897), the Autonomy Bills for the provinces of Alberta and Saskatchewan (1905), the Thornton Act (1916), the Saskatchewan Schools Act (1918), and others. French responses to these specific political crises are dealt with in more detail in Chapter 7.

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<sup>12</sup> Bissonnette, *Une Bagarre Très Politique*.

Local newspapers and local records posit a local or community identity but say little about regional affiliations. For example, the local *cercle* remained the center and core identity for the French of each mission and of each parish. But once a year when all the French in Manitoba would gather to take a pilgrimage to St. Malo, or when the French in Alberta and Saskatchewan would travel to Lac La Nonne for their pilgrimage, their geographic horizons expanded, if temporarily.

Between 1870 and 1930, French-speaking settlers in western Canada both established and maintained pockets of a French culture that would change (politically, socially, and economically) over time as these same communities were impacted by other cultures (non-French and non-Catholic) and entities (organizations, associations, government agencies) around them. Donatien Frémont, writing for *La Liberté* newspaper in 1929, noted:

Dans l'ouest Canadien, vous le savez, l'élément français et catholique occupe une situation spéciale qui nous oblige à veiller et à lutter continuellement pour conserver nos positions. Faible minorité au milieu d'une vaste agglomération de peuples d'autres langues et d'autres croyances, nous aurons toujours à revendiquer nos droits et notre place au soleil.

translation

In Western Canada, as you know, the French and Catholic element occupies a special situation that forces us to ensure and continually strive to maintain our positions. A small minority in the midst of a vast agglomeration of peoples of other languages and other beliefs, we will always have to claim our rights and our place in the sun.<sup>13</sup>

The Catholic Church, after years of colonizing efforts by Taché and his successor Adelard Langevin and others, acknowledged in the early 1900s that the French-speaking immigrant numbers could not keep up to others arriving. As a result, the Church came to realize their own diminishing hold on the West. The Holy See then commanded a new strategy to focus

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<sup>13</sup> Letter from Donatien Frémont, 6 mar 1929, SHSB, Collection Générale de la Société Historique de Saint-Boniface, Folder Grande-Clairière.

on colonizing all Catholics, and not just the French. This decision would help the Church salvage and maintain a Catholic influence in the West. Unfortunately, this meant the Franco-Catholics had to share the patronage offered by the Church with others. Franco-Catholics would no longer be the only 'official' Catholic ethnic group in the area. This directive to welcome Catholics of all ethnicities would be a severe blow to French westerners already there, given that much of their ongoing settlement, infrastructure, business, social welfare and community strategies were now left more to their own devices than in the past.

The already established French communities in the West were challenged, as exiting French-speaking priests and their religieuses would sometimes be replaced by non-French clerics. The impact of this decision by the Church's hierarchy would be further accentuated when Archbishop Legal of the Edmonton Archdiocese was replaced posthumously by the Irish Catholic Archbishop O'Leary in 1921, the first non-French Archbishop in the West. This represented a shift away from Québec oversight, where French western traditions and culture had originated. Thereafter, Catholic and French-Canadian populations tried to salvage the already established French enclaves. While many continued to flourish the development affected the French identity in the West.

Given these difficulties, how did local French communities survive in the overwhelming English and Protestant environment of western Canada? How did they understand themselves and how was this expressed in the period between 1870 and 1930? As Franco-Catholics lagged further behind in numbers, and as their own Church focused more on non-French Catholics, questions of a sustainable French identity arose. How did the necessary and changing mandates of their leaders affect how these communities understood themselves? Were there connections



between these communities that produced a larger French identity? Did a connection remain with their origins in Québec, in France?

Newspapers, correspondence, census data, and local histories suggest that while a strong regional identity may not have existed in the western provinces between 1870 and to 1930, there were French communities which survived and prospered in the western provinces. These western French communities were connected to each other through Church infrastructure and French socio-economic associations. Some had built a stronger ethnic infrastructure while others looked to salvage what they could, but they all had challenges. Besides existing as minority populations, these communities were also isolated from each other by large distances. They were also divided by infighting among rival associations and newspapers, and, as already noted, were partially abandoned by the Church in its decisions to refocus on all immigrant Catholics.

### **Historiography**

The story of French settlement in the West has a long history dating back to the first Oblate priests who attempted to educate and evangelize among the Métis and the Indigenous peoples. When Catholic missionaries Joseph-Norbert Provencher and J.V.S. Dumoulin first came west in 1818, they had a solitary goal to evangelize these first peoples of the prairies. With the establishment of the Catholic Church in the Red River District by 1820, they quickly assumed responsibility for the souls of most of western Canada. By 1860 the Catholic Church and Archbishop Taché had already started a colonization scheme to ensure the place of French Culture (and Catholic faith) in the West. As a result of this overarching strategy by the Church, and the writings of Taché and other religious leaders from this period, a clerical interpretation of the French in the West would influence the historiography of this subject well into the twentieth

century. It has only been in the latter half of the twentieth century that a secular historiography has developed.<sup>14</sup>

These early clerical scholars focused on religious and nationalist themes, and how western settlement was connected with Québec. By the 1960s, and with the rise of social history, this clerical interpretation was replaced by a more secular historiography which problematized both the issue of Identity and the connection to Québec.

The earliest historians of the French in the West were invariably Catholic clerics who focused on French culture being intimately connected to the Roman Catholic Church. In keeping with an ultramontanist ideology, they justified and promoted the Catholic Church's role to help legitimate Franco-Catholic claims to both language and culture. They argued that a bilingual and bicultural western identity for both French and English should continue to exist, believing that the French had 'inalienable rights' in western Canada. This continuation of the French factor in the West, they believed, would not only strengthen the Franco-Western position, but the French national position as well. As a group, these religious scholars determined that this partnership between English and French could not fail or French culture in the West would "run the risk of disappearing in an Anglo-Protestant sea."<sup>15</sup>

This historiographic tradition was strongest in the period beginning the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries when the religious connections to French settlement were strongest, and it emphasized nationalist aspects of how the West was settled by Franco-Catholics.

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<sup>14</sup> With their own printing press, they published books and pamphlets that further emphasized their mission. It was from these publications that the first interpretations of the French in the West were promulgated. The Archdiocese of Saint Boniface was also proprietor of the West Canada Publishing Company (beginning in 1902).

<sup>15</sup> Richard Lapointe and Lucille Tessier, *The Francophones of Saskatchewan: A History* (Regina: Campion Collège, 1988).

Remaining consistent with the ‘racial-religious’ viewpoint, these historians relied on a ‘we were here first’ argument to rationalize that the West should be the rightful domain of Francophones.

This ‘Clerico-Nationaliste’ school included French-speaking writers from the West: A. G. Morice,<sup>16</sup> Dom Paul Benoît,<sup>17</sup> Noël Bernier,<sup>18</sup> Alexandre Taché,<sup>19</sup> Louis-Arthur Prud’homme<sup>20</sup> and Donatien Frémont.<sup>21</sup> These scholars promoted the Church’s role in helping to legitimate Franco-Catholic claims.<sup>22</sup> Many of these scholars wrote articles for *Les Cloches de Saint-Boniface* and for *La Liberté* and had their own manuscripts published by the Church’s printing company. Morice, for example, wrote a lengthy manuscript on the western Catholic factor.<sup>23</sup> His books defended French peoples’ undeniable rights through events that highlighted French and English cultural conflict like the *Manitoba Schools Question* of the late nineteenth century.

This same group of western scholars would also begin to distance themselves from a Québec nationalism. While they still looked to Québec and the Federal Government for a defence of their rights in the West, and while they continued to promote Québec as their motherland, they began to see a separate French identity for French-speakers in the West, apart

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<sup>16</sup> A. G. Morice, *History of the Catholic Church in Western Canada, from Lake Superior to the Pacific (1695-1895)* (Toronto: The Musson Book Company, limited, 1910).

<sup>17</sup> Benoît described Bishop Taché’s life and stance on both Métis issues (as relate to English domination) and Catholic and French education. Benoît, *Vie De Mgr Taché*.

<sup>18</sup> Western journalist Noël Bernier concluded that the Franco-Manitoban colony was born notwithstanding the “persecution” and “violence” inflicted on them by various groups, including Orangemen, Ontarians and government. Noël Bernier, *Fannystelle* (Manitoba: Société Historique de Saint-Boniface, 1939), 189.

<sup>19</sup> Archbishop Taché established and became the first editor of *Les Cloches de Saint-Boniface* and wrote many editorials on the subject of protection of the French on a national scale.

<sup>20</sup> Louis-Arthur Prud’homme, for his part, took a more romanticized view of French western settlement, extolling the benefits of living on the prairies. L. A. Prud’homme, *Les Premiers Aborigènes Du Manitoba et Les Mandans* (Ottawa: Imprime pour La Société Royale du Canada, 1937); L. A. Prud’homme, *L’enseignement Français Au Nord-Ouest et Son Action Bienfaisante* (Ottawa: Imprime pour la Société Royale du Canada, 1933).

<sup>21</sup> Donatien Frémont, *Les Français Dans l’Ouest Canadien*, Vol. 1 (Saint-Boniface: Éditions du Blé, pour la Société Historique de Saint-Boniface, 1980; 1959).

<sup>22</sup> Some of these authors included: Alexandre A. Taché, *Vingt Années de Missions Dans Le Nord-Ouest de l’Amérique* (Montréal: E. Senecal, 1866); Benoît, *Vie de Mgr Taché*; Lionel Groulx, *L’Enseignement Français Au Canada* (Montréal: Librairie d’Action Canadienne-Française, 1931); Wilfrid Morin, *Nos Droits Minoritaires; Les Minorités Françaises Au Canada, Philosophie et Problèmes Contemporains* (Montréal : Editions Fides, 1943).

<sup>23</sup> Morice, *History of the Catholic Church in Western Canada*.

from one related to Québec. They believed that the French in the West established a separate identity from their origins in Québec (and France). Writing in *La Liberté, Les Cloches de Saint-Boniface* and Saskatchewan's *Le Patriote de l'Ouest*, these churchmen and scholars articulated a view of French and Catholic rights in the West as distinct from those of Québec. They began to vocalize their beliefs that a lack of French settlement in the West stemmed from a lack of assistance shown by Québec's leaders. It was not only Anglo-Protestants who disrupted French settlement in the West, but it was also related to Québec's reluctance to immigrate to the West. In their view, Québec's leaders should have extended a nationalist call to populate the West. Archbishop Taché, for example, had envisioned a regional community of French-speaking settlers to best support the idea of having a united French-Catholic nation, one that could challenge claims by English-Protestants. Unfortunately, Taché's many requests to Québec (and Ottawa) to help promote his scheme fell mostly on deaf ears.<sup>24</sup> Later, Taché would focus the majority of his efforts on doing what he could to influence the French already in the West or those about to arrive.

In the twentieth century two other variations of the 'Nationaliste' school arose. In the first variation, J-P Benoît focused his writing on Taché's earlier efforts to protect Catholic and French education (as related to English domination).<sup>25</sup> Later, in the 1930s, western journalist Noël Bernier espoused a story of perseverance as he attacked the English majority (over Québec's indifference to help) and concluded that the Manitoban colony was born notwithstanding the 'persecution' and 'violence'.<sup>26</sup> Finally, L.A. Prud'homme took a more accommodationist direction in an attempt to protect French Catholic rights in the West. Prud'homme, with a

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<sup>24</sup> Taché, *Vingt Années De Missions*; Morice, *History of the Catholic Church in Western Canada*.

<sup>25</sup> Benoît, *Vie De Mgr Taché*.

<sup>26</sup> Bernier, *Fannystelle*, 189.

burgeoning political career in Manitoba, perhaps did not want to upset the non-French political majority. Much of the writing in the first three decades of the twentieth century continued to promote a French identity and defend French rights articulated in the *British North America Act* and the Manitoba Act.

### Secular Scholars

A second group of western scholars coming of age after 1960 wrote from a more socio-economic and social-science viewpoint. Eschewing clerical or religious nationalism, they argued that Québec emigrants, instead of heading west, went to the United States, and western French leaders adapted their strategies to try and attract these settlers back from the United States. This strategy and mandate became a major theme among these historians. Franco-Manitoban historian Robert Painchaud looked at the migration patterns of French-Canadiens and French immigrants from Europe, and argued that transportation costs and the ability to work in southern factories weighed mostly into Québécois decisions and that the national and cultural pull to the West fell into disfavour.<sup>27</sup>

English-speaking scholar A.I. Silver argued that the French people (both in France and in Canada) had neither the inclination nor the capacity to work the land nor live the harsh life required on the prairies. According to Silver, the French were a ‘settled society’ who preferred the relative security of factory labour in New England instead of western Canadian hardship. In essence, the French were not culturally willing of trying new and demanding things. They were a ‘settled society’ who wanted nothing of adventure and challenge and risk. In Silver’s Master’s

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<sup>27</sup> Painchaud discusses this concept in his MA thesis. Robert Painchaud, “*Le Manitoba Et L’immigration Canadienne Française 1870-91*” (Thesis (M.A.) : University of Ottawa, 1969).

thesis, he labeled this phenomenon a ‘fear of the frontiersman.’<sup>28</sup> In his next major work, Silver softened his position somewhat by claiming that, regardless of whether the French were or were not suited for frontier life, they much preferred Québec’s hinterland. This would keep them closer to home to help protect both themselves as well as the Québec nation. Silver concluded his argument by reconfirming past scholarship that argued Québec’s leaders were more focused on protecting their own borders than expanding west. Silver summarized:

In the quarter-century after the Manitoba Act, then, when English Canada was looking to the prairies as the land of promise, the key to Canada’s future, and when thousands of Ontarians were pouring onto the plains, three main trends of opinion tended to keep French Canadians away from the region: a disbelief in the material value of Prairie land; a fear that to go there was to expose oneself and one’s national identity to danger; and a conviction that Québec alone was the French-Canadian *patrie* so that to go west was to expatriate oneself.<sup>29</sup>

Ultimately, Silver focused on the realization that the French had lost their battle with the English in the West soon after Confederation.

Writing later, Robert Painchaud, a western scholar, agreed that western French settlement had been dependent on help from Québec, and this help was not forthcoming from the Québec elite. Writing as one of the first scholars who focused on the French in the West, and not simply as part of a national French program, Painchaud confirmed the theory that French-Canadian eastern leaders cared little about western settlement and only looked to defend French western rights when it impinged on their own. Painchaud noted:

While Québécois historians view the Schools Questions as causes for the failure of French-Canadian expansionism in western Canada, Franco-Catholic writers [in the West] from the diaspora perceive them instead as the result of Québécois indifference.<sup>30</sup>

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<sup>28</sup> Ibid.

<sup>29</sup> A. I. Silver, “French Canada and the Prairie Frontier, 1870-1890”, *Canadian Historical Review* 50, no. 1 (March 1969), 27.

<sup>30</sup> Robert Painchaud, “French-Canadian Historiography and Franco-Catholic Settlement in Western Canada, 1870-1915”, *Canadian Historical Review* 59, no. 4 (12, 1978), 453.

Painchaud clarified that Québécois historians therefore suggested that keeping Québécois from emigrating was more critical to their safety and sustainability than western expansion was. Painchaud argued that these views all but ended any hope for large scale French-Canadian immigration to the West.

Raymond Huel, himself the son of French Belgian immigrants to the Canadian West, looked to update the racial-religious scholars' views from the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries with emphasis on the Catholic Church's leadership role. Huel extended an argument that tied the Catholic Church (and its leadership) inextricably to French culture. In "When a Minority feels Threatened: The Impetus for French Catholic Organization in Saskatchewan", Huel argued that you cannot have one without the other.<sup>31</sup>

Writing at the turn of the twenty-first century, Huel opined that strength of the Catholic Church's leadership ultimately determined the success or failure of the western French identity. Huel focused on Oblate missionary history in western Canada as being the dominant French leadership group and the critical link that determined whether a French identity was possible in the West. In *Archbishop A.-A. Taché of St. Boniface: The 'Good Fight' and the Illusive Vision*, Huel highlighted the life of Taché to tell the larger story of the formative years of the province of Manitoba, of an isolated French culture, and how the Oblate Order (and Taché as its leader) went to great efforts to fight for the "illusive vision" of having a bilingual and bicultural west – a 'little Québec.'<sup>32</sup> According to Huel, the purpose of Taché's work was to bring the ideals of his

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<sup>31</sup> It is here that Huel described the term 'Gesta[e] Dei per Francos' (or 'deeds [of God] through the French') that highlighted a theme utilized by French leadership. Raymond Huel, "When a Minority Feels Threatened: The Impetus for French Catholic Organization in Saskatchewan," *Canadian Ethnic Studies/Etudes Ethniques Au Canada* 18, no. 3 (1986).

<sup>32</sup> Raymond Huel, *Archbishop A.-A. Taché of St. Boniface: The 'Good Fight' and the Illusive Vision*, (Edmonton Alta.: University of Alberta Press, 2003).

beloved Québec and its cultural integration of religion, language, and social order, to the Northwest and to its peoples.<sup>33</sup>

Huel determined that French success or failure in the West needed to be measured by evaluating their local communities, newspapers, and how their economic independence and integration merged into a greater regional and national economic infrastructure. Huel called this evaluation and test ‘mutual insurance’,<sup>34</sup> concluding that an ongoing French culture in the West failed.<sup>35</sup> As proof, Huel noted that the Catholic Church failed to exert enough pressure on the Federal Government to safeguard French rights. In his final analysis, Huel determined that there were simply too many obstacles stacked against the French for Church leaders to sustain a French-speaking western region indefinitely.

K.M. Sylvester, writing in 2001, examined French settlement patterns from another perspective, providing a case study of the socio-economic development and family strategies in the Franco-Manitoban rural municipality of Montcalm.<sup>36</sup> Focusing on rural and agrarian life he examined how the market economy, family farm financing, and overall capitalist development changed over time. Sylvester focused specifically on household autonomy structures. Utilizing economic and demographic data, Sylvester concentrated on migration and group settlement. He did not incorporate the impact of religion (as Painchaud did), a connection to tradition (akin to the early clerics and Huel), or political influence as possible drivers for changes to the French municipality of Montcalm. He instead focused on the economics alone: on fertility patterns, farm financing and inheritance strategies. The struggle for these Franco-Manitobans, according to

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<sup>33</sup> *ibid.*, XXV.

<sup>34</sup> Raymond Huel, *“L’Association Catholique Franco-Canadienne De La Saskatchewan: A Response to Cultural Assimilation, 1912-1934”* (M.A. Thesis, University of Saskatchewan, 1969), 36.

<sup>35</sup> *Ibid.*, 40. See also Raymond Huel, “Gestae Dei Per Francos: The French Catholic Experience in Western Canada”, *Visions of the New Jerusalem: Religious Settlement on the Prairies* (Edmonton: NeWest Press, 1983), 39-53.

<sup>36</sup> Kenneth Michael Sylvester, *The Limits of Rural Capitalism: Family, Culture, and Markets in Montcalm, Manitoba, 1870-1940* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2001).



Sylvester, was in deciding how best to protect their own families and communities while national and global economic and technological advances encroached on their lives. Attempts were made to slow this process by using family labour, but eventually this gave way to hired labour as second and later generations moved off the farm to urban centres to work in the factories and railway yards. In essence, Sylvester attempted to explain how the French family unit and local communities tried to delay for as long as possible the inevitable arrival of a market economy and assimilation. He also argued that, because there was some success in delaying capitalism, the rural enclave of Montcalm was unique. The arrival of capitalist ideals were 'limited' in their impact because of the family unit and perhaps because of French traditional values they brought with them. Through this closed value system, the Montcalmois increased the chances of ethnic viability, at least for a while.

In carrying out these analyses, K.M. Sylvester raised an important question of whether all immigration and community studies should be understood as a family (and economically driven) process. Sylvester argued that Church and Government did little to affect French-speakers who came west. He also argued that the French were required to change, to create new traditions to accommodate modernity and other intrusions: "Underneath it all, the transformation of cultural and economic life was drawing Montcalmois out of their traditions and into a common future."<sup>37</sup> Sylvester, however, does not get at how this community saw itself or developed an identity beyond the family. He does not incorporate the impact of religion, culture, politics, or a connection to tradition and core ethnic values as possible factors in the cultural continuity of the community of Montcalm. And while his contribution is important, aspects of ethnicity and identity in the community and as region are not addressed.

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<sup>37</sup> Ibid., 134.

Cornelius Jaenen took a different approach in examining French settlement in the West.<sup>38</sup> Instead of focusing on a particular locality, Jaenen focused on a particular immigrant group, the Belgian French. He examined their reasons for coming to western Canada and how they tried to adapt to Canadian society.<sup>39</sup> Ultimately, Jaenen believed that the need to protect one's heritage had little place in a new settlement. Focusing on the diaspora of Europe to the West of Canada, he did not concentrate on the French language, religious connections, or French identity. And while Jaenen did show how Belgian settlement at the local level involved individual decisions with regards to settlement locale and adaptations to the physical and political and cultural environment, he did not compare his findings to those from other communities.

Writing in 2011, Cornelius Jaenen focused on Belgian immigration and how these nineteenth-century settlers inevitably assimilated into western and English culture. Disagreeing with earlier historiography, Jaenen believed that issues of retaining a French heritage had little impact on successive settlement. French-speaking Belgians immigrated to western Canada, he argued, in the hope of a better life. Thus, he did not focus on French language, religious connections, nationality, or ethnicity, but rather how Belgian individuals and communities made decisions in regard to adapting to the Canadian West. Jaenen therefore limited what impact governments and leaders and the Catholic Church had on decisions to create and sustain a local or regional French culture in the West.

The reluctance of recent scholars of the French in the Canadian West to address issues of ethnic or group identity at either the local or regional levels is surprising given the work on other

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<sup>38</sup> Cornelius Jaenen, a second-generation Belgian immigrant, was a professor at the University of Ottawa. He has published extensively on Canadian ethnic and religious history.

<sup>39</sup> Cornelius J. Jaenen, *Promoters, Planters, and Pioneers: The Course and Context of Belgian Settlement in Western Canada* (Calgary: University of Calgary Press, 2011).

ethnic groups in the West. For example, the work of Royden Loewen on the Mennonities in Manitoba<sup>40</sup> and Frances Swyripa on the Ukrainians, Doukhobors, and Mennonites in the Canadian West<sup>41</sup> shows how scholarship can address questions related to how ethnic groups both understood their place in western Canadian society, and how these groups maintained or invented new identities, not just at a local level, but on a regional basis as well. This study reinforces Gerald Friesen's arguments regarding the patterns of cultural persistence and assimilation of the ethnic groups in the West. While Friesen argues that the French and English were not ethnic groups like the rest given their constitutional language rights, and notes that the low level of French immigration to the West proved fatal to their political rights, he does note a fairly high rate of French language retention to 1941, and the continued importance of ethnic identity.<sup>42</sup>

### **Methodology**

This study begins in 1870 as this date marks the beginning of large-scale immigration into the West; French, English and other. The year 1930 has been chosen as an end date as the Great Depression ended major immigration waves onto the prairies until after World War II. The study is also framed geographically. Given that my research interrogates the various possibilities of local, provincial and even regional French identities, I have chosen three localities in the West, each in a different province to hopefully represent the West as a whole.

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<sup>40</sup> Royden Loewen, *Family, Church, and Market: A Mennonite Community In the Old and the New Worlds, 1850-1930* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1993).

<sup>41</sup> Frances Swyripa, *Storied Landscapes: Ethno-Religious Identity and the Canadian Prairies* (Winnipeg: University of Manitoba Press, 2010).

<sup>42</sup> See chapter 11 of Gerald Friesen, *The Canadian Prairies: A History* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1984).

The first locality is in the Red River Valley area south of Winnipeg and includes the river-lot communities that extend to the American border. This area contained some of the first settled communities under the Catholic mandated colonization strategies, and gives a good synopsis of the beginnings for all French-Catholic settlement in western Canada. Connections to the Church and to Québec are evident and are highlighted through associations and leadership. This area was the base of much of the early Catholic and French organizations. The specific communities included in this locality known first as *le Mission Saint-Joseph de la Rivière aux Marais* are: Saint-Jean-Baptiste, Saint-Joseph and Letellier.

The second locality, the southern plains of Saskatchewan, presents many similarities to the Red River Valley locality in Manitoba, but with some variations. This area in Saskatchewan was settled around the turn of the century and was led as much by businessmen as it was by the Catholic Church. And whereas the urban centre of Winnipeg loomed over the Red River Valley communities to the south of it, the area of southwestern Saskatchewan was very much built in isolation. The community and area in and around Gravelbourg (and what would become *Le Diocèse de Gravelbourg*) dominates the research here.

Last, this project considers the rural French communities of central Alberta. French and Catholic evangelical and missionary work began quite early in this area of the West and was critical to the establishment of a French identity. This locality highlights how these existing rural populations struggled to maintain their identity within a larger and ever-growing infrastructure that emphasized the Anglo-Protestant majority. Excluding the large urban centre of Edmonton, this third locality includes the towns of Morinville and St. Paul des Métis.

After establishing these three localities in their geographic spaces (through immigration, settlement, and community building strategies), I will try to isolate the various strategies articulated by French elites to save a French identity in the West.

The Métis, while closely tied to the early history of French settlement in the West, are not the focus of this study. Their history and identity are distinct from that of the French immigrants who arrived in the period after 1870. While both groups initially emphasized the French language and Catholicism as crucial to their identity, and both groups often settled in the same localities, their identities increasingly diverged after 1885. For Riel and the Métis, indigenous origins, prior rights to land, and Métis nationalism trumped Catholicism and the French language.<sup>43</sup> Thus, to have focused on the Métis as well as the settler French would have introduced vastly different themes and made this study unmanageable.

Even in those areas where Métis and French immigrant settlements overlapped, the relationships were often not complimentary. For example, St. Paul des Métis was established by the Catholic Church in 1896 to settle the landless Métis of the Northwest, and to instill an agricultural lifestyle among this group. When the Church decided that this goal was unattainable, they shifted their strategy to the greater goal of densely settled French populations. The colony was then opened to general settlement and by secret agreement Québec French were brought in to settle these lands. In effect, Métis and Québec French settlement trajectories were discontinuous in this locality.<sup>44</sup>

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<sup>43</sup> Gerhard J. Ens, *From New Peoples to New Nations: Aspects of Métis History and Identity from the Eighteenth to Twenty-First Centuries* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2016).

<sup>44</sup> John Fontaine "St. Paul des Métis, 1896 to 1909 – The Dual Roles of the Missionary Oblates of Mary Immaculate." (MA Project Paper, Department of History and Classics, University of Alberta, 2009). Another example of this kind of replacement settlement occurred at Grande Clairière, Manitoba. See: Gerhard J. Ens, "The Dispersal and Resettlement of the Oak Lake Metis to 1900," *Ecclectica: Métis Issue* August 2003. [www.ecclectica.brandon.ca/issues/2003/2/ens.asp](http://www.ecclectica.brandon.ca/issues/2003/2/ens.asp).

While it will be shown that the Métis often began French settlements in the West, they rarely had the same lifestyle. They were seen as different by the Catholic Church, government, and most important the non-Indigenous French themselves. For this reason, I do not focus on the Riel Rebellions in this dissertation, and instead investigate the non-indigenous French settlement in the post 1870 era.

The most obvious source of the western French identity is one authored by the elites of the various localities and includes the Catholic Church. This is a discourse that focuses on how these elites saw their flock, and their strategies of ethnic survival. As with most ethnicities, elites often are in the forefront of constructing the identity of the group. In many ways, what these leaders said and wrote formed the basis of understanding the French identity in the West. L'Abbé Norbert Jutras of Saint-Jean-Baptiste writing in *La Liberté's* pages after the turn of the twentieth century focused on what he (representing both Church and editor) considered to be the core values of the French-speaking westerner.<sup>45</sup> The newspaper's promotion and wide distribution of his running article made it one guidepost to understand the clerical view of the French identity in the West, and this view was absorbed and adopted by its readers.

From these comments it should be clear that French newspapers published in the West are one of the main sources for this project. These newspapers were published and edited by both church and business leaders of these communities. To this end, my research surveys the different regional French-language newspapers in the Prairie West. To access more local discourses, community histories are also examined to determine how they constructed their own identities.

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<sup>45</sup> The running article by Jutras was called "Autour de la Ferme,". In one article Jutras compared 'the smell of clover' to the farmer's life and the direct connection from land to faith and culture. "Le trèfle d'odeur", *La Liberté*, vol. X, no 40, 13 mars 1923, 8.

The challenges locals faced were quite different than those of their leaders both at the community and regional level. It will therefore be critical to augment regional newspapers with both local newspapers including personal collections.

The stated goals of the French regional newspapers in the West was to unite all French in western Canada to the cause of defending and protecting French identity in Canada. It was to defend what they believed had been agreed to in 1867 and 1870 as a partnership between two founding ethnic groups. This was their stated goal. It is what the newspaper editors and the Church determined was needed for both the French factor and the Church to be successful. These regional newspapers shed light on what local communities thought of themselves, especially as those locals often wrote in or contributed to the columns of these regional newspapers. For example, Blanche Lamontagne, writing from Saint-Jean-Baptiste in 1918, noted what it meant to be French in the West. She connected the essence of their new land, of farming, to the character of the traditional French identity first established in the motherland.

Ne raillons pas leurs habitudes,  
Leur dehors simple et sans atours,  
Leurs manières, leurs gestes rudes,  
Et leurs pittoresques discours.

Ne rions pas de leur costume,  
Fait de "l'étoffe du pays",  
Et, tissé, selon la coutume,  
De la laine de leurs brebis...

Car, dessous cette rude écorce,  
Ils cachent tous un noble cœur.  
Et, sous ce dehors pleine de force,  
Une âme pleine de douceur!

Ils venaient de la Picardie.  
Leurs ancêtres, et de l'Anjou,  
De la paisible Normandie,  
De la Bretagne et du Poitou;

Ils venaient de la belle France,  
-Le sol des divines moissons.  
Ces hommes de toute endurance.  
Qui firent ce que nous voyons!

Ils ont, sur nos forêts sereines,  
Abattu leurs bras acharnés,  
Ils ont fait nos champs et nos plaines,  
Et c'est d'eux que nous sommes nés!!!

Gloire a ces hommes qui demeurent  
Près de la charrue et des boeufs!  
Ils sauvent les gloires qui meurent,  
Dans le passe de nos aïeux!...

translation

Do not mock their habits,  
Their simple and wearable exterior,  
Their manners, their rude gestures,  
And their picturesque speeches.

Do not laugh at their costume,  
Made of "the fabric of the country",  
And, weave, according to custom,  
Of the wool of their sheep...

For, under this rough bark,  
They all conceal a noble heart.  
And, beneath this strong exterior,  
A soul full of sweetness!

They came from Picardy.  
Their ancestors, and of Anjou,  
From the peaceful Normandy,  
From Brittany and Poitou;

They came from beautiful France,  
-The soil of divine harvests-  
Who did what we see!

They have, on our serene forests,  
Defeated their fierce arms,  
They made our fields and our plains,  
And it is from them that we are born!! ...



Glory to these men who remain  
Near the plow and the oxen!  
They save the glories that die,  
In the past of our forefathers!<sup>46</sup>

Lamontagne was trying to connect the local French of the West to their patriarchs in rural and agricultural France. But whose thoughts does this poem represent? Does it truly represent the feelings of the locals? Or does it instead represent the thoughts or the desired impressions of the elite? The choice to publish this poem in *La Liberté's* regional network was made by the editor and the publisher. Asked another way, is this poem representative of the mindset of the French Western labourer or is it simply elitist propaganda?

In a sense, this project analyses the ethnic strategies authored by the elites and compares them to what the ordinary French of the West said about themselves. The elites argued, propagandized, and spewed boosterism in an attempt to convince both those French in their region and those yet to come that there was, and would continue to be, a successful French presence in the West. The locals, instead, spoke through their actions (and inactions) and their local institutions and the memberships they held. History told from the local level must coexist with the history told from the regional or national level and this conjunction of sources contributes to my overall research strategy. This project is a kind of discourse analysis that, on the one hand, will examine the written text of newspapers and what they say about French identity in western Canada. Equally important, there was also a more local discourse authored within each community *cercle*. By analysing French newspapers in the West, I hope to lay out the basic themes related to the existence of a French regional identity in the Canadian West between 1870 and 1930. Regional and local newspapers, their editorials, columns,

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<sup>46</sup> "Les Habitants", *La Liberté*, vol. VI, no 11, 24 jul 1918, 2.

subscription/newspaper successes, mandates and main themes (leadership, strategies, the French Language) will be used to locate and analyse these themes.

For my purpose, two major themes emerge in these sources; leaders who argue for a successful French placement and identity in the region, and second, local community members who argue local French identities in isolation. From this evidence one can, at the very least, argue for limited and local French identities. It is also clear that there existed, at least at the level of infrastructure, and struggle to retain the French language and some kind of French regional identity. Given these competing opinions of the extent of French identity in the West, it is necessary to establish an understanding of what French ethnicity means. This requires some consideration of the different theories of ethnicity.

### **Theories of Ethnicity**

Analysing theories of ethnicity helps us to understand individual and group-level behavior. Understanding how local and connected communities behave and are identified by others and by themselves is core to my project. Concepts of ethnicity are used to understand settlement, immigration patterns and how minority groups either adapt or assimilate to their host societies. Ethnic theories can also help us understand the purpose of conflict within a nation and region and community. Despite these and other potential benefits however, the actual concepts have been little analyzed in relation to the French in the Canadian West.

What are the qualities of being French in western Canada? How does one display or be French? For example, does the annual pilgrimage that was made from Lebret, Saskatchewan to Notre Dame de Lourdes, Manitoba each year reflect an older French-Canadien identity or a new

western one? Or does an active social and Catholic farm life make one French? These questions get at the heart of ethnicity theories and are at the heart of this project.

In considering the many concepts of ethnicity, R.A. Schermerhorn first defined an ethnic group as:

A collectivity within a larger society having real or putative common ancestry, memories of a shared historical past, and a cultural focus on one or more symbolic elements defined as the epitome of their peoplehood... A necessary accompaniment is some consciousness of kind among members of the group.<sup>47</sup>

Steve Fenton disagreed.<sup>48</sup> Fenton argued that using the concept of ethnicity without context, without placing it in a real-life situation and then activating it reduces it to a useless term:

So, I ought to make it clear from the outset that I do think there is something 'out there' which corresponds to what observers call ethnicity. At the same time I do not believe that ethnicity is anything more than a broad and loose denoting of an area of interest; it is not, on its own, a theoretical standpoint, nor is it likely that there can be a unitary theory of ethnicity.<sup>49</sup>

Fenton emphasizes this connection to activity and being 'out there' in helping us understand the concepts of ethnicity.

To provide a concrete example, a 1923 article published in Alberta's *L'Union* newspaper titled 'Nos Avenir'<sup>50</sup> laid out its purpose to best support the French factor. Within its mandate, the editors of this newspaper were trying to claim and to protect a French identity for those French-Canadiens in the West. This article highlighted the tenuous status of the French in the West, and like the example of 'La Bagarre', what could be done to preserve this status. It was

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<sup>47</sup> Werner Sollors, *Theories of Ethnicity: A Classical Reader* (Basingstoke: Macmillan, 1996), xii.

<sup>48</sup> Abner Cohen (ed.), *Urban Ethnicity* (London: Tavistock Publications, 1974), 22-26.

<sup>49</sup> Steve Fenton, *Ethnicity* (Cambridge, UK: Polity, 2003), 3.

<sup>50</sup> Translation - 'Our Future'.

based on the willingness of the French person to be active, to struggle against the oppression they face.

Si nous ne luttons point, nous disparaîtrons certainement; tandis si nous luttons, si nous savons réagir, nous avons toutes les chances du monde. Il s'agit de vouloir.

...nous constatons que notre position n'est pas des plus brillantes. Nous sommes entourés, débordés; des circonstances qui s'échappent à notre contrôle nous ont enlevé de nos principaux soutiens; malheureusement il semblerait que nos cadres se dégarnissent; tantet [sp] sur un point, tantôt sur l'autre nous sommes obligés de constater qu'il y a recul. N'est-il pas vrai que nos gens sont trop indifférents? L'école ne nous appartient guère, quel profit en tirons-nous? La génération qui pousse, ayant bu à des sources étrangères aura-t-elle la même, fidélité? la pénétration, anglaise, n'accomplit-elle pas son œuvre? Regardons autour de nous; examinons-nous nous-mêmes.

Mais de tout cela quoi conclure? Qu'il faille réagir d'autant plus fortement que le mal est plus grand. Un malade qui ne réagit pas est flambé. Tout n'est pas perdu, voyons! Connaissez-vous un peuple, si petit soit-il, qui, ayant combattu pour sa religion, sa langue, ses traditions, son âme, soit disparu? "Les peuples ne meurent pas," rappelait naguère le Souverain Pontife Benoît XV. Pour vivre, encore une fois, il ne s'agit que de vouloir. Dieu fera le reste.

translation

If we do not struggle, we will certainly disappear; While if we struggle, if we know how to react, we have all the chances of the world. It is about wanting.

...we find that our position is not the brightest. We are surrounded, overflowing; Circumstances which escape our control have deprived us of our principal supporters; Unhappily it would seem that our leaders are deprived; And on one point, sometimes on the other we are obliged to note that there is retreat. Is it not true that our people are too indifferent? The school does not belong to us, what profit do we derive from it? Will the generation that grows, having drunk from foreign sources, have the same fidelity? Does not the English penetration accomplish its work? We must look around; we must examine ourselves.

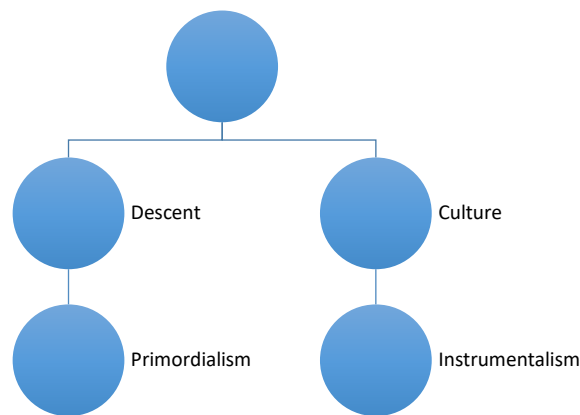
But what can we conclude from all this? That it is necessary to react more strongly because the evil is greater. A patient who does not react will continue to burn. Yet still, all is not lost! Do you know a group of people, however small, who, having fought for their religion, their tongue, their traditions, their soul, have disappeared? It does not happen. "The peoples do not die," recalled Pope Benedict XV. To live, once again, it is only a question of wanting. God will do the rest.<sup>51</sup>

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<sup>51</sup> "Notre Avenir", *L'Union d'Edmonton*, Vol.7, no 2, 15 nov 1923, 1.

In dealing with the challenges of conceptualizing the ambiguity of different theories of ethnicity, Abner Cohen notes: “The question is not which definition is the most valid, but which is most helpful in the analysis of certain theoretical problems.”<sup>52</sup> In any discussion of the term, however, there is at least continuity of the terms ‘descent and culture’ that pervade the scholarly work.<sup>53</sup> It is from these terms that an analysis of the various concepts can begin. Thus, the main question to consider is – How do the terms ‘descent’ and ‘culture’ help us to contextualize French identity in western Canada?

Figure 1-1 Ethnicity Theories



Primordialism is one of the basic concepts for conceptualizing ethnicity within the greater terms of ‘descent’ and ‘culture.’ It is usually conceived of as an inherent and mostly ‘primal’ belief or trait that simply exists in us all. As noted in the simple diagram above, primordialism is more closely linked to ‘descent’ because it is based on a connection to our familial origins, to our ‘descent’. Clifford Geertz points out three central ideas of primordialism: First, that primordial

<sup>52</sup> Cohen, *Urban Ethnicity*, ix.

<sup>53</sup> Kathleen Conzen et al define ‘descent’ as based from one’s national origins. For example, they ascribe a primordial base of being Anglo-Saxon to helping create their ethnic identity in the Americas: “Anglo-Saxon descent alone offered a secure grounding for a national identity, or so it began to seem to many Americans.” Kathleen Neils Conzen and David A. Gerber, “The Invention of Ethnicity: A Perspective from the U.S.A.,” *Journal of American Ethnic History* 12, no. 1 (Fall, 1992), 9. ‘Culture’ is defined by Conzen more as it relates to its deeply social traditions and it being more a product of ‘nurture’ rather than nature. For Conzen, aspects of ‘culture’ “constituted an attitude, a vocabulary, and a set of invented traditions.” Ibid.

ties should not be ‘reflected upon,’ they simply exist; second, that they are ‘felt’ at the deepest level and are not easily discarded; and last, that there is an ‘absolute import.’<sup>54</sup>

To understand the first critical concept, primordial ties, primordialism must be considered as deriving both from birth and as part of a social relationship. Ties to birth, to one’s religious belief and to one’s language are considered primordial and one can therefore expect a connection to family, community and religious groups as a result of its activation. Yet even more critical, and even more basic, is that these ties are not questioned, nor even explained or defined. Steve Fenton notes that few theorists would argue against “... a real distinction between relationships which have a certain ‘given’ ... [and those that] are ordered by contractual considerations, by ‘interest’ [in them].”<sup>55</sup> This suggests that there is a permanent and unbreakable bond between the individual and one’s primordial ethnic base. When considering ‘La Bagarre’s’ events in this context, Geertz might say that the Catholic Church’s primary role in defending both French-speakers in government and French priests exist from the unquestioned connection of being French with being Catholic. Fillion’s protection of the French communities of Saint-Jean-Baptiste and Ste. Agathe with either his letters to Taché or with his physical resistance to intruders on his property is as absolute and automatic as it was for those French who supported him in the fight. Simply, primordial ethnicity induces activity. Realizing this, one cannot be ‘ethnic’ unless there is movement taken to display (or activate) one’s ethnicity. Simply being French and Catholic and living in the Red River Valley does not make one ethnic.

What then creates the opportunity to activate ethnicity? Theorist Edward Shils argues that primordial ethnicity can be motivated into action by civil or political unrest: “The quality of

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<sup>54</sup> Fenton, *Ethnicity*, 82.

<sup>55</sup> *Ibid.*, 89.

attachment [between action and primordial ethnicity] arises ‘because a certain ineffable significance is attributed to the tie of blood.’”<sup>56</sup> ‘La Bagarre’s’ events and the decisions made by the Franco-Catholics there to actively defend their Church and their provincially elected representative exemplify the idea of this concept. Geertz also considered primordial ethnicity as more of an ‘integrative revolution’:

This goes a good deal further than Shils in trying to flesh out what a primordial attachment is: there is a sense of obligation to others which is rather taken for granted...it is a kind of ‘given’ just there...not easily put into words...It is something we feel bound by because of the kind of obligation that it is – like the more or less unquestioned sense of duty we usually feel towards members of our family.<sup>57</sup>

As primordialism is conceptualized in relation to ‘descent’ (mostly), instrumentalism is conceptualized in relation to interests or ‘culture’. Ethnic theorists Nathan Glazer and Daniel Moynihan consider an instrumental ethnic action and a relationship to primordialism as follows:

Ethnically informed action is opportunistic, in pursuit of particular goals which can be achieved through maximizing ethnic identities. This is in contrast to a view of ethnic groups as profound and organic bases of social and cultural difference [ie. primordialism].<sup>58</sup>

As a result, instrumental ethnicity might be considered primordial ethnicity’s diametric opposite – an ethnicity for ‘what suits us at the time’ (instrumentalism) as opposed to a ‘real’ ethnicity that just exists (primordialism).

Glazer and Moynihan consider instrumental ethnicity as a conscious activation that is done in order to achieve some political or economically based result. If this goal or conscious movement results, then the ethnic action is said to be instrumental. For example, to get Métis Scrip in 1885, you had to be Métis. Thus, many Métis, understanding this requirement, declared themselves as such to the Canadian Government. It was their choice to identify themselves Métis

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<sup>56</sup> Ibid., 79.

<sup>57</sup> Ibid., 82.

<sup>58</sup> Ibid., 98.

in order to receive scrip. The ethnic identity of the Métis as Métis is determined in this example by its active players and movements made. The Federal Government in this same example determine that there was a Métis ethnic category when they make the scrip offer and set their parameters. The activation of ethnicity helps each group move towards their political (for the government) and economic (for the Métis) goals. To summarize, the difference between the two basic parts of the framework of ethnicity is that one is a ‘given’ (primordial) or assumed identity, and the other is a constructed or invented (instrumental) identity.

Scholars like Eric Hobsbawm and Steve Fenton, however, consider both primordial and instrumental ethnicity as overlapping concepts. Fenton says that: “People or peoples do not just possess cultures or share ancestry [primordialism]; they elaborate these into the idea of a community founded upon these attributes [instrumentalism].”<sup>59</sup> Some, like Fenton, consider the foundation of ethnicity somewhere in the middle, between primordialism and instrumentalism. This type of overlap is very relevant to my project.

Building on this basic framework of ethnicity, Frederick Barth considers ‘boundaries’ a key concept to understand ethnic groups.<sup>60</sup> Barth opines that what is contained within an ethnic group’s boundaries is not as important as how the boundaries themselves are rationalized through social interaction. He declares that it is critical to define ethnicity in relation to other ethnic groups. This theory of ethnicity is conceptually a relational construct. Barth determines that ethnic boundaries and therefore ethnicity or identity comes from players both within and outside the ethnic boundary. Barth makes a further point by saying that one does not lose one’s ethnicity; one simply changes it by crossing from one boundary into another. And the decision to activate this ethnic boundary is a choice, a socially constructed choice, developing from a

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<sup>59</sup> Ibid., 3.

<sup>60</sup> Fredrik Barth, *Ethnic Groups and Boundaries: The Social Organization of Culture Difference* (Boston: Little, Brown, 1969).



primordial starting point and culminating in instrumentalist thought and action. This means that Barth does not question whether there are ethnic groups (primordial trait), he simply looks to differentiate one group from another through a series of choices in determining which ethnic boundary one belongs within. The critical aspect to Barth's ethnic boundaries focuses how players within a group identify themselves and are identified by others. They are forming and then conforming to their perceived boundaries.

Herbert Gans disagrees with Barth by saying that ethnicity can be lost over time. Gans argues that all ethnic groups, all forms of ethnicity slowly die by being assimilated into the dominant culture. And wherever pockets of 'ethnic revivalism' can still be seen, this is only a symbolic and ultimately futile effort to retain ethnicity:

The visibility of symbolic ethnicity provides further support for the existence of an ethnic revival, but what appears to be a revival is probably the emergence of a new form of acculturation and assimilation that is taking place under the gaze of the rest of society.<sup>61</sup>

Gans argues that the initial action toward this inevitable assimilation and losing of one's ethnicity begins with second-generation immigrants. According to Gans, it is this generation who realizes they do not need to participate in real ethno-cultural activities in order to be ethnic. They do not need to declare and believe in their ethnic identity and what it represents. They simply need to feign ethnicity at opportune moments. This concept of ethnicity is therefore only activated to create symbolic gestures and not a real or deep feeling for one's own ethnic culture. The reason for symbolic action is to gain political or some other ends. For example, Gans argues that people wanting to succeed in larger society will often associate themselves ethnically for some gain. He explains: "The future of symbolic ethnicity and ethnic identity is shaped as much

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<sup>61</sup> Herbert J. Gans, "Symbolic Ethnicity: The Future of Ethnic Groups and Cultures in America," *Ethnic & Racial Studies* 2, no. 1 (01, 1979), 12.

or more by needs, wishes and opportunities that originate in the larger society as by those created from internal changes in the ethnic group.”<sup>62</sup>

A further theory of ethnicity to consider in context with this project of French western settlement and identity also arises from the primordial-instrumental axis. For Eric Hobsbawm, ‘invented tradition’ is an implied or invented connection to one’s own history and is critical in establishing or maintaining certain values and norms of accepted behavior.<sup>63</sup> This invented tradition allows an ethnic group or individual to create the substructure and the surroundings to allow the feeling of being ethnic, or of belonging. In the western French context, invented traditions can include events like the pilgrimages made to Notre Dame de Lourdes. According to Hobsbawm,

It is probably most difficult to trace where such traditions are partly invented, partly evolved in private groups (where the process is less likely to be bureaucratically recorded), or informally over a period of times as, say, in parliament and the legal profession. The difficulty is not only one of sources [primordialist thinking] but also of techniques [instrumentalist thinking], though there are available both esoteric disciplines specializing in symbolism [Gans] and ritual [primordialism].<sup>64</sup>

Hobsbawm, to clarify his argument, provides the example of Swiss nationalism and how they invented both their national anthem and song to instill a feeling of ethnicity, of national belonging, even though this ‘invention’ was quite recent.<sup>65</sup>

Why are these ethnicity theories useful to conceptualize Franco-Catholic identity in western Canada? How do concepts of ethnicity impact our understanding of French-Catholic settlement in the West? First, ethnic motivation and action are indicators of group identity in our

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<sup>62</sup> Herbert J. Gans, "Symbolic Ethnicity and Symbolic Religiosity: Towards a Comparison of Ethnic and Religious Acculturation", *Ethnic & Racial Studies* 17, no. 4 (10, 1994), 588.

<sup>63</sup> E. J. Hobsbawm and T. O. Ranger, *The Invention of Tradition* (Cambridge Cambridgeshire; New York: Cambridge University Press, 1992).

<sup>64</sup> *Ibid.*, 4.

<sup>65</sup> The Swiss national anthem was made official in 1981.

society. If we can determine that ethnic motivation and action exists, we can conclude that there is an ethnic group and identity. According to Hobsbawm, the professional historian is in a unique position to best “use history as a legitimator of [this] action and cement of group cohesion.”<sup>66</sup> By considering these different theories of ethnicity, historians can also consider more deeply how and why decisions were made and actions were taken by linguistic and religious groups in western Canada. The historian will be able to trace the various ways French-speaking groups sought to define their own boundaries, invent and protect their own traditions, interpret their own choices of their past, and their connections to both their beginnings in Québec and decisions to venture off on their own.

### **Chapter Summaries**

In Chapter Two, I will situate the Catholic Church into the West and consider how it attempted to colonize a French immigrant population and how different settlement strategies were realized. The Catholic Church brought a determined strategy to populate the West with French and Catholics. Their colonization schema, established by the Archbishop of Saint-Boniface, and carried out through a sophisticated administrative and communication infrastructure, gave French-Canadiens opportunities to thrive in their new land. Given the geographic, political and cultural environment in which these communities were established and existed, questions arise as to both the effectiveness and sustainability through the settlement years that followed.

The third through fifth chapters focus on the various western communities I am studying. Each chapter will illustrate provincial and area localities and communities and connect to case

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<sup>66</sup> Hobsbawm, *The Invention of Tradition*, 12.

studies and examples. The settlement period (1870-1930) and progression through it will be essential to understanding each locality.

Chapter six will investigate how French regional and local newspapers constructed, invented and protected the various ideas of French rights and identities in the West. Many of the themes and varied discourses are introduced in this central chapter.

Chapter seven will connect a political landscape of the period with how French-speaking leaders tried to keep their identity alive. Specifically, the political battles include addressing the Manitoba Schools Question of the 1890s, the period leading to the creation of the provinces of Alberta and Saskatchewan and their respective Autonomy Bills in 1905, and the Saskatchewan Schools Act (1918) and fallout into the 1920s. Within this context this dissertation will examine how sympathetic associations, organizations and individuals determined the level and degree of effort made to unite and defend French communities in the West. It is here that differences between the provinces will be examined.

The conclusion will attempt to tie this analysis together to answer questions such as: Did the French-speaking people in these western communities carry their ethnic traditions with them from France and Québec? Did they preserve the traditions and culture of their own ethnic makeup in a new and isolated safe haven, or did they have more success when adapting to an existing infrastructure as a minority entity? How important was the struggle itself to realize either a continued or distinct and new identity? Can a minority French identity exist in a non-French majority culture, or is it relegated to slow decay?

Historians have attempted to analyse these and other questions. They laid the groundwork for my study. They wrote of Québec's relationship to the western French, and of Québec's indifference to populating the West. Previous historiography has mostly considered the western

French rights as a whole, or focused on a single French western community, or group. They have not asked whether a larger regional French identity existed in the West.

In this thesis I argue that there are elements of both primordialism and instrumentalism in the French identity in western Canada. Chief among the primordial aspects of this identity were the French language and Catholicism. How these core elements were articulated or strategized, however, was very situational. Given that this study focuses on the articulation of ethnic strategies and communities to defend the French language, the focus here is mainly on the instrumental aspects of ethnicity. French newspapers and associations attempted to construct an identity based on instrumental or strategic concepts to overcome the attempts to assimilate them. In localities where challenges to their French way of life were less apparent, there was less need to activate one's ethnicity. Manitoba's French, for example, being more secure in their situation (with greater church control and influence), were less likely to invoke instrumental associations or actions. Those western French in less protected localities, especially in parts of Saskatchewan and Alberta, often had to rely on more purposeful ethnic strategizing.

It should also be noted that a French ethnicity in the West was very much connected to a struggle to survive. French business leaders of newspapers and associations, while they took the support of the Catholic Church as a given, understood that the survival of the French and French language in the West required a constant struggle and active associations. With Catholicism as the base, these leaders made decisions to activate their ethnicity and to attempt to influence those of their communities and localities. There needed to be this melding of primordial beliefs and instrumental choices, with an understanding that losing strength in the former would dictate the need for struggle in the latter.

Realizing differences in strength and approach of the Catholic Church and the need for a more active secular leadership, the levels of struggle required were different throughout French localities. There were differences in how the Catholic Church in Manitoba drove much of its French identity and how French business leaders in Saskatchewan and Alberta more actively attempted to secure theirs. Thus, a French regional identity of varying degrees existed in the different localities of the West. It will be argued that there were both local French identities throughout the West, and a more general or regional identity that had at its basis the mobilization of strategies to protect the French language in their communities. This regional identity, however, differed in points of emphasis and strength in Manitoba, Saskatchewan, and Alberta. Finally, I also argue that, while a singular regional French identity cannot be shown, overlapping aspects do exist.

## Chapter 2 The Catholic Church and French Colonization in the West

The Canadian Catholic Church, with its beginnings in Québec, was intimately tied to French colonization in western Canada. To highlight the importance and role of the Catholic Church (and Québec) in the process of western immigration and French identity, I have highlighted an historical vignette that appeared in the pages of a western regional French language newspaper.

In 1929, Rodolphe Laplante, the editor of *La Survivance* Newspaper, reviewed Philippe Roy's book 'L'Île d'Orléans.'<sup>67</sup> In his review, Laplante opined that many Québécois settlers of western Canada were connected to this island's pioneer families, and that l'Île d'Orléans should be thought of as 'la patrie' for the French in the West:

Par sa situation géographique, l'Île d'Orléans a eu, dans les débuts de notre histoire, un rôle remarquable. Nos ancêtres y luttèrent, car les Hurons qu'ils y protégeaient, furent maintes fois l'objet d'attaques surnoises de leurs ennemis. Des familles considérables de notre nationalité y ont pris naissance et de là se sont répandues par toute la contrée. Enfin, cette île d'Orléans est l'un des coins dont nous-pouvons tirer à lui seul de quoi alimenter un patriotisme vivace.

translation

Because of its geographical location, l'Île d'Orléans had a remarkable role in the early days of our history. Our ancestors struggled in the beginning years, because the Hurons, who they protected, were often attacked by their enemies. Considerable families of our nationality were born there, and from there they spread throughout the country. Lastly, this island of Orleans is one of the corners from which we can draw enough to feed a vivacious patriotism.<sup>68</sup>

There was a sense that the French-speakers from this island best carried the French tradition and culture from France. This island's people had connections to the Church, but also to their families, land and water. They realized early that these bonds would be critical to their

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<sup>67</sup> Pierre Georges Roy, *L'Île d'Orléans* (Québec : L. A. Proulx, 1928).

<sup>68</sup> "Critique littéraire - L'Île d'Orléans", *La Survivance*, vol.I, no 42, 29 aug 1929, 2.

success. The farming and coastal lifestyle they knew in France would assist them as much as their connections to their Church. Their French language, culture, and societal bonds would help them create a thriving community and burgeoning market economy.<sup>69</sup> These core values, and indeed the Island of Orleans, were seen by leaders such as Rodolphe Laplante as the ‘Homeland’ of the new communities in the West

L’Ile d’Orleans is an island on the St. Lawrence River five kilometers south and east of downtown Québec City. Called the birthplace of French identity in North America,<sup>70</sup> this island has historically been at the forefront of French settlement to the North American continent. And forty years after the first permanent French settlers arrived on Orleans in 1645, the island had over 1000 French-speaking residents spread over six interconnected parishes.<sup>71</sup> With funding and support from Louis XIV, the French population on this small island would more than quadruple to over 6000 within twenty years. Even after the British took control in 1760, the French living upon this island typified what it meant to be ‘Canadien’.<sup>72</sup>

One of the early pioneers to l’Ile d’Orleans was a direct ancestor of mine, 24-year-old Etienne Fontaine.<sup>73</sup> He made the decision to go to New France, not as an engagé of the King, nor as a trader in the fur market, but as a farmer with naval experience.<sup>74</sup> Upon his arrival in 1683,

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<sup>69</sup> N.H. Bowen, “An Historical Sketch of the Isle of Orleans: Being a Paper Read before the Literary and Historical Society of Quebec, On Wednesday Evening, the 4th of April, 1860” (Québec?: s.n., 1860).

<sup>70</sup> The first permanent French community was established at Ste. Famille Parish in 1661 and was the first of six parishes there.

<sup>71</sup> A number of sources were consulted on L’Ile d’Orleans, including; L.-É. Bois, L’île D’orleans: Notes Sur Son Etendue - Ses Premiers Etablissements, Sa Population, Les Moeurs De Ses Habitants, Ses Productions (Quebec : A. Cote, 1895); Roy, L’île D’orléans; Louis-P. Turcotte, Histoire De L’île D’orléans (Québec : s.n., 1867).

<sup>72</sup> The origin of the use of the word Canadien, or Canadian (anglicized), referred originally to the first French immigrants in New France, later Canada. Therefore, I will be using the term ‘French-Canadien’ instead of the more popular ‘French-Canadian’ throughout my dissertation.

<sup>73</sup> Etienne Fontaine was born in L’Ile d’Yeu, France, an island off its western coast on February 24, 1659. “Ancestors of John Murray Fontaine”, 1 mar 2018, SHSB, La Société Historique de Saint-Boniface.

<sup>74</sup> Fontaine held numerous positions in New France, including; Maître de Barque (1700, 1708), Navigateur (1705, 1713, 1717) and Pilote de Navire (1705, 1708). Etienne would later be elevated to Captain of one of the main immigrant transport vessels the ‘Saint-Louis’ (1711). Ibid.



Etienne, like other early pioneers to New France, quickly married. Etienne's 18-year-old wife Marie Conille was also newly arrived from France.<sup>75</sup> Here on a plot of land in *la Paroisse de St. Jean* they raised a family of ten children.<sup>76</sup> The traditional life in New France was in many ways similar to what they had left in France. The Church remained critical to their communities and was the base for their school, their social networking and where they received direction and advice. The Church was their father, their mother and their friend.<sup>77</sup>

Though the Catholic Church was vital to their lives, a second theme, and one which also translated to the Canadian west, focused on the growing market economy that dictated many Franco-Catholic community and individual decisions. While the settlers of New France learned to take advantage of the budding market economy, generations later these French-Canadiens would again look for a better life. After living for 200 years in and around greater Québec, Etienne and Marie Fontaine's direct descendant Adjuteur would be one of those emigrants.

Adjuteur Fontaine [et sa femme Rose deLima Guenette] arriva à Emerson [le sud de Manitoba] en bateau en 1883. Il était venu Drummondville, Québec et bâtit sa maison de "billots" sur un "homestead" de 160 acres situé 3 milles et demi au nord-ouest de Saint-Joseph.

translation

Adjuteur Fontaine [and his wife Rose deLima Guenette] arrived at Emerson [southern Manitoba] by boat in 1883. He came from Drummondville, Québec and built his log house on his homestead of 160 acres situated three and one-half miles north-west of Saint-Joseph.<sup>78</sup>

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<sup>75</sup> One strategy to populate New France was to bring over many young French girls, 'Les Filles du Roi.' Etienne Fontaine, born on the French island of l'Île d'Yeu and Marie Conille who comes from mainland France (La Rochelle) met upon their arrival to l'Île d'Orleans. Jacques (Etienne's father) would also spend time in New France, living for a short period in the arondissement of Charlesbourg, Québec City where he was listed as a habitant in 1681. *Census of Canada, 1665 to 1871*.

<sup>76</sup> Etienne and Marie's children stayed and farmed on l'Île d'Orleans. "Ancestors of John Murray Fontaine", 9.

<sup>77</sup> Roy, *L'Île D'Orleans*.

<sup>78</sup> *Moissonneurs de La Rouge, 1882-1982.*, 1re éd. (Letellier, Manitoba: Municipalité Rurale de Montcalm, 1982), 321.

Saint-Joseph was to be their new French homeland. They brought their children and all they needed to succeed as their ancestors had done on l’Ile d’Orleans so many generations before.<sup>79</sup>

Franco-Catholic immigrants to this small section of rural Manitoba were welcomed by the resident priest. At this time in Manitoba’s history, communities like Saint-Joseph along the Red River had only just been established. Arriving Franco-Catholics from L’Ile d’Orleans and Québec were a welcome addition to the priest’s congregation as the Church was trying to establish a French and Catholic enclave in the province. These pioneering French-Canadien families, along with the residing priest (called a *curé*) assumed much of the responsibility for these growing French communities. As *Adjuteur* Fontaine tended the family farm, his wife Rose established herself as a leader and role model in the community of Saint-Joseph, Manitoba. Her obituary in 1923 noted her role and positive impact on the community.

Le glas funèbre et toujours triste annonçait dimanche dernier la mort d'une des anciennes de la paroisse, Mme *Adjutor* [sp] Fontaine... La paroisse perd en la personne de Mme Fontaine le type de nos grand-mères canadiennes, ces héroïnes de notre race et de notre pays, qui au prix de sacrifices et de privations parfois héroïques, ont élève chrétiennement de nombreuses familles et se sont soumises à des misères sans nombre pour former un noyau stable de notre race.

translation

The funeral and always sad knell announced last Sunday the death of one of the elders of the parish, Mrs. *Adjutor* [sp] Fontaine... In the person of Madame Fontaine, the parish loses the type of our Canadien grandmothers, those heroines of our race and our country, who, at the cost of sacrifices and sometimes heroic and unending hardships, have raised many families to form a stable nucleus of our race.<sup>80</sup>

Rose and *Adjuteur*’s children, like all Franco-Manitobans of this locality, went to French-Catholic school at l’École Langevin in Saint-Joseph. The school, run by *les religieuses*,<sup>81</sup>

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<sup>79</sup> "Leurs possessions consistaient d'une charrette, une paire de boeufs et une vache...Ce ne fût qu'au printemps qu'ils purent acheter un cheval pour continuer à travailler leur terre." Translation – "Their possessions consisted of a cart, a pair of oxen and a cow... It wasn't until the next spring that they could buy a horse to continue working on their land." Ibid.

<sup>80</sup> "Saint-Joseph", *La Liberté*, vol.X, no 38, 27 feb 1923, 7.

<sup>81</sup> The term '*les religieuses*' denotes any residing religious order in support of the archdiocese. In this instant, *les religieuses* were the Catholic Sisters that ran the school.

continued an emphasis on the core values of family, farm and Church. The French language was explicitly used and taught here. And while community leaders and church encouraged teaching French at home, the benefits of having an organized school system became essential to their continuing culture and identity.

Figure 2-1 L'École de Saint-Joseph, circa 1890<sup>82</sup>



Les élèves de l'école de Saint-Joseph, vers 1890. Rangée en avant: Exilda Lacharité, Elmire Delorme, Clara Nadeau, Evéline Thuot, Agnès Grandmont, Aimé Martel, Léon Dionne, Wilbrod Boudreau, Joseph Dionne, Calixte Leblanc. 2ième rangée: Boudreau, Corinne Leblanc, Elise Dandensault, Régina Moquin, Marie-Rose Brûlé, Imelda Nadeau, Adéard Smith, Wilfrid Grandmont, Ephrem Moquin, Gualbert Nadeau, Roch Daneault. 3ième rangée: Dina Martel, Rose-Anna Nadeau, Marie-Ange Grandmont, Alice Perron, Emilia Leblanc, Smith, Edouard Lacharité, Victor Fontaine, Hector Mercier. 4ième rangée: Malvina Leblanc, Ida Daneault, Asina Mercier, Eugénie Perron, Olympe Gauthier, institutrice, Mme Elénore (Gauthier) Goulet, Louis Perron, Hector Daneault, Nazaire Pelletier, Ludger Lacharité.

source: *Moissonneurs de La Rouge*, 129.

Rose and Adjuteur's decision to settle in the Canadian West in the latter nineteenth century aligned with the thinking of other Québécois, when the economy in Québec took a downturn and as economic opportunities outside Québec opened up. During this period, more Québécois would move to the factories in the eastern United States or relocate to northern Québec and Ontario. And while relatively few Québécois moved to western Canada, the ones that did would move for economic reasons and to reconnect with family. This was also a time in western Canada when waves of other immigrants arrived. It was a time just after Manitoba became a province and

<sup>82</sup> Adjuteur and Rose's eldest son, Victor, attended school here.

when competing religious orders and ethnic blocs scrambled to organize themselves. It would also be a time when the Catholic Church began to aggressively encourage French-speakers from Québec, France and the United States to immigrate for fear of losing what they had already established.

The Catholic Church would play a critical role in the story of French settlement in western Canada. They accomplished this through early missionary work among the various Indigenous communities and bands, and then, through settlement and colonizing efforts. These colonizing efforts will be described in the rest of this chapter.

### **Missionary Work**

Akin to the earlier Recollet and Jesuit religious orders who played fundamental roles in the establishment of New France, the Oblates of Mary Immaculate (O.M.I.) of the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries looked to do the same in the West.<sup>83</sup> Initially, the Oblate congregation focused on evangelizing the Indigenous peoples of the West and the North.

The Oblates of Mary Immaculate entered western Canada in 1845.<sup>84</sup> Prior to that, the Catholic Church's presence in the West was limited to a few missions in the Red River colony overseen by clergy from Québec.<sup>85</sup> Eugène de Mazenod, who founded the Oblate Order in 1815 and began his first mission in Marseilles in 1827,<sup>86</sup> would also establish missions in eastern

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<sup>83</sup> Morice, *History of the Catholic Church in Western Canada*, 88-112.

<sup>84</sup> Father Aubert and Brother Taché were the first Oblates sent west, arriving at Red River August 25, 1845. The Oblates arrived in Canada in 1841, and secular priests established Lac Ste. Anne in 1844. Gaston Carrière, "The Early Efforts of the Oblate Missionaries in Western Canada," *The Prairie Forum* 4, no. 1 (1979), 3-4. Author Marcel Giraud (1900-1994) was engrossed within the ultramontane movement in the Dominion of Canada (and France) as he wrote from France. Giraud believed missionaries in the West were important to nation-building and protection of proper French culture. Marcel Giraud, *The Métis in the Canadian West* (Edmonton: University of Alberta Press, 1986).

<sup>85</sup> The first of these included St. Boniface, Pembina, and St. François Xavier, all established in the period 1818 to 1823.

<sup>86</sup> Raymond Joseph Armand Huel, *Proclaiming the Gospel to the Indians and the Metis: The Missionary Oblates of Mary Immaculate in Western Canada, 1845-1945* (Edmonton: University of Alberta Press: Western Canadian Publishers, 1996), 2, 387.

Canada as early as 1841, in Oregon (1847), Ceylon (1847), Texas (1849), South Africa (1852), and in British Columbia (1858). De Mazenod directed his missionaries with an ‘Instruction Doctrine’ to assist in evangelizing those thought to be poor and morally destitute. He believed it was the Franco-Catholic Church’s obligation to correct the inefficiencies in the world’s population by instructing its Indigenous inhabitants to accept a proper and ‘superior’ European (and French) culture. De Mazenod proclaimed in his doctrine that there would be no salvation outside the Catholic Church, and that baptism and assimilation into French society needed to be the focal point of all missionary strategies. Raymond Huel, in his book *Proclaiming the Gospel to the Indians and Métis* noted that De Mazenod’s objective was “the conversion of souls. The Oblate was God’s envoy, a pioneer.”<sup>87</sup>

To accomplish the mandate of missionary work amongst the Indigenous peoples of western Canada, the Oblate Order received support from both the greater Catholic Church and from French institutions like *l’Œuvre de la Propagation de la Foi*.<sup>88</sup> Within Canada, the Oblates also received encouragement and manpower from Québec.<sup>89</sup> When Archbishop Bourget of Montréal first searched for an appropriate missionary order to enter the West, he contacted De Mazenod after hearing of some early work by his congregation on the eastern coast of Canada. Bishop Provencher, priest and the Catholic Church’s representative already engaged in the Northwest, supported the request without hesitation.<sup>90</sup> Québec’s archbishopric would also commit both Alexandre Taché and Albert Lacombe to this task.

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<sup>87</sup> *ibid.*, 3.

<sup>88</sup> *ibid.*, 23.

<sup>89</sup> *Le Société de Colonization de Manitoba* was organized in Montréal under the Montréal Bishop’s direction and for the purpose of helping the Oblates populate the West with Francophones. This society was then placed under the authority of Archbishop Taché.

<sup>90</sup> Bourget initially attempted to secure the Jesuit Order for the first missions west, but the Jesuits declined. Provencher was Bourget’s first charge sent west in 1818. Morice, *History of the Catholic Church in Western Canada*, 189.

To best utilize this support, De Mazenod determined that Oblate training for the task of evangelizing the West would focus on theological preparation as well as learning Indigenous languages. In addition, De Mazenod required his priests to withstand physical and mental hardships that the West would present.<sup>91</sup> Given the mental and physical fortitude, and substantial time commitment the training required, it was not surprising that De Mazenod only received one initial volunteer from France, Vital-Justin Grandin in 1854.<sup>92</sup> Nonetheless, and with the initial efforts of these three Oblate priests, a Catholic foothold was initiated. Soon after the trio's arrival, De Mazenod and Bourget assigned seventeen more pioneer priests in support.<sup>93</sup>

From this beginning, the pioneer Oblates continued their missionary work through the 1850s. They were able to build on the limited successes of the few secular priests who preceded them to the area of what is now Alberta, Saskatchewan, Manitoba and the Northwest Territories. Establishing the Lac Ste. Anne Mission in 1844 in what is today Alberta, the Oblates reinforced the earlier work of the first permanent Catholic mission west of the Forks of the Assiniboine and Red Rivers. From these early beginnings the Oblates would reach far into the Northwestern frontier. They also supported other significant missions in the area at Lac La Biche in 1853, and St. Albert in 1861. Stationed at the Diocese of Saint-Boniface, Winnipeg, Bishop Taché would help in the establishment of the Archdiocese of Athabasca-Mackenzie (1862) in the North and

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<sup>91</sup> In contemplating this strategy, De Mazenod tried to mirror the hardships of Jesus' apostles as well as what he believed was learned from New France's Jesuits of the seventeenth-century. Huel, *Proclaiming the Gospel to the Indians and the Metis*, 3-4.

<sup>92</sup> Actually, Oblate priest Pierre-Henri Grollier was the first sent to the Northwest by de Mazenod. The difference is that Grollier did less in the western region as opposed to the North, and he did not actually volunteer to go the northwest, whereas Grandin did. *Ibid.*, 28.

<sup>93</sup> By the time of Oblate arrival, there already existed a Catholic presence in the West. Bishop Provencher and Father Dumoulin had arrived at Red River earlier in 1818 as the first Catholic priests in the territory. Bishop Taché (arriving with Father Pierre Aubert) would be headquartered in Saint Boniface as the first diocese in the West was established. Lucien Lemieux, "Provencher, Joseph-Norbert," *Dictionary of Canadian Biography*, vol. VIII (University of Toronto/Université Laval, 1985). *Centenary of the Oblate Fathers in Western Canada, 1845-1945 : pageants = Centenaire des pères Oblats dans l'Ouest Canadien : pageants* (Winnipeg: Canadian Publishers, 1945), 43, 104; Huel, *Proclaiming the Gospel*, 12, 387.

the Diocese of Saint Albert (1871) in the West. There is little doubt that these were the critical years of placing the Catholic Church in western Canada.

As successful as the Catholic Missionary Church was in the West, Confederation and English immigration to the West after 1870 would force a change of strategy. The foresight of the Catholic Church to recognize these changing conditions and then adapt illustrates their capacity and willingness to accept and affect change. This adaptation provided the institutional base for a French Catholic colonization of the Canadian West and went a long way to ensure a regional French identity.

### **Setting the Stage for French Colonization**

When French-Catholic immigrants began arriving in Manitoba after 1870 they tended to concentrate in the parishes, and area, south of Saint-Boniface where there was already a strong majority of French inhabitants (both Métis and Québec settlers). It thus made sense that the Catholic Church in Saint-Boniface would focus initial efforts along the Red River down to the U.S. border.<sup>94</sup> They hoped that the Red River Valley settlements could attract other Franco-Catholics, to further strengthen the western Catholic Church's hold on the region, and to compete for land and jobs with the non-French they knew were about to arrive in the region. Beginning in the late 1860s, rural river-side communities, supported by Bishop Alexandre Taché of the Saint-Boniface Diocese, tried to solidify and protect this land for their own. And like the trail networks that already crisscrossed the western landscape, the Catholic Church would also extend its settlement plans further west into what would become Alberta and Saskatchewan. With Catholic missions already established in these western areas, Taché would take it upon himself to help

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<sup>94</sup> The western Catholic Church first looked to settle and secure Manitoba, then Saskatchewan, then Alberta.

establish and formalize these early Franco-Albertan and Fransaskois communities. The Catholic Church relied heavily on the knowledge it had acquired during its early missionary period to form a coherent settlement strategy focused on French and Catholic enclaves.

A *Maison-Chapelle* was typically the first religious structure built in these early Franco-Catholic localities. It was used as a place of worship, and as a residence for the curé, the missionary priest or for other *religieuses*. If warranted, it would also be used as a community meeting place and schoolhouse. When a mission was first established, often an existing resident's house was first used as the *Maison-Chapelle* until a proper one could be built. Prosper Ducharme, a Métis and one of the first residents living at *La Rivière aux Prunes* Mission (later Saint-Jean-Baptiste, Manitoba), offered his house to Archbishop Taché and l'Abbé David Fillion after Fillion first took up residence in the area in 1876. Fillion would perform the first baptism in this Red River locality at Ducharme's *Maison-Chapelle*.<sup>95</sup>

After a French-Catholic mission had been set up, the missionary priest would go to the desired area. He would baptize anyone who resided there. Given that the more nomadic Indigenous inhabitants seldom lived in one area year-round, mission priests would typically find only a small contingent of some of the more settled Métis. It was these Métis populations who formed the original nucleus of most French communities studied here.<sup>96</sup> In the area of the Red River locality almost all communities were first settled by the Métis. For example, Antoine

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<sup>95</sup> "L'Histoire de Nos Eglises de St. Jean Baptiste", n.d., SHSB, Corporation Archiépiscope Catholique Romaine de Saint-Boniface, Folder Saint Jean Baptiste - Notes historiques, coupures de presse, etc.; "La Paroisse Catholique de Saint-Jean-Baptiste", 14 jun 1974, SHSB, Collection Générale de la Société Historique de Saint-Boniface, Folder Saint-Jean-Baptiste.

<sup>96</sup> Of the communities I will be engaging with, Grande-Clairière (Souris area), Letellier, Saint-Joseph, Saint-Jean-Baptiste and Morinville were all initially settled by Métis. In the case of Saint-Paul-des-Métis, this area was settled on top of a failed Métis land settlement experiment.



Vandal, with his wife Angelique from the Saulteaux Tribe and their children, were the first residents to establish a permanent residence at Saint Jean-Baptiste, in 1869.<sup>97</sup>

Once a church mission was established, these early groups of Métis and other French-speakers assumed core functions to maintain these early communities. Cultural and community norms were further advanced by the introduction of schools for the children taught most often by *les religieuses* (most often nuns). Taché realized the importance of schools and how the French language taught was vital to a sustainable French identity. He made the establishment of French schools in these communities a priority in these early stages of settlement.

Rarely would non-French immigrants gain a foothold in these early French communities overseen by the Church. Data from the 1870 Census of Canada shows that English and French speakers were relatively equal in Manitoba (55.4% being non-French), but in French strongholds along the Red River south of Winnipeg over 98% were Franco-Catholics. While these percentages would decline as communities matured, these beginnings were a testament to the Catholic Church's success and to the growing authority and acumen of Archbishop Taché.<sup>98</sup>

Taché implemented a course of action effective in grouping French settlers into French communities. Once an area was identified as a mission (or parish), this ensured that support from the Catholic Church would continue. And once these French enclaves were established, structures would be commissioned by the Catholic Church and then built. Some money would come directly from the Archdiocese and some from funds raised in the respective communities.

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<sup>97</sup> "L'histoire de St-Jean Baptiste 1877-1967", 30 jun 1969, SHSB, Collection Générale de la Société Historique de Saint-Boniface, Folder Saint-Jean-Baptiste Centenaire Historiques.

<sup>98</sup> Federal census data was collected from all final data reports beginning with the first report of New France (1608-1876) and continuing every 10 and then 5 years until 1936. A complete list of all Census data sources is listed in bibliography. See first, *Census of Canada, 1608 to 1876*. The 1916 Census of the Prairie Province edition was critical to my research. *Census of the Prairie Provinces, 1916*.

Interested businessmen would also be encouraged to take advantage of the opportunity to support these beginnings by adding stores, accommodations and medical support.

As these missions grew, they received parish status. The community would then be assigned a residing curé (and a supporting vicar and other *religieuses* if warranted). Other substantial infrastructure would include buildings; a rectory, Church and cemetery. The new parish would be given permission to hold mass and other celebrations, take advantage of funding support from their archdiocese, and establish and maintain a schoolhouse. The parish council would be led by the resident curé to ensure all civil matters were dealt with. Ongoing instruction in matters religious and cultural would be disseminated through the curé and council. In essence, a Franco-Catholic parish would become one of many connected and supported communities reporting to the head of their archdiocese (the Archbishop). For this commitment the parishioners would pay *tithes* (typically 10% taxation of an individual's gross income) and *bancs* (church pew rentals), as well as commit themselves and their families to the Catholic faith. Their children would also be obligated to an education regime focused on Catholic and French morality and culture, receiving all instruction in French.

With this blueprint for setting up French-Catholic communities, and with the support of his missionary priests and residing curés, Archbishop Alexandre Taché implemented a region-wide 'chain settlement strategy.' This strategy took advantage of both the growing French population and the physical landscape. To realize this strategy, Taché or one of his clergy would identify settlement sites outside of existing French (and Franco-Métis) missions and parishes. Taché would then assign a residing priest (almost always already working in that locality) to each identified site to help establish and govern the next community's infrastructure.

As these communities became populated, and community populations and infrastructures grew, Taché and his missionary (and parish) priests would continue their work on the next link in the chain and extend their colonization efforts. This method allowed the Franco-Catholic factor to grow within the safety of other French-speaking Catholics. A safe haven was created that could accept increases in population without disturbing the community and parish already in place. Thereafter, the Catholic Church increasingly focused on protecting its French and Catholic community culture and less their missionary work with the Indigenous populations. The danger they saw was the beginnings of a mass migration west.<sup>99</sup> A boom in non-French immigration west was on the horizon and the Catholic Church would again need to adapt their strategy. Rather than simply shelter the French already there, they would now need to incorporate a strategy to proactively promote their own immigration and colonization efforts.

*Les Cloches de Saint-Boniface*,<sup>100</sup> the western Catholic Church's flagship newspaper, gave the Church a voice in promoting French and Catholic colonization strategies. Through this journal they were able to reach a plethora of Franco-Catholic readers. The editors of *Les Cloches de Saint-Boniface* both supported and promoted new strategies like those of l'Abbé Jean Gaire. Gaire, a French Belgian, had independently tried to organize European French colonists to come to western Canada from the 1880s to the early 1900s. Gaire's essay 'Notre Plan' was not only distributed in Europe but was also shared across Canada and parts of the U.S. through *Les Cloches de Saint-Boniface*. His 'Plan' laid out challenges settlers faced and how best they could combat them:

Ce qui s'impose tout d'abord à notre zèle c'est donc une propagande active et immédiate auprès de toutes les races Catholiques en général, et spécialement auprès des races

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<sup>99</sup> A.G. Morice argued that the Catholic Church in the West wanted to protect French culture from both the physical frontier (and challenges with geography, climate and space) and an invasive attack on French identity that came with mass immigration and settlement. Morice, *History of the Catholic Church in Western Canada*.

<sup>100</sup> *Les Cloches De Saint-Boniface*. Saint-Boniface, Man. : Archevêché de Saint-Boniface.

Françaises. C'est ensuite la création de nos œuvres de colonisation avec l'établissement parfaitement compris de nos colons quoique nous fassions, les troupes de nos émigrants ne seront jamais aussi nombreuses que celles des émigrants étrangers.

translation

What is required first is to take advantage of our zeal and therefore a more active propaganda strategy with all Catholic races in general, and especially to the French races. Then what is required is the creation of our colonization work with schools for our settlers. Whatever we do, we must understand that the troops of our own [Franco-Catholic] emigrants are never as numerous as those of foreign immigrants.<sup>101</sup>

Written and published in Lille, France, Gaire continued to attract and negotiate with potential immigrants and interested regulatory bodies who might support the cause. Explaining the conditions in western Canada and how the early stages of settlement and colonization were well underway, Gaire's efforts successfully promoted the prairies as a viable destination for emigrants. "C'est seulement quand nous aurons bien préparé la place un peu partout que nous pourrons nous hâter de regagner la France, pour y organiser notre propagande sur des bases solides...".<sup>102</sup>

Within this new mandate and goal to shift from missionary to colonizing work, three themes became apparent. First, the Catholic Church would need to transition their existing manpower effectively. They would have to ensure that their own colonizing agents were in place and proactive strategies were carried out. As part of this goal, the Church redoubled efforts in securing support from all levels of government, and from both the Catholic Church and private citizens both inside and outside the West. Second, the Church in the West would need to see the process of land settlement in a more systematic and structured way. Taché's chain-settlement

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<sup>101</sup> "Notre Plan", *Les Cloches de Saint-Boniface*, vol.2, no 33, 18 aug 1903, 423-425. See also "Visite Pastorale", *Les Cloches de Saint-Boniface*, vol.2, no 33, 18 aug 1903, 415-416.

<sup>102</sup> Translation - "It is only when we have prepared a little place everywhere [in western Canada] we can hasten to return to France, to organize our propaganda on solid foundations ...". "Notre Plan", *Les Cloches de Saint-Boniface*, vol.2, no 34, 25 aug 1903, 433.

strategy, while effective in the earlier years, was less effective in handling the large influx of immigrants resulting from both increased colonizing efforts and mass immigration. A new 'Block Settlement Strategy' would be needed. Last, but not least, the Catholic Church would need to ensure that a growing and sustainable regional Franco-Catholic infrastructure was in place, and not just at the community level. They would require an infrastructure that included a complex communication network as well as one that could enforce a strict and quickly adaptive decision-making process.

In their role as protector of a French western society and culture, the Oblates and the western Catholic Church needed to acquire and sometimes re-acquire land. As English-speaking settlers began to threaten French enclaves already established, the Catholic Church would focus on securing blocks of land for parishioners. For the Church, Catholicism meant a French identity and Protestantism indicated an English one.<sup>103</sup> The Catholic Church also tried to protect their French-speaking parishioners through negotiated agreements with the Government. The Red River Valley south of Winnipeg is a good example of one such agreement. As English settlers streamed into the area and began squatting on and acquiring the land, the Church appealed to the Federal Government for action to both protect those French enclaves already there and acquire new land in anticipation of further French arrivals. Fortunately for the Catholic Church, the Honorable Luc Letellier de St-Just, the Federal Minister of Agriculture and active in Québec's Government during this period, took up the cause to protect this preferred land for the French.<sup>104</sup> Over the dozen years of negotiations between church and state, the Catholic Church was able to acquire and retain large blocs in the area. The Church would then resell or grant the land to

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<sup>103</sup> Huel, *Proclaiming the Gospel*, 38.

<sup>104</sup> "Memoires de la Société Royale du Canada, section (1927)" in Marie Olive Sarrasin, *Histoire de La Paroisse Saint-Joseph, Saint-Joseph, Manitoba* (Altona, Man. : D.W. Friesen, 1964), 229.

incoming French settlers. Many French families who made their way to this Red River Valley locality were established on this basis.

As significant numbers of Franco-Catholic immigrants continued to arrive in the West, Taché's 'Chain Settlement Strategy' would start to feel the strain. While this strategy was effective and in place through to the 1890s, this strategy could not keep up with the demand for whole sections of land. A new strategy was needed. Aptly named a 'Block Settlement Strategy', whole groups of French-speakers would arrive west at one time, and either be attached to an existing community, or begin their own. Through this new strategy the Catholic Church looked to accomplish three things: first, to accept 'blocks' of French-settlers once arrived; second, to act as an administrative resource for these Franco-Catholic colonizers; and third, to combat non-French colonizing institutions that were quickly winning the West. The first champion of this block settlement strategy in the West was Taché's successor, Adelard Langevin.

Langevin was born in 1855 in Saint-Isadore, Québec, into an affluent and influential family. With his elevated status, Langevin received the benefit of a good education, and eventually joining the novitiate of the Oblates of Mary Immaculate. Ordained in 1882, Langevin became part of Taché's administration at Saint-Boniface in 1893, being groomed to replace Taché as Taché's own health deteriorated. Upon Taché's death, Langevin would become the Archdiocese's second Archbishop in 1895.

In his role as overseer of the greater part of the Catholic Church in Manitoba and the Northwest Territories, Langevin would immediately align his own goals with changes required due to the mass immigration underway. The Archdiocese of Saint-Boniface had already reset their own borders. As of 1895, the ecclesiastical Saint-Boniface Province included the Saint Albert Diocese which would comprise the southern half of the province of Alberta, the

Athabasca-Mackenzie Vicariate that included what is now the Yukon and the Northwest Territories, and the Saskatchewan Vicariate that began on the northern border of Saint-Boniface connecting the Hudson Bay and the Arctic Ocean. During Langevin's tenure and until his death in 1915, the Saint-Boniface Archdiocese would grow from 24,000 mainly French-speaking Catholics to just over 135,000 Catholics, of which one-third were French, and another one-third Ukrainian.<sup>105</sup> Langevin would play a vital role in establishing Franco-Catholic settlement blocs in Manitoba to add to the parishes already there. He also had significant influence in the growth of Franco-Catholic settlement in what would become Saskatchewan.

When the Diocese of Regina was established in 1911, the new Bishop, Olivear-Elzéar Mathieu, assumed responsibility for Langevin's 'Block Settlement Strategy' in Saskatchewan. As a first step, Mathieu commissioned both the Abbés Jean Gaire and Moise Blais to colonize southern Saskatchewan with French-Catholic settlers. Efforts in this locality had limited success. Mathieu would try again to have Franco-Catholics become a mainstay in Saskatchewan by accepting priests Louis-Pierre Gravel and Albert Royer to focus on the southwest of the province. Royer and Gravel would be more successful in their efforts than their cohorts Gaire and Blaise had been in the southeastern corner. Gravelbourg, Lafleche and Meyronne were three of the most successful block settlements established in the province. Gravelbourg was especially successful and would become a beacon for other Franco-Catholic block settlements. These efforts would result in the creation of the Diocese of Gravelbourg by 1930.

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<sup>105</sup> This increase of Catholics, French and non-French, would see the creation of the Regina Diocese and Keewatin Vicariate, both responsible to Saint-Boniface. The addition of the Edmonton Diocese in 1912 included St. Albert and the Catholic Diocese of Calgary.

Placement of Franco-Catholic communities in relation to non-French populations were an important consideration. Decisions to establish a settlement isolated from other French settlement was often driven by two factors: the locality's potential for a market economy, and second, the colonizer's own mindset and opinion on how to create and sustain a French identity. Establishing Franco-Catholic communities in isolation was often a choice to allow cultural and economic development without distraction. Establishing a Franco-Catholic community in close proximity to a non-Catholic population was done for economic advantage. One reason southeastern Saskatchewan's block settlement experiment by Gaire and Blaise struggled was because they chose a more isolated strategy, and thus there was little opportunity for economic growth. The Federal Government and private industry had little interest to invest in their communities. In Gravel's Saskatchewan communities, set among immigrants of all ethnicities, more funding and resources became available. Gravel took full advantage of these surrounding groups to establish successful settlements. And with this success came a closer relationship with the non-French communities.

But there were still those who supported a more isolationist strategy. Gaire himself argued for the establishment of Grande Clairière not on the edges of the Red River Valley where Taché first proposed, but in an isolated area away from the potential for non-French and non-Catholic influence. Gaire the colonizer was very much aware of the negative impact of mass immigration. He was of the opinion that isolation was required to create a successful colony.

*De là pour les nôtres les dangers graves d'être cernés. Voilà pourquoi une habile direction de nos forces s'impose rigoureusement. Nous devons nous garder de laisser les nôtres s'éparpiller un peu partout. Il est bon que nous prenions plutôt moins de localités, mais plus solidement, afin de pouvoir faire un bloc imprenable partout où nous aurons jugé bon de nous cantonner. De plus, il est nécessaire que ces sortes de citadelles déjà fortes par elles-mêmes soient suffisamment reliées entre elles pour pouvoir se secourir réciproquement et s'appuyer l'une sur l'autre, de telle sorte que tous les efforts des étrangers soient complètement impuissants contre cette chaîne vivante.*



translation

From this [non-Franco-Catholic mass immigration west], we have grave concerns of being overwhelmed, concerns that force us to impose rigorous rules. We must keep ourselves from scattering everywhere. It is why we take less desired land in order to build our walls, to isolate ourselves from that which is outside our culture, our faith. Moreover, it is necessary that these kinds of citadels, already strong by themselves, are sufficiently interconnected in order to be able to reciprocally rely on one another, so that all the efforts of foreigners are utterly powerless against this living chain.<sup>106</sup>

Gaire and other isolationist thinkers argued that Franco-Catholics living in close proximity of other groups and centres would be tempted to leave their farms and their rural French lives and gravitate toward Winnipeg's factories and other economic opportunities. Gaire therefore believed that the focus must be in providing a Catholic environment replete with a French traditional way of life in isolation. The heart could only be truly French without distractions.

In opposition, Gravel argued that the only hope for Franco-Catholic survival would be to work together with the non-French and non-Catholic Federal Government and business and economic infrastructure. This strategy will be fully articulated in *Chapter 4 – L'Abbé Gravel; Le Diocèse de Gravelbourg*.

### **The Shifting Church - Colonizing Strategies**

Once the Roman Catholic Church established itself in the West, and after some success was realized with the early placement of Franco-Catholic missions and then parishes, the Catholic Church determined that they would also need to reinforce and adjust their colonization strategy. They did this by asserting themselves in French-speaking markets and extending their

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<sup>106</sup> "Notre Plan", *Les Cloches de Saint-Boniface*, vol.2 no 33, 18 aug 1903, 423.

own ethno-religious associations, affiliations and communication networks both domestically and internationally.

This new colonization project began in earnest nearer the end of the nineteenth century. Thankfully, the Catholic Church had a solid foundation on which to build. There was already a procedure to receive and place immigrants in both existing and new French enclaves in the West through their 'block settlement strategy', with options to settle on isolated or shared space. The Catholic Church was thus able to focus on a communication strategy that would reach their desired target audience.

The Catholic Church utilized the access they had to church sponsored publications like *Les Cloches de Saint-Boniface*. This publication was completely funded by the Church under their own 'Western Canada Publishing Company', and the Archbishop of Saint-Boniface at the time, Adelard Langevin, was its first editor. The paper's manifesto was announced in their first edition of 1902:

Les Cloches de Saint-Boniface : tel sera le titre que nous donnons à notre humble feuille. Ces cloches que le poète a chantées auront comme une triple Voix: Voix d'église, elles chanteront le dévotement du prêtre, du missionnaire, de la religieuse, l'histoire de ces nombreux clochers et ces saintes institutions que le zèle, le sacrifice a élevés à la gloire de Dieu; voix de l'École, elles rediront les difficultés du passé et celles du présent, appelleront l'enfant à la source de la véritable science, appuyée sur les principes de la Foi; voix de la Colonie ou de la Paroisse, elles chanteront le succès du colon dans ce jeune pays et l'encourageront à travailler ce sol qui rend au centuple.

translation

Les Cloches de Saint-Boniface: this will be the title we give to our humble leaf. And to our steeples [les cloches] that the poet has sung there will be a triple voice. They are the voice of the Church; they sing the devotion of the priest, of the missionary, of the nuns, the history of the numerous steeples and those holy institutions. With their zeal and sacrifice that was raised to the glory of God. They are the voice of the school; they will recreate the efforts of the past and the present, and call the child to the source of our true science, resting on Principles of Faith. They are the voice of the colony or the parish.

They sing the colonist's success in this young country and encourage the working of the soil to make it a hundredfold better.<sup>107</sup>

Langevin, for a time, had a running column in *Les Cloches de Saint-Boniface* titled 'Voix de la Colonie – Avis aux Nouveaux Colons', where he would argue against the purported opponents of their western colonization efforts.<sup>108</sup> Langevin would also re-publish articles to get the message of Franco-Catholic settlement west to the masses. In 1902, he re-printed an article published in another newspaper (*Le Métis*) thirty-five years earlier and written by Archbishop Alexandre Taché. At that time, and in rebuttal to editorials written in Québec Newspapers *La Verité* and *Le Canada*, Taché argued these editorials promulgated the myth that the West was a cold and barren land unsuited for settlement. Taché disagreed, promoting the benefits of farm life and the French culture that could be had in the West. He encouraged Québécois to go west because a French region on the prairies would better support the French Nation of Québec and ultimately Canada.<sup>109</sup>

Aside from a reactive strategy of rebuttals meant to defend the benefits of the West as a place of settlement, the Catholic Church also assumed a more pro-active approach in their overall colonization strategy. One such strategy was to have already arrived settlers become champions for Franco-Catholic settlement. An article titled "Comment aider la Colonisation" in *Le Courrier de l'Ouest*, a Franco-Alberta regional newspaper, provides an example.<sup>110</sup> The editor of this paper implored its readership to write directly to friends and family with a simple letter, telling them to come see the West for themselves.

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<sup>107</sup> The church also supported other publications like *La Liberté* in Manitoba and *Le Patriote de l'Ouest* in Saskatchewan in order to get their message out to would-be settlers. "Les Cloches de Saint-Boniface", *Les Cloches de Saint-Boniface*, vol. 1, no 1, 15 jan 1902, 1.

<sup>108</sup> Translation – 'Voice of the colony – advice to the new colonists.' "Voix de la Colonie – Avis aux Nouveaux Colons", *Les Cloches de Saint-Boniface*, vol. 2, no 4, 15 apr 1902, 111-114.

<sup>109</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>110</sup> Translation – "How to help with Colonization."

Une simple lettre, écrite tout bonnement par vous, lecteurs, fera plus, pour amener un nouveau colon, que cinquante articles de journaux et deux cents brochures décrivant le pays. Et pourquoi? Parce qu'on sera plus porté à croire ce que vous dites dans votre lettre, que ce qu'on lit dans le journal, - les journalistes sont si menteurs! - ou dans un livre - qui doit être fait pour tromper et faire venir des colons à tout prix. N'est-ce pas, en effet, ce que l'on se dit quand on lit les descriptions d'un pays fertile, beau, jouissant d'un climat sans pareil, là où on est habitué à entendre dire qu'il n'y a que plaines arides, neiges et froids insupportables. Et pourquoi croirait-on plutôt ce que dit notre lettre? Tout simplement parce que c'est vous, un parent ou un ami, qui le dites. On vous connaît, on sait que vous ne voudriez pas tromper. Et on commence par se dire: "Ça doit être vrai," plus tard : "Il faudrait voir ça pourtant." Et plus tard encore on se décide à venir. Et quand on est venu... on y reste, n'est-ce pas?

Vous voyez que c'est facile, en somme, d'aider la colonisation.

translation

Now, a simple letter, readily written by you, readers, will do more to bring a new settler than fifty articles in newspapers and two hundred pamphlets describing the country. And why? Because they will be more likely to believe what you say in your letter, than what they read in the newspaper - journalists are such liars! - or in a book - that must be made to deceive and bring settlers at all costs. Is it not, indeed, better what one says to oneself when one reads the descriptions of a fertile country, beautiful, enjoying an unparalleled climate, where one is accustomed to hear that it is not so [from others]? They hear that there are only arid plains, snowy and cold and unbearable. And why will they [instead] believe what our letter says? Simply because you, a relative or a friend, say so. We know you, we know you would not want to deceive. And they then will start by saying [to themselves]: "It must be true," later: "You [I] should see it through." And still later one decides to come. And [as proof] when we came ... we stayed here, did we not?

You see that it is easy, in short, to help with colonization.<sup>111</sup>

In Québec, articles sponsoring western Franco-Catholic settlement were especially powerful. A 1908 *Le Canada* issue promoted "un appel aux nôtres"<sup>112</sup> from a recently settled Saskatchewan author. The article appealed to not just his Québécois brethren, but to also those working the eastern U.S. factories to repatriate and come west where "...there are now sixty-four

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<sup>111</sup> "Comment aider la Colonisation", *Le Courrier de l'Ouest*, vol.I, no 20, 22 feb 1906, 4.

<sup>112</sup> Translation – "a call to ours". "Some Extracts Taken From Many Articles Published on the Life and Work of Father L.P. Gravel Missionary-Colonizer and Founder of Gravelbourg, Saskatchewan", n.d., SHSB, Collection Générale de la Société Historique de Saint-Boniface, Folder Gravel, Louis-Pierre (notes).

new townships [in southeastern Saskatchewan] of the best wheat land waiting for you, and where you will find in the West your fellow countrymen.”<sup>113</sup> A second example from *L’Union* (a newspaper in Alberta) promoted western settlement by attaching a brochure created by then Federal Immigration Agent Reverend J.A. Normandeau of Montréal, and published by their colonization office in Montréal. Their target audience, according to the article, were “...nos compatriotes de l’Est qui songent à venir faire de la colonisation dans nos parages,” encouraging them to take advantage of the mixed farming opportunities there.<sup>114</sup> Their hope was that many copies of the paper (and brochure) would be distributed to both Québécois and U.S. French-speakers.

Another strategy saw French western newspapers bolster their claims of a growing French factor in the West. An article in *Le Patriote de l’Ouest*, a French-Saskatchewan and regional newspaper, infamously quoted Père Gravel and how he successfully brought over 10,000 Franco-Catholic repatriates to southwestern Saskatchewan within the span of a few years. While this claim was ultimately challenged, it nonetheless was effective. Through print, the Catholic Church (and papers they could influence) tried to shape or in some cases re-shape the mindset of an external Franco-Catholic group away from ideas of the West being a place of suffering and hardship, “a few acres of snow”,<sup>115</sup> to one where the physical resources combined with an established infrastructure of Catholic Church and French society could provide a better life than the one they had.<sup>116</sup> Jean Gaire, celebrated colonizer from Belgium, spoke highly of

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<sup>113</sup> This article was written in both English and French. Ibid.

<sup>114</sup> Translation – “...our eastern compatriots who are thinking of coming to colonize as our neighbors.” “La Colonisation En Alberta”, *L’Union*, vol. I, no 4, 15 jan 1918, 1.

<sup>115</sup> Original quote, “quelques arpents de neige”, was used by Voltaire to highlight the barren waist land that he considered New France to be. Voltaire and Peter Gay, *Voltaire’s Candide, A bilingual ed.* (New York: St Martin’s Press, 1963).

<sup>116</sup> In one letter in *Le Canada*, they reported from the Dominion Lands Office in Moose Jaw where in October 1907, 2776 settlement entries by French-speakers were made; 699 in Lethbridge, 499 in Battleford, 662 in Calgary and 495 in Edmonton. The same article extolled the virtues of l’Abbé Gravel and his work. Bishop Mathieu of Regina is quoted at Gravel’s funeral

western Canada as a place to live. From lectures and speeches given abroad, he would publish *Le Défenseur*. Extracts of this publication would be printed in *Les Cloches de Saint Boniface* and in international newspapers like *Le Croix du Nord* in Lille, France.<sup>117</sup>

The western Catholic Church also won support from Québec's administrators. The Catholic Church in Québec played an especially critical role. The simple message from Québec's clergy to their parishioners was this – Please stay in Québec, if you must, go to rural Québec. If you cannot survive in rural Québec, please consider going west over going to the factories of the northeastern United States. If you decide to go west, we will assist you by connecting you to the Church there. In Alberta's *La Survivance* 1929 edition, the editor published an article representative of Québec's support. "Il importe donc que nous nous organisions, ici, dans l'Ouest pour recevoir les colons de l'Est... Soyons hospitaliers pour nos frères de l'Est et ils prêteront l'air pur de nos prairies à l'atmosphère empoisonnée des villes."<sup>118</sup>

Both Taché and Langevin had the services of a government-appointed colonizing agent based out of Québec. Charles Lalime was the first in this role (1876), working closely with both the Archdiocese of Saint-Boniface and the Federal Government.<sup>119</sup> In addition to their two offices based out of Montréal and Winnipeg, Lalime and his successors would be in contact with missionary-colonizers already in the West. On behalf of both federal government and church, these front-line colonizers would travel within Canada, the U.S. and Europe.

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"The work of Father Gravel is visible to all in Saskatchewan, it is there all around you and will live forever." "Un Appel Aux Nôtres", 24 nov 1908, SHSB, Collection Générale de la Société Historique de Saint-Boniface, Folder Gravel Louis-Pierre (notes).

<sup>117</sup> "M. L'Abbé Gaire", *Les Cloches de Saint-Boniface*, vol.2, no 42, 20 oct 1903, 534.

<sup>118</sup> Translation – "It is therefore important that we also organize in the West to receive the settlers from the East... Let us be hospitable to our brothers in the East and they will prefer the pure air of our prairies to the poisoned atmosphere of the cities." "La Colonisation Dans le Ouest et Québec", *La Survivance*, vol.1, no 51, 31 oct 1929, 7.

<sup>119</sup> Lawyer Charles Lalime was named immigration agent in 1876. He and Lacombe would travel this first year to both the U.S. and Québec, resulting in 600 French-Canadiens arriving to Manitoba. In 1877 Lacombe, Fillion, Lalime, and Dr. Weatherford repeated the experience, bringing another 400 back with them. As result, both Saint-Pierre and Saint-Jean-Baptiste parishes would be created same day January 5, 1877, Saint-Pie (Letellier) on April 22, 1879 and Saint-Joseph on August 13, 1879. "La Petite Histoire", mar 1998, SHSB, Collection Générale de la Société Historique de Saint-Boniface, Folder Fillion J-David (abbé) 1907-1963, 1-16.

As the western church's missionary work with the Indigenous population began to shift to French colonization and settlement, some of the front-line priest's job functions needed to change. Father Lacombe, for example, would periodically forego his missionary and settlement work in the West to travel through Québec, the Eastern U.S. and France to do his part in bringing French settlers to the prairies. Lacombe and other 'front-line' colonizers would do their best to entice settlers with stories of pioneer heroism, of the fertile land, and how French tradition and culture could be recreated.

Along with colonizing and settlement strategies would come the need for funding. And while the Catholic Church in the West and their archbishoprics would provide much of the financial support, sometimes funding would come from their parishioners. Often western parishes would hold bazars after Sunday mass and take extra collections. In turn, residing curés would provide extra money from parish finances to the cause. For example, in 1903 *Les Cloches de Saint-Boniface* published an article from Oak Lake (then Lac des Chênes) celebrating the successful bazar held by Reverend M. Bouillon of that mission. All proceeds were earmarked to pay for colonists coming from Québec.<sup>120</sup> Unfortunately, there was much less financial support and external commitment than what was required in order to compete successfully with the process of mass immigration of non-French settlers.

When immigration and colonization efforts slowed during World War I, the western Catholic Church placed more of an emphasis on maintaining the communities and parishes they had. Luckily, the Catholic Church had built a formidable infrastructure (especially in Manitoba) that they could rely on to help maintain existing Franco-Catholic communities. A number of

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<sup>120</sup> According to the Catholic Church, Manitoba's French communities were inclined to contribute more than those further west. "Ding Dang – Oak Lake (Lac des Chênes)", *Les Cloches de Saint-Boniface*, vol.2 no 46, 14 dec 1903, 589.

strengths of the Catholic Church were evident, including; an organizational agility to meet the needs of the communities quickly and effectively, an ability to connect to and utilize French associations connected to these communities, and perhaps most important, the use of communications to help promote a strong and hopefully sustainable French region.

The Catholic Church, with the placement of a resident curé and other *religieuses* in each community, would maintain a hierarchy of communication between the overseeing archdiocese and the parish population so that community decisions could flow through the archbishopric. And all information from the various archdioceses, dioceses, parishes and connected vicariates would flow through the governing archdiocese at Saint-Boniface. Both the Archbishop of Saint-Boniface (and other archbishops who would soon be in the West) and residing curés (and *les religieuses*) were the cornerstone of this network. They were the link between parishioner and mother Church. This worked because the curés of each parish were required to provide written and ongoing reports to their Archbishop. This arrangement allowed the Church to be immediately aware of the status of all their parishes and missions and to connect all the parishes within their archdioceses with a consistent and timely direction. In essence, the Catholic Church was able to utilize a relatively flat organizational structure. This meant that a front-line communication system could be deployed to sustain a regional Catholic and French community.

How did this communication process work? Simply, the residing curé was required to submit periodic updates on their parish. As part of the structure, the curés were given limited authority and required permission from the Archbishop for any action that could impact the community. To ensure the curé made the best recommendations, he would need to have a complete knowledge and understanding of the fears, needs, and wants of his parish and his



parishioners. Whether asking for permission to hold a Sunday bazar at Saint-Jean-Baptiste,<sup>121</sup> or to question the exorbitant cost of purchasing a new bell for Saint-Joseph,<sup>122</sup> or to build a new convent for the new sisters of Saint-Paul-des-Métis yet to arrive,<sup>123</sup> the Archbishop would decide for them.

This communication link would also be used by the Archbishop when he needed to disseminate information or make an on-site assessment of a situation. The Archdiocese would advise parishes of upcoming visits and tours, and provide direction on school curriculum, and so forth. And while they could only communicate as quickly as the rivers and roads could take them, the majority of the correspondence between resident curé and archbishop would still be sent and returned almost always within seven days. The speed of these communications was critical to its success, and a testament to the efficiency and effort by both resident curé and governing archbishopric.

Aside from a communication network between community and archdiocese, each Franco-Catholic community would also need to take advantage of efforts by parish residents and their connections east if they were to hope to maintain a thriving French community. French associations, newspapers and publications became critical to a community's success or failure. For example, the individuals of these French associations and newspapers would combine their efforts with the curé (and his administration) and invite Québec dignitaries from all aspects of

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<sup>121</sup> Many letters are noted requesting bazars be approved. One example, l'Abbé Jutras of Letellier asks Archbishop Taché for approval in order to help pay down the village church's debt. Norbert Jutras to Archbishop Taché, 26 sept 1891, SHSB, Corporation Archépiscopale Catholique Romaine de Saint-Boniface, serie taché, T45516-7. Many Sunday bazars were reported in both *La Liberté* and *Les Cloches de Saint-Boniface* newspapers, especially those in the French enclaves along the Red River. In another example, one report promotes a bazar at Saint-Jean-Baptiste that spanned several days. "À Saint-Jean-Baptiste", *La Liberté*, vol.IX, no 17, 4 oct 1921, 1.

<sup>122</sup> Jutras explained to Taché the exorbitant cost of the bell (\$226.20) and that Emerson's small parish population (only eight French-Catholics) would make it difficult to justify the cost. Jutras to Taché, 26 Jul 1889, SHSB, Collection Générale de la Société Historique de Saint-Boniface, Folder Letellier – correspondance (copies) 1877-1913.

<sup>123</sup> "L'Apostolat dans un Diocese de l'Ouest", *Le Patriote de l'Ouest*, vol.14, no 7, 16 apr 1924, 1-2.

business, political and spiritual life to tour the prairies and their parishes to see for themselves the benefits of living there. This aspect of regional French communication networks and the organizations and individuals and motivations that ran these newspapers will be covered in chapter six. An analysis of French run western associations will be covered in a later chapter as well.

### **The Western Catholic Church - French or not**

The western Catholic Church went to every effort to first establish a French identity and culture, beginning before 1870 and continuing through 1930. At times and in different parts of the West, they both succeeded and struggled. And without church oversight and funding and support it is difficult to see how French settlement in the West could have occurred. A shift away from church leadership, however, would follow. This potential shift (from church to lay leader) brought to the fore the issue of French identity and its survival.

Understanding the Catholic Church's role in western Canadian settlement remains the most critical concept to help us comprehend the region's French factor and identity. Without the Catholic Church's investment, there was little hope that Franco-westerners could have successfully formed French settlements in the building years of the Canadian West. The Catholic Church formalized their western Canadian project to be a French arm of the Roman Catholic Church, promising to be 'un patriote' to French nationalism in Canada while also upholding its principles as God's faithful servant. This meant the Church would take responsibility for the successes and failures of having a French identity in the region, and the Church took their role as French cultural leader seriously.

In a July 5, 1916 speech identifying that “nôtre vieux curé est mort”, the Archbishop of Saint-Boniface Mgr. Beliveau spoke to the resident priests in his archdiocese.<sup>124</sup> He summarized both the goal and dilemma of the Catholic Church’s continuing role in the West. Beliveau argued that without a strong Catholic clergy in each community, French identity would die. Beliveau’s wish was for a renewed effort by the clergy (and the citizens within these French communities) to save a French way of life. This need for a recommitment urged by the new Archbishop of the largest French diocese in the West was a sign of the dangers to Franco-Catholic identity and telling of a desperation within the Catholic Church. Written to “Mon Vieux Curé”, Beliveau noted:

Il appartient à cette longue lignée de curés patriotes qui ont opéré le grand miracle: le miracle dont parle barres, de la survivance de notre race, de notre foi et de notre langue sur la terre canadienne. Ce sont eux qui ont entretenu tous les petits foyers de vie catholique et Française sans lesquels la nationalité se serait éteinte.

translation

It is in this long line of patriot priests who operate the great miracle: the miracle speaks finitely, of the survival of our [French] race, our faith and our language on Canadian soil. It is they who have protected all the little Catholic and French-living homes without which their [French] nationality would be extinguished.<sup>125</sup>

The hierarchy of this renewed relationship was equally clear. The Church was to be the driving factor in establishing and maintaining French communities and localities. The French elite needed to follow in support. This was the plan restated. These recommitments would continue throughout the period studied here but as the context of western settlement evolved, the Catholic Church would abandon the plan.

Before beginning an analysis of the various communities and localities that are the focus here, it is important to understand some of these changes. These changes occurred at different

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<sup>124</sup> Translation – “our old curé is dead.” “Mon Vieux Curé”, *La Liberté*, vol.IV, no 8, 16 jul 1916, 3.

<sup>125</sup> Ibid.

times across different parts of the Western Canadian region. They occurred when the Western Catholic Church needed to accommodate Indigenous populations, when it began to address growing populations, and within this, as it conceptualized its parishioners as Catholics of all ethnicities rather than just French Catholics.

On April 16, 1924 *Le Patriote de l'Ouest* newspaper ran an article, “L'Apostolat dans un Diocèse de l'Ouest - Conférence de Mgr Prud'homme à l'Action Française”, which summarized the proceedings of a conference for western Catholic clergy.<sup>126</sup> Its focus was a November 30, 1919 decree by Pope Benoît XV to his Catholic episcopate. The *Maximum Illud* Apostolic letter concentrated on the Church's propagation of the faith and a new direction to be taken to reach Catholics globally. This document directed all clergy to teach and pray in the language and culture of those they minister to. The Pope's mandate, and the follow up Prud'homme Conference of 1924, determined that the Catholic clergy had to represent and support all Catholics of the West. Since there were already French-speaking clergy to represent the French-speaking Catholic population, efforts should be made to support non-French-speaking Catholics in the West. As the table below shows, French clergy could no longer be the default for community assignment.

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<sup>126</sup> “L'Apostolat dans un diocèse de l'Ouest”, *Le Patriote de l'Ouest*, vol.14, no 7, 16 apr 1924, 1-2.

Table 2-1 Ethnic Origins for Western Catholics, circa 1910

	Regina Diocese		Saint-Boniface Diocese		Saint-Albert Diocese		Prince Albert Diocese	
French	16,886	35.2% <sup>127</sup>	33,786	27.5%	17,370	33.3%	10,000	22.7%
German	6,327		10,789		3,170		12,000	
English/Irish	2,759		11,181		14,290		5,000	
Polish	2,387		13,195		negligible		negligible	
Ruthenian/Ukrainian	15,000		45,000		negligible		12,000	
Hungarian/Ruthenian/ Polish	negligible		negligible		12,780		negligible	
Indigenous origin	negligible		3,882		4,490		5,000	
Other	4,640		5,240		negligible		negligible	
<b>Total</b>	<b>47,999</b>		<b>123,073</b>		<b>52,100</b>		<b>44,000</b>	

source: Regina Diocese data from "La Population Catholique du Nouveau Diocese de Regina", *Les Cloches de Saint Boniface*, vol.9 no 21, 1 nov 1910, 264-5. Saint-Boniface Diocese, Saint-Albert Diocese and Prince-Albert Diocese data from "Statistiques de la Province Ecclesiastique de Saint-Boniface", *Les Cloches de Saint Boniface*, vol.8 no 13, 1 jul 1909, 162-3.

On September 7, 1920, and upon the death of Archbishop Emile Legal of the Edmonton Archdiocese, the western Catholic Church appointed Henry Joseph O’Leary as his replacement. Archbishop O’Leary was the first non-French Archbishop appointed to western Canada. This appointment culminated from a number of years in which the western Catholic Church was torn between their focus on Franco-Catholics and a growing non-French Catholic population who came with the mass immigration of the later nineteenth and earlier twentieth centuries. The appointment of O’Leary reflected this demographic dynamic.<sup>128</sup> Non-French and Catholic populations would now receive concentrated support from the western Catholic Church. The decision by the Holy See to not focus solely on French-speakers in the West would begin another shift in focus for both the Catholic Church and the French-speaking westerner. With this shift,

<sup>127</sup> This column and every second column thereafter represents the percentage of French-Catholics of the total Catholic population for that diocese.

<sup>128</sup> With this admission of a dominating non-French population within the Catholic Church in western Canada, many ethnic groups began to demand Catholic priests who spoke their language and understood their customs. These non-French Catholics, seeing the support the Franco-Catholics had received for a quarter of a century or more since they arrived, claimed they, as Catholics, had the right to be treated with the same respect. A number of articles were written on this issue, especially in the more western French newspapers. *Le Patriote de l’Ouest* published the most on the topic. One example can be found from “L’Apostolat dans un diocese de l’Ouest”, *Le Patriote de l’Ouest*, vol.14, no 7, 16 apr 1924, 1-2.

western French-speakers would need to quickly assume more responsibility for their own cultural survival.

This trend was reinforced by the appointment of, and subsequent actions by Archbishop O’Leary. Beginning in 1921, O’Leary’s strategy became clear. As French clergy retired or were relocated, O’Leary would replace them with non-French clergy. It would be a struggle for many French clergy to put their own identity as French persons aside and follow the new direction of the Catholic Church. Those in more settled French-Catholic rural parishes like those in and around the parishes of Manitoba would be less affected. For other parishes farther west, it would be difficult for some French clergy to curb their desire to protect their French-Catholic parishioners living in a non-French-Catholic parish. It also became equally difficult for some French clergy to work with other ethnic groups and institutions.

In 1924, the French-speaking curé l’Abbé Voisin of Red Deer, after being given thirty days to vacate his parish, wrote a scathing letter to Archbishop O’Leary condemning his actions to replace him and other French clergy. Voisin considered O’Leary’s actions a direct assault on the French in the West. Disputing that the French-speaking population was shrinking, Voisin considered recent events and decisions made by O’Leary a “... persécution d'une race par une autre qui désole le Diocèse d'Edmonton depuis que votre Grandeur en a pris possession...de déblayer le pays de tout ce qui est Français.”<sup>129</sup> Voisin argued that, despite what he called manipulated statistics to the contrary, French Catholics in the Archdiocese of Edmonton continued to be the majority, and therefore should rightfully be represented by a majority French clergy.

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<sup>129</sup> Translation - “...persecution of one race by another that has been desolating the [Arch]Diocese of Edmonton since your Highness took possession of it... hastened to clear the country of all that is French.” Voisin to O’Leary, 14 oct 1924, The Catholic Archdiocese of Edmonton Archives, Folder O’Leary and the French-Speaking Catholics ARCAE-97-3-29, 1.

Voisin made the focus of his letter an argument for ethnicity over religious faith. He condemned O’Leary for being Irish-bred and sharing the hate his ethnic group had for the French. He accused O’Leary of authoring a discriminatory anti-French strategy. To highlight his point, Voisin argued that O’Leary was responsible for sponsoring a contingent of Scottish immigrants, complete with Scottish priest, to locate in an area less than five miles from Voisin’s Church in Red Deer. According to Voisin, the importation of this group within an already weakened and mixed-race parish was meant to quicken the assimilation of the Franco-Catholic minority. O’Leary and the Western Catholic Church were not allowing the current French clergy to retire with dignity.<sup>130</sup>

As biased as Voisin was, he still made the point that the Archdiocese of Edmonton and the greater Catholic Church in parts of western Canada had put the 1919 papal decree and subsequent Prud’homme Conference’s mandate at the forefront. The new Catholic Church, at least in Alberta, had apparently withdrawn from the original Catholic mandate in the West, to protect their French identity as their own traditions dictated. The Edmonton Archdiocese led the way in making the West a multi-ethnic Catholic Church at the expense of a continuing French identity in the region.<sup>131</sup>

By the time of the 1924 conference at Prud’homme, there already existed many non-French Catholics in the region.<sup>132</sup> O’Leary was well into his plan to save the western Catholics and give identified communities priests and a working administration who were of the same ethnicity. He resolved that this would provide an immediate connection with and trust from their

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<sup>130</sup> Ibid.

<sup>131</sup> Ibid.

<sup>132</sup> The Prud’homme mandate listed German, Polish and Hungarian immigrants as those in need of the Church’s guidance.

parishioners, unlike the ‘foreign’ French priests who had neither the understanding nor perception of what it was like to be of that specific ethnic group’s culture and identity.<sup>133</sup>

With these actions of the Catholic Church in Alberta in the 1920s, the various leaders of the Franco-westerners realized that they would need to find ways to better support their own French livelihoods and communities within a multi-ethnic Catholic Church and a continually growing multi-ethnic population. Given the intimate connection between Catholic Church and French culture, these transitions had the potential of reshaping how Franco-Westerners saw themselves in relation to the Church, and whether a French identity could survive.

### **Conclusion**

The theme of this chapter connects the Catholic Church to French colonization in western Canada. The Catholic Church was wholly responsible for establishing a staged scheme that would result in a western French population. Through an ability to shift their focus to adapt to the continuing changes in the West, from missionary to colonization to settlement work, the Catholic Church had relative success doing their part to establish both their own institution and a continuing French factor. From beginning work with the region’s Indigenous groups, mission sites (and parishes) were established as the Church shifted their focus to French settlement. The western Church would then re-focus efforts toward colonization in the face of massive non-French and non-Catholic immigration. Through these evolving strategem, the changing Catholic Church secured for themselves, and their French-speaking parishioners, a strong and active footprint in western Canada.

While we could argue that the French language and the Catholic faith represented a kind of primordial ethnicity in western Canada, the Catholic Church knew it had to knit the various

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<sup>133</sup> “L’Apostolat dans un Diocese de l’Ouest”, *Le Patriote de l’Ouest*, vol.14, no 7, 16 apr 1924, 1-2.



Métis, Québécois, Belgian and Swiss French-speaking population together. No simple reference to Québec as 'la patrie' could do this and consequently the Catholic Church's efforts to create unified French communities in the West through their various colonization schemes of this identity became very clear when the Catholic Church turned its back on the primary identification of French with Catholics in the 1920s.

Within these western provinces, there were differences between each other. There were delays in realizing a church infrastructure the farther west one went. With this, the more the church struggled, the more a Québec tradition would be questioned. A colonizing Catholic Church arrived later to Saskatchewan, then Alberta. With this lag, the landscape of arriving non-French and non-French-Catholic immigrants made it difficult for the Catholic Church to continue to influence and carry its French traditions. Non-French Catholics increasingly determined the Catholic Church's efforts. French-Catholics in the West increasingly had to fend more for themselves, and connections to 'la patrie' and the intimate (and 'given') relationship between church and French culture was questioned.

Western French communities would now need to decide how best to navigate their surroundings. The remainder of this dissertation will discuss some of these themes and the intimate connection between Catholic Church and a French western identity in jeopardy.

## Chapter 3 Manitoba's Red River; *Le Mission Saint-Joseph de la Rivière aux Marais*<sup>134</sup>

All of the localities and communities studied in this thesis began as Catholic Church missions or parishes, with church leadership crucial in maintaining both their Catholic and French identity. As noted in the previous chapter, however by the 1920s this leadership began to abdicate its French mission in lieu of a multi-ethnic Catholic one. How each French community handled the changing situation would contribute to their own viability but also a uniqueness between the provinces' French communities and the directions they would take.

The purpose of the next three chapters is to highlight the key events, organizations and people in the six communities within the three localities studied here and how they developed from 1870 to 1930. This case study approach should both highlight the importance of the Church's early role and the progression of some localities toward a non-Church leadership by the 1920s.

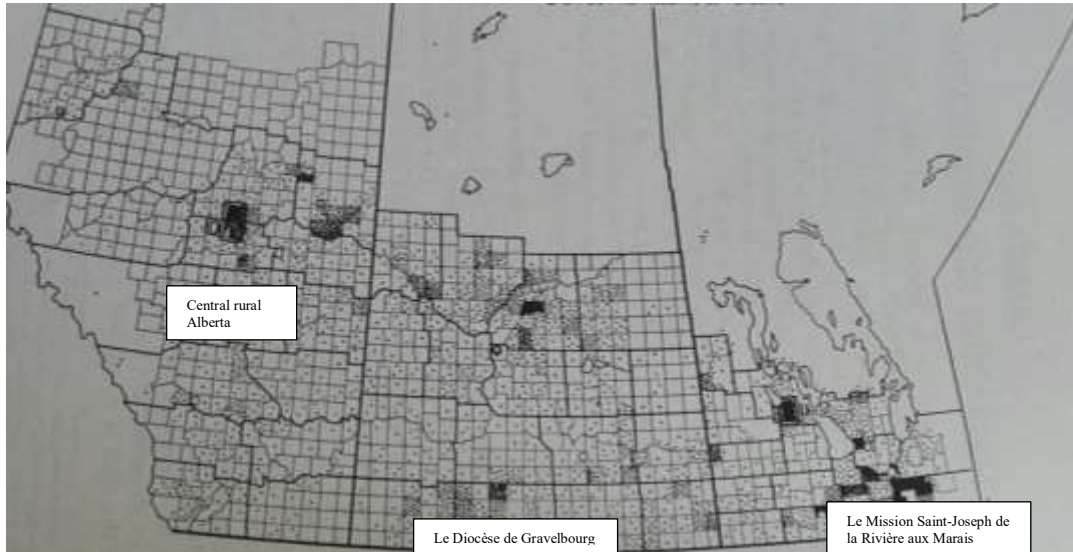
I have decided to focus on three localities that illustrate different historical origins and trajectories that make up and challenge a common French identity. I will consider localities spread across the prairies where French enclaves and populations existed and were led by curés and by French-speaking business and cultural leaders. Each case study will highlight the period when the Catholic Church was the main leadership group and will also emphasize the role that non-Church French leaders and locals played throughout and since. I will also illustrate the challenges to a French identity of these communities. The three localities include: *Le Mission Saint-Joseph de la Rivière aux Marais* at the southernmost edge of the Red River Valley, *Le*

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<sup>134</sup> There are a number of sources within the SHSB Archives at Saint Boniface used for this locality. Some of the more important ones include those in SHSB, specifically within the Collection Générale de la Société Historique de Saint-Boniface; Folder L'histoire de St-Jean Baptiste 1877-1967, Folder Saint-Jean-Baptiste Centenaire Historiques, Folder Letellier - notes du P.Picton and Folder radio talks by S Caron cure on Saint Jean Baptiste – 1946.

*Diocèse de Gravelbourg* within the southern plains of Saskatchewan, and *Central and Rural Alberta*.

Figure 3-1 Rural Population of French Origin, 1921 (each dot represents 25 persons)



source: Carl Dawson, *Group Settlement: Ethnic Communities In Western Canada* (Toronto: Macmillan, 1936), 336.

The locality of *le Mission Saint-Joseph de la Rivière aux Marais* in the Red River Valley includes the parishes of Letellier, Saint-Jean-Baptiste and Saint-Joseph. In the locality of Southern Saskatchewan my focus will be on the community and *le Diocèse de Gravelbourg*. Last, the locality of *Central and Rural Alberta* will include the communities and parishes of Saint-Paul-des-Métis and Morinville. My discussion of these localities and communities has the purpose of laying the groundwork for an analysis of the French identity in these western communities.

As early as the 1860s, some Métis families began to settle the area near present-day Saint-Jean-Baptiste along the Red River. These efforts, aided by the Catholic Church of Saint-Boniface, created a French and Catholic niche in this area. Some of the first families in this area included: François Bériau, Toussaint Vaudry, Romain and Elzéar Lagimodière, André Gaudry, Norbert Landry, Maxime Dumais and Francis Flammand. These Métis families would be aided

by a French-Canadien, Jean-Baptiste Gauthier. Gauthier was one of the first Québec pioneers to arrive. He arrived in 1861.<sup>135</sup> With Gauthier's help, twelve Métis families had settled within his first year. Because the French-speaking communities of St. Norbert and Ste. Agathe Missions were already well established, the Catholic Church focused their colonization efforts on the area near Saint-Jean-Baptiste and to the south. These communities were made up of these founding Métis families, and a very few Québec immigrants who arrived in these early years as well as some colonists recruited from the United States.<sup>136</sup>

Named *le Mission Saint-Joseph de la Rivière aux Marais*, the locality would be significantly altered, when, in the summer of 1876, Father Albert Lacombe and immigration agent Charles Lalime, with oversight from both the Archdiocese of Saint-Boniface and *La Société Manitobaine de Colonisation*, successfully settled over 400 repatriates from the area in and around Fall River, Massachusetts. A few months later another 200 French settlers arrived from Québec. Some of these pioneers included; MM. Jean et Joseph Boiteau and spouses, MM. François and Didier Parent (father and son), M. Toussaint Breault (or Brault), M. Gaspard and Joseph Breton (father and son), and M. Louis Marcil and spouse (and child – Leopold). These early additions went a long way in providing a buffer against the wave of non-French immigration that would soon begin.<sup>137</sup>

In these early years, the French populations of the Red River Valley south of Winnipeg stretched down to the communities of Emerson and West Lynne at the Canada-U.S. border.

From the French municipality of St. Norbert south of Winnipeg, those municipalities that had a

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<sup>135</sup> He settled on lot number 59 on the river and one kilometer away from their church built there in 1874. A nearby village would be named Gauthier in his honor. "Letellier of Manitoba Directory 17th July 1877. Township 2 Range 1, East.", 1877-1890, SHSB, Collection Générale de la Société Historique de Saint-Boniface, Folder Letellier - notes du P.Picton.

<sup>136</sup> In addition to the primary sources noted, the life story of Mgr. Taché was also used. Benoît, *Vie de Mgr Taché*, 295-325.

<sup>137</sup> The first federal political riding to capture a majority of the Franco-Catholic population on the Red River, Provencher and its borders were quickly realigned so a new federal riding of Lisgar could now encompass this influx of French-speaking settlers. "Historique de la Paroisse de St-Jean-Baptiste", *Les Cloches de Saint-Boniface*, vol.35, no 8, aug 1936, 210-213.

majority French population included; Ritchot (Ile des Chênes) and Taché along the Seine River; De Salaberry (Ste. Elisabeth, St. Malo) along the Rat River (all south and east of Winnipeg), and Montcalm (that included what would be Letellier, Saint-Jean-Baptiste and Saint-Joseph) on the Red River.

In all of these Franco-Manitoban communities the Catholic Church played a large role and had their own organization. Within the above noted political borders, Franco-Catholic missions and parishes existed. For example, the rural municipality of Montcalm (political designation) and *le Mission Saint-Joseph de la Rivière aux Marais* (religious designation) covered roughly the same geographic area. For the purpose of my research, and to best identify this and other localities and communities, I reference these areas by their religious designations where possible. Thus, the first locality under review is identified as *le Mission Saint-Joseph de la Rivière aux Marais*.<sup>138</sup> Granted corporate status on July 22, 1874, this locality became the first Franco-Catholic permanent reserve south of St. Norbert along the Red River.<sup>139</sup>

The main Anglican communities to the north (Morris) and to the south (Emerson/West Lynne) of *le Mission Saint-Joseph de la Rivière aux Marais* separated the mission from other French communities and the American border. There were also non-French ethnic enclaves to the east and west of the Saint-Joseph reserve. This made the locality somewhat of a French and Catholic island, and missionary priests under direction from the Saint-Boniface Archdiocese looked to strengthen this French-Catholic mission into a stronghold. The Catholic Church, utilizing its knowledge of the land, began to purchase tracts to establish more French communities. They had successfully done this south and east of Winnipeg with the assistance of

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<sup>138</sup> Sarrasin, *Histoire de la Paroisse Saint-Joseph*, 17-18.

<sup>139</sup> French-Catholic communities just south and east of Winnipeg (north of *le Mission Saint-Joseph de la Rivière aux Marais*) had just recently been established. *Ibid.*, 18.

the Abbés Lestanc, Ritchot, Taché, Fillion and other Roman Catholic missionaries. They would try to repeat this process at *le Mission Saint-Joseph de la Rivière aux Marais*.

Père Joseph Lestanc, one of the Catholic Church's first missionaries to this locality, focused on protecting the land that the Catholic Church had already claimed. He made recommendations to his archdiocese of how existing pioneer Métis families could be cared for, and how French-speaking missions, townships and eventual parishes could proceed and be protected. It was Lestanc who first reported to Archbishop Alexandre Antonin Taché that a few English families had first squatted on this mission territory, and that their unfounded claims for land needed a response.<sup>140</sup> The Catholic Church decided that more French-speaking families would be required to occupy this land. It was hoped that a further infusion of French-speakers would tip the scale in their direction and help secure this area for themselves.

In a letter written by l'Abbé Clovis St-Amant (curé of what would be Saint-Jean-Baptiste Parish) to Archbishop Taché in the early 1880s, St-Amant updated the Catholic Church on recent land acquisitions arranged by the Archdiocese of Saint-Boniface of land once owned by Anglo-Protestants. These acquisitions included thirty land claims covering 4000 acres, including land owners both there from the start and those recently arrived: the Baril Family (two lots; 320 acres), the Guenette family (five lots; 880 acres), the Fillion family (six lots; 1440 acres), and the Sabourin family (four lots; 1301 acres).<sup>141</sup> While this French locality would continue to be threatened from both outside and inside its borders, there remained hope that the Franco-Catholic Church could thrive here.

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<sup>140</sup> Lettre du P. Lestanc à Mgr. Taché, 14 jul 1861, SHSB, Collection Générale de la Société Historique de Saint-Boniface, Folder Letellier – notes du P. Picton 1.1/141.

<sup>141</sup> "Terres Achetees des Protestants par les Catholiques de Saint-jean-Baptiste, Man", n.d., SHSB, Collection Générale de la Société Historique de Saint-Boniface, Folder Saint-Jean-Baptiste – photocopie de documents divers 1875-1928.

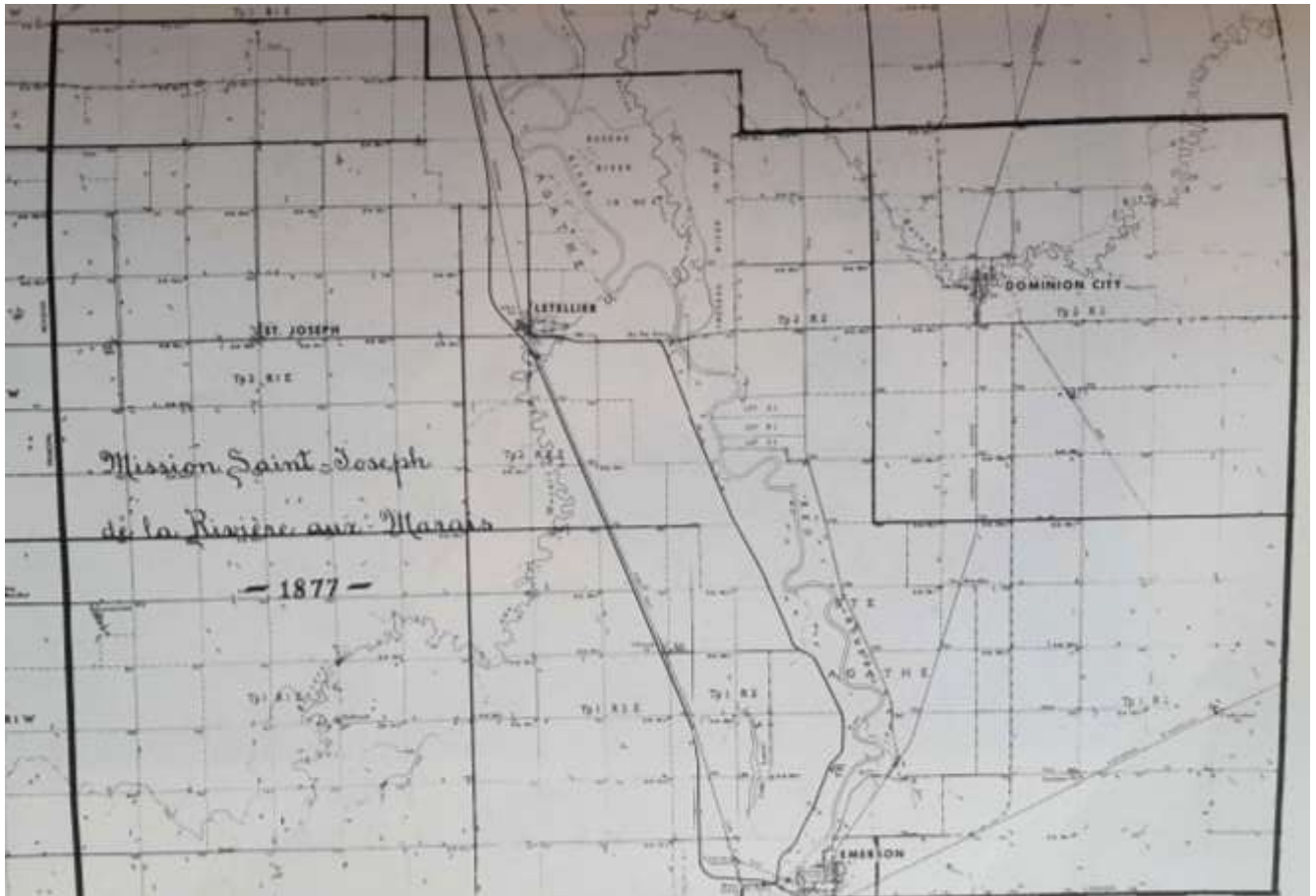
The Catholic Church needed to decide whether to include the village of Emerson within the new mission's borders. After discussions and correspondence between l'Abbé Fillion and Bishop Taché at Saint-Boniface, Fillion suggested in an April 1879 letter that the bi-ethnic and bi-religious community of Emerson would not be a good place for the Catholic Church to continue their work and effort.<sup>142</sup> French-Catholics in the community were already greatly outnumbered. The existing mission site there was simply too costly to maintain for such an enterprise. Both Fillion and Taché surmised that the Church's money and efforts could be better utilized strengthening existing communities within their already defined mission's borders. While Catholic missionaries would continue to visit Emerson and offer day trips to the now nearest chapel at Saint-Pie for Sunday mass, Emerson, being a mostly Anglo-Protestant community by 1879, was officially given up by Taché and the Catholic Church.

By March of 1875 villages and towns were beginning to be established within the land designated as the Mission Saint-Joseph. In May that year, after encouragement by both Catholic Church and *La Société Manitobaine de Colonisation*, land was officially reserved by the Federal Government along the Red River South to become the largest section of what would be *le Mission Saint-Joseph de la Rivière aux Marais*. Townships 2 and 3 in range 1 and 2 east (current Letellier and Saint-Joseph Parishes) were allotted for the church's distribution.

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<sup>142</sup> Fillion to Taché, 12 apr 1879, SHSB, Corporation Archiépiscope Catholique Romaine de Saint-Boniface, serie taché – T21662-3.

Figure 3-2 Le Mission Saint-Joseph de la Rivière aux Marais, 1877<sup>143</sup>



source: Sarrasin, *Histoire de la Paroisse Saint-Joseph*, 19.

First established in 1872, the village of Saint-Joseph consisted of twelve permanently settled Métis families and one French-Canadien (Henri L'Ecuyer).<sup>144</sup> Some of these pioneer families included: Charles Ditto, Joseph Lépine, Irénée Duhamel, Louis Têtu and Julien Godard. The Abbé Proulx (touring missionary) would soon begin to visit this new mission, offering the first mass there that same year.<sup>145</sup> The arrival of U.S. repatriates and Québec immigrants resulted in the township of Saint-Joseph being founded in 1877. The initial request to finish building a proper church at Saint-Joseph Mission by some fifteen families now residing at Saint-Pie

<sup>143</sup> The dark lines in the map above display the borders of *le Mission Saint-Joseph de la Rivière aux Marais*. Saint-Jean-Baptiste would also be added to its northern locality border along the Red River in 1877, but not in time to be included in map.

<sup>144</sup> L'Ecuyer was the first pioneer from Québec to settle at Saint-Pie de V de Letellier. *Ibid.*, 12.

<sup>145</sup> Edmond Cormier, *Almanach Français Du Manitoba* (Saint-Boniface, Man.: Le Centre, 1984), 87-88.



resulted in the structure being finished by 1877. With the chapel now completed, the greater mission of Saint-Joseph locality was formally established.<sup>146</sup> Further additions to the new mission would take place.

Given the expanse of the locality, resources were quickly stretched thin. The existing church at Saint-Pie, the first chapel of the mission, occupied its southern section.<sup>147</sup> With the Saint-Pie Church located in the south of the mission, it was unable to adequately service the northern part of their mission. For this reason, and because mass was not sung every Sunday at Saint-Pie, settlers in the northern end of Saint-Joseph Mission would often travel to the nearer mission church at Saint-Jean-Baptiste. It was a time of confusion when mission borders were not well understood and when Franco-Catholic settlers looked for resources and guidance anywhere they could. From these early years, the decision would be made that the separate missions of Saint-Joseph and Saint-Jean-Baptiste would need to be under the same designation.<sup>148</sup> Townships 3, Range 1 east and Township 4, range 2 east (current Saint-Jean-Baptiste Parish) would be included before its incorporation in 1877.<sup>149</sup>

Saint-Jean-Baptiste, Saint-Pie V. de Letellier and the Township of Saint-Joseph<sup>150</sup> would become its leading communities. Saint-Pie V. de Letellier and Saint-Jean-Baptiste were designated with parish status in January of 1877. The small village of Saint-Joseph was

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<sup>146</sup> This document describes the Letellier area and the establishment of Saint-Joseph. It includes a list of 27 area inhabitants. The letter advises that the area would be inhabited by repatriates from the U.S. and established by l'Abbé Fillion and named Saint-Joseph. "Letellier of Manitoba Directory", 1 jul 1877, SHSB, Collection Générale de la Société Historique de Saint-Boniface, Folder Letellier – notes du P. Picton 1.1/141. Another primary document confirms the establishment of Saint-Joseph, first named Saint-Pie, a Catholic Mission in 1877, by l'Abbé Fillion. It includes a list of pioneers. "St. Pie", n.d., SHSB, Collection Générale de la Société Historique de Saint-Boniface, Folder Letellier – notes du P. Picton 1.1/141.

<sup>147</sup> The Saint-Pie Chapel was located at Township 2 Range 2 east.

<sup>148</sup> Sarrasin, *Histoire de la Paroisse Saint-Joseph*, 40.

<sup>149</sup> *Ibid.*, 1-2.

<sup>150</sup> This area was named a 'township' after *le Mission Saint-Joseph de la Rivière aux Marais* partitioned into Letellier Parish and Saint-Jean-Baptiste Parish and the Township of Saint-Joseph (all in 1877). This area would be referred to as 'the township of Saint-Joseph' from 1877 until achieving parish status in 1889.

immediately thereafter given the new designation of township status, eventually becoming a parish on its own in 1889.<sup>151</sup>

With a chapel in place, the first post-office was established in 1880 and the Catholic Church took over the mail service. Three curés (l'Abbé M. Charbonneau 1880-1881, l'Abbé Nazaire Pelletier (curé at Saint-Jean-Baptiste) 1881-1885 and 1889-1894, and l'Abbé E. Béguet 1894-1895) were Saint Joseph's postmasters for its first fifteen years. And while the first post office was situated at the presbytery, to be near the 'postmaster priest', it would continue in the private homes and local stores of its parishioners. After these beginning years, the community's secular French leaders assumed this responsibility from the Catholic Church.<sup>152</sup>

The Catholic Church also tried to expand the new parish of Saint-Jean-Baptiste on its northern edge, and they founded a society to help arriving and settled Franco-Catholics acquire land in the area. According to *La Société de Colonization de Manitoba*, and the Catholic Church that sponsored it, the primary goal was to secure title to properties for French-Canadian settlers by both ensuring the laws of the region were understood and complied with, and that the government would be petitioned should liberties be taken by non-French interlopers. In essence, the Catholic Church looked to protect French-speaking settlers, and all this was done to safeguard the future of both the Catholic Church and the French population.

Prêtre avant tout, il rappelait sans cesse à ses paroissiens que l'espérance de notre survivance, comme groupe français, reposait sur les principes religieux et notre attachement à l'église catholique. En effet, que resterait chez nous de force française si le catholicisme ne l'avait constamment soutenue et protégée. Il est un exemple de plus pur patriotisme; celui qui conserve nos traditions de foi, d'honneur et de noblesse de vie, celui qui entraîne vers les sommets et qui élève et vivifie toute une race.

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<sup>151</sup> As was common with naming and renaming and reusing mission, village, township and parish names, the names Letellier and Saint-Joseph were often confused. "On ne parlera plus du 'township' Letellier et, après plusieurs années, on aura oublié que, pendant 12 ans, 'St-Joseph – Letellier' était le double nom d'un même endroit connu aujourd'hui sous le nom de 'St-Joseph'." Translation - "We no longer speak of Township Letellier, and after some years, we forgot that, for twelve years the double name 'St-Joseph – Letellier' was used for present day 'St-Joseph'." Sarrasin, *Histoire de la Paroisse Saint-Joseph*, 77, 100-101.

<sup>152</sup> Cormier, *Almanach Français Du Manitoba*, 88.

translation

The hope of our survival, as a French group, is based on religious principles and our connection to the Catholic Church. Nothing would be left of our French identity if Catholicism had not sustained and protected it. It is an example of purest patriotism; one that keeps our traditions of faith, life, nobility, and honor; and invigorates the whole race.<sup>153</sup>

The borders and settlement strategies of the French-Catholic enclave of *le Mission Saint-Joseph de la Rivière aux Marais* were complete and in place. And from these efforts three communities within the mission were quickly becoming the most prominent; Saint Pie V de Letellier (later designated as Letellier), Saint-Joseph and Saint-Jean-Baptiste.

This locality's French-Catholic strength was in contrast to the province as a whole. In 1870 Manitoba had a population of 12,228 of which approximately 45% were French-Catholics.<sup>154</sup> By 1901 the population of the province was 255,211 of which only 13.3% claimed French origin, and by 1921, of the 610,118 people in the province, only 9.8% remained. In comparison, when Manitoba became a province in 1870, *le Mission Saint-Joseph de la Rivière aux Marais* had a total population of 2641, of which 98.2% were French.<sup>155</sup> By 1921, and with

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<sup>153</sup> These words were written by Juge Prud'homme in 1927. Joseph David Fillion and L. A Prud'homme. L'abbé Joseph David Fillion, Curé-Fondateur: Paroisses Saint-Jean-Baptiste, Saint-Joseph, Saint-Pie V De Letellier & Sainte-Elisabeth, Manitoba : Mémoires et écrits biographiques à l'occasion du centenaire de son décès, 12 Janvier 1907-2007 (Winnipeg : s.n., 2007), 2. For similar articles, see "Nouvelles locales", *Le Métis*, vol.10, no 1, 1 sep 1880, 3; and "Monsieur L'Abbe Joseph-David Fillion", *Les Cloches de Saint-Boniface*, vol.27, no 2, feb 1928, 41-42.

<sup>154</sup> Census reporting utilized different terms to identify religious affiliation (ie. Catholic) and 'racial origin'. The terms 'birthplace', and 'nativity' were most accurate in identifying country of origin and 'mother tongue' best described that the individual claimed as their spoken language. 'Racial origin' was used interchangeably through the years the census data was collected, most often related to whether the individual was considered to be 'of that race' without designating a place of birth. This meant, unfortunately for my research, that it was difficult at times to designate country (or province) of birth from census data. For the purpose of this dissertation it was important to best designate what French ethnicity existed, whether it be from France, Québec, or elsewhere. I therefore use the terms 'French', 'French-speaking' and 'French origin' most often as an attempt to identify that 'French ethnicity' existed.

<sup>155</sup> 2593 Catholics were recorded. It is assumed that all Catholics at this time in Manitoba were French-speaking. *Census of Canada, 1870-71*.

the rural municipality encompassing 3,000 people, almost 74% remained of French origin.<sup>156</sup> By the time of the 1931 census their percentage had dropped only slightly (71.4%).<sup>157</sup> It was understandable that the Catholic Church wanted to protect existing Franco-Catholic enclaves where it could, and their initial efforts resulted in relative success at the Saint-Joseph Mission. Within the locality, the French population was exclusively Catholic.<sup>158</sup> Of the many church leaders who had a hand in the building of this mission and locality, two individuals stood out: les Abbés Norbert A. Jutras and J. David Fillion.

#### Fillion the Colonizer<sup>159</sup>

L'Abbé Joseph David Fillion, founder and resident missionary of Saint-Jean-Baptiste, contributed greatly to settling many of the first inhabitants within the Saint-Joseph Mission and in pockets at Saint-Pie V. de Letellier, Saint-Joseph, Gauthier and Ste. Elisabeth villages as well as his northern community at Saint-Jean-Baptiste. He is also credited with setting up chapel houses, schools and villages at Rivière aux Gratias (Letellier), Rivière aux Prunes (Saint-Jean-Baptiste) and Rivière aux Marais (Saint-Joseph).<sup>160</sup>

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<sup>156</sup> The rural Municipality of Montcalm is closest to land area of French locality and therefore used for census data. 2906 total population in the municipality, of which 2148 were French origin (from Québec, France and Belgium), or 73.7%. *Census of the Prairie Provinces, 1936*.

<sup>157</sup> The population of Montcalm was 2997. This included 2,138 of French origin (from Québec, France and Belgium). Ibid.

<sup>158</sup> The greater mission realized a 98.6% French-Catholic population in 1915 (1,927 of 1,955 Catholics in the communities of Saint-Jean-Baptiste [1,082 French and nineteen non-French], Saint-Joseph [319 French and three non-French], and Letellier [526 French and six non-French]). "L'Eglise Catholique Au Manitoba – Archdiocèse de Saint-Boniface – Après la division en 1915, Population catholique", *La Liberté*, vol.IV no 13, 9 aug 1916, 1.

<sup>159</sup> A list of all regular and secular Catholic priests who served in Canada between 1834 and 1934 is provided in *Les Cloches de Saint Boniface*. It includes their emigration point, arrival date and date of death. An obituary of l'Abbé Fillion was written by Rev. P. Gagné. "Centenaire d'une Brochure! 1834-1934", *Les Cloches de Saint Boniface*, vol.33, no 3, 13 aug 1934, 73-76.

<sup>160</sup> One particular source identifies some of the work Fillion did to establish communities in the area. It includes a list of pioneers of each community that Fillion was responsible for helping to settle. "Manitoba Directory – Electoral Division No 23", 1878, SSHB, Collection Générale de la Société Historique de Saint-Boniface, Folder Letellier - correspondance (copies) 1877-1913 divers.

Fillion was ordained priest in Montréal October 2, 1870 having lived there his entire life. He was assigned to Saint-Boniface September 22, 1873. His initial ministerial work was done in the French area just south and east of Winnipeg at Lorette (and Petite Pointe des Chênes). He was then installed in the Ste. Agathe area which, for a time, would be part of the Saint-Jean-Baptiste village. In 1874 Taché named Fillion missionary to all their missions on the Red River. Fillion's responsibilities included doing work for various missions, including: Scratching River (later renamed Morris), *le Mission Saint-Joseph de la Rivière aux Marais* (Saint-Joseph, Letellier, Saint-Jean-Baptiste), the Mission at Saint-Joe, Dakota (south of the 49<sup>th</sup> parallel), and St. Pierre-Jolys (east of the Rat River and the Saint-Joseph Mission). Fillion did the majority of his early work at La Rivière aux Rats (later St. Pierre Jolys) and La Rivière aux Prunes (later Saint-Jean-Baptiste) Missions. Fillion would spend the majority of his career travelling to the various missions over the larger locality and region.<sup>161</sup>

Fillion became the curé of Saint-Jean-Baptiste when it received parish status January 7, 1877. Along with his other responsibilities as touring missionary for the locality, he remained the parish's first and only curé until his death in 1907.<sup>162</sup> Commenting on the 25<sup>th</sup> anniversary of Fillion's death in 1928, Juge L.A. Prud'homme noted of the Saint-Jean-Baptiste Parish that: "C'est une paroisse établie qui n'a plus besoin que de se maintenir, se développer normalement et intensifier un foyer de vie catholique et de liaison Française."<sup>163</sup>

Fillion recognized that the biggest concern of these French settlers was with land issues. The first French-Canadien and Métis settlers of Saint-Jean-Baptiste, for example, were farmers.

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<sup>161</sup> In a collection of sixty-six letters from Fillion to Taché between 1873 and 1894, Fillion often referenced his travels to different communities. In one letter, Fillion, as he often did, advised of his upcoming travel plans within the locality. Fillion to Taché, 13 oct 1884, SHSB, Corporation Archiépiscope Catholique Romaine de Saint-Boniface, serie taché – t30137-8.

<sup>162</sup> "Pastors of the Parish of St. Jean-Baptiste", n.d., SHSB, Fonds Yolande Rheault, Folder L'abbe David Fillion.

<sup>163</sup> Translation - "It is an established parish that only needs to be maintained, to develop normally and left to intensify a Catholic home life and French bond." "Monsieur L'Abbe Joseph-David Fillion", *Les Cloches de Saint-Boniface*, vol.27, no 2, feb 1928, 41-42.

They needed land. When the Vandal brothers and other Métis settled on land here in the 1860s, many of these settlers were fearful of not being able to keep their properties. Anglo-Protestants argued that the Federal Government should grant them land in this area and remove the Métis group. In 1870, many of the Vandal brothers from the area would leave for Batoche for this reason.<sup>164</sup> It was after trends such as these, that the Catholic Church assumed responsibility to lead settlement and land placement strategies in this locality.

Notwithstanding some early successes, the Catholic Church would continue to have challenges securing enough land in the area. One of the biggest roadblocks was that, in the Church's opinion, the Federal Government did not want to grant land to French-speaking settlers. In response, Fillion wrote letters to all levels of government. These efforts led to French settlers obtaining patents for the majority of the land within the locality,<sup>165</sup> and the Catholic Church went to great length to support French-Catholics wanting to live in the area. Often, the Catholic Church would carry the loan of or even gift the land to the settler. In one example, Fillion wrote to Taché asking the Church to buy land on the Red River for a poor immigrant at the cost of \$100.<sup>166</sup> In another instance, Fillion asked Taché if the Church could extend a French-speaking Catholic's land-loan for three months. Fillion noted that this individual would lose his land to an English-speaking buyer if he could not continue his payments, and that the Franco-Catholic man's sons had been working on the railway and that their father could not afford to pay what he owed to keep the land until after his sons' return.<sup>167</sup>

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<sup>164</sup> Many who initially lived at Saint-Jean-Baptiste would go on to live in communities in Saskatchewan and other places. Morice, *History of the Catholic Church in Western Canada*, 413.

<sup>165</sup> "Mémoires de Monsieur L'abbé Joseph David Fillion Par M. le juge L.A. Prud'homme, M.S.R.C.", n.d., SHSB, Fonds Yolande Rheault, Folder l'abbé David Fillion.

<sup>166</sup> Fillion to Taché, 14 jun 1876, SHSB, Corporation Archiépiscope Catholique Romaine de Saint-Boniface, serie taché, t17580-1.

<sup>167</sup> *Ibid.*

Aside from lending money for the purchase of land, the Church and resident curé would help to secure these lots. As part of the Church's efforts to protect its French-speakers, the Church sometimes safeguarded the land purchase agreements on behalf of their French-speaking parishioners. These original documents were almost always held at the office of the Saint-Boniface Archdiocese.<sup>168</sup>

Resident curés would also intervene when those they labelled aggressive land raiders tried to pressure Saint-Jean-Baptiste's French landowners to vacate their properties. One example illustrates this point. In the early 1880s, members of the local Orange Order lodge were successful in scaring French-Catholic settler M. Ch. Donald's son off of lot #352 in Saint-Jean-Baptiste. The senior M. Donald asked his curé to intervene. In response, l'Abbé Fillion, agreed to help, assuring that he would also do what he could to have him avoid suffering his son's fate. While the curé respected the son's wishes of not wanting him to pursue reclaiming his lot, he was able to support the senior Donald in securing lot #350. Realizing the significance of situations like these, Fillion hoped to gain an in-person audience with Taché to have him look into this and other similar matters. With the backing of both curé and archbishop, settlers like A. M. Charron, another resident of Saint-Jean-Baptiste, were able to retain their land through the Catholic Church's support.<sup>169</sup> As part of the fight to protect and support French-Catholic land owners, Taché would eventually appoint a 'location councilor' to handle matters like these. A

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<sup>168</sup> Some of the landowners that entrusted these land documents to the Archdiocese included Pierre Parenteau, Antoine Lavalée and Antoine Vandal. In one letter from Fillion to Taché in 1879 he noted for Saint-Jean-Baptiste settlers that two affidavits were sent in trust to Taché for lots 215 and 293. According to this source, others were being sent later. Fillion to Taché, 7 oct 1879, SHSB, Corporation Archiépiscope Catholique Romaine de Saint-Boniface, serie taché, t22596.

<sup>169</sup> In 1882 the state of land entitlement issues came to a head. Fillion confirmed that a Protestant society had formed and was making claims that large sections of land were theirs after declaring they had already made appropriate payments to the Government. The Protestant society promised Fillion that they had appropriate documentation to secure the land. It was later discovered that this documentation never existed. The Protestant Society was not named in these records. Fillion to Taché, 31 jan 1882, SHSB, Corporation Archiépiscope Catholique Romaine de Saint-Boniface, serie taché, t26259-60; Fillion to Taché, 27 jan 1879, SHSB, Corporation Archiépiscope Catholique Romaine de Saint-Boniface, serie taché, t21350-1.

Saint-Joseph parishioner, M. C.B. Dery's job was to assist landowners in securing and retaining title to their property in the area.

In addition to the Catholic Church's support, some parishioners from the community of Saint-Jean-Baptiste would also do what they could to protect their own interests. For example, the community's town council submitted a proposal to the 'government in power' to allow French settlers to be on fair footing with other non-French settlers in Manitoba. Titled 'La Question des Terres – 1878', the town council and supporting parishioners itemized eight points they hoped would give French-Catholic settlers the same opportunities as others to make a living in the locality. Further, the committee proposed that the colonists already at Saint-Jean-Baptiste (almost all exclusively Métis and French-Canadien) be given the first opportunity to retain the lots of their neighbors before the lots were put on the open market for resale. These proposed resolutions were given to the Archbishop of Saint-Boniface for him to forward, with his endorsement, to the Minister of the Interior.<sup>170</sup> No response was provided by the Federal Government.

In 1907, Fillion fell ill and died. Archbishop Langevin of Saint-Boniface wrote in the parish register at Fillion's funeral that Fillion was a model priest with great piety. Over 2500 attended Fillion's funeral. The mass, celebrated by Langevin, was a testament to Fillion and to the community of Saint-Jean-Baptiste and the greater mission of Saint-Joseph. Senators, other dignitaries, clergy and faithful from across Canada attended. This included M. Royal, Senator Bernier, Judge Dubuc, Judge Prud'homme and Senator Lariviere, all influential politicians and

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<sup>170</sup> "La Question des Terres", 8 jan 1878, SHSB, Collection Générale de la Société Historique de Saint-Boniface, Folder Saint-jean-Baptiste – coupures de presses 1876-1878.



businessmen at the time and all that would be key players in the French question of western Canada.<sup>171</sup>

### Jutras the Farming Priest

While Fillion was known as the ‘colonizing’ priest, l’Abbé Norbert Jutras was considered by many to be the ‘farming priest’.<sup>172</sup> He was also dubbed as ‘l’Apôtre de Culture Mixte’ by his archbishop for his efforts in transforming the farming culture of French-Canadiens into one that best utilized the natural resources provided in the region.<sup>173</sup> And like Fillion, the Abbé Jutras did much of his work in the same locality, that is, the community of Letellier.

Before arriving at Letellier, however, Jutras was, in 1886, the first missionary for Emerson as well as the Apostolic Vicar of the Dakota, Pembina, Saint-Vincent, and for two more villages across the U.S. border. But it was at Letellier where Jutras orchestrated the majority of his work. The son of a Québec farmer, Jutras recognized that it would be through the life of farming that the locality’s path must be directed in order to create and maintain successful French enclaves. The editor of the *La Liberté* newspaper once wrote that l’Abbé Norbert Jutras was most responsible for the daily life of the French people and surrounding communities. Jutras accomplished this, according to the editor, through espousing a connection of the person to their land. Jutras wrote a column in *La Liberté* (titled *Autour de la Ferme*), reaching a large population

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<sup>171</sup> Amongst other tributes to him, an obituary was published in English. “Pastors of the Parish of St. Jean-Baptiste – submitted by Rev. Pierre Gagné”, n.d., SSHB, Fonds Yolande Rheault, Folder L’Abbé David Fillion.

<sup>172</sup> Jutras was known as ‘Le Missionnaire d’Agricole.’ “Feu M. L’Abbe Norbert Jutras”, *Les Cloches de Saint-Boniface*, vol.28, no 2, feb 1929, 35-6. Jutras often signed his running article in *La Liberté* with ‘Mis. Agricole’, “Autour de la Ferme”, *La Liberté*, vol.II no 48, 13 apr 1915, 4.

<sup>173</sup> “Les Debuts d’Une Paroisse – L’Apotre de la Culture Mixte”, n.d., SHSB, Collection Générale de la Société Historique de Saint-Boniface, Folder Letellier – Divers historiques.

throughout Manitoba and other parts of French Canada.<sup>174</sup> He argued incessantly that a French enclave could only be maintained by a direct connection to the land and by having farmers inspiring their children to also become French-Canadian farmers. Only through this exercise would the importance of a French language and Catholic faith continue. Jutras postulated that if the youth were on the farm, they were not in the cities, where they would be tempted to interact with and be swayed by ideas unimportant to living a good Franco-Catholic life. Jutras argued that factory workers were subservient to their bosses all year long, having no control over their lives. On the contrary, Jutras argued that the farmer is "...roi sur sa ferme ..., il est libre ; il fait sa besogne comme il l'entend et comme il le veut. Sa position sociale est supérieure à celle des ouvrières de la ville."<sup>175</sup>

And aside from this 'social superiority', Jutras argued this way of life was the best way to avoid 'la culture mixte'.<sup>176</sup> When French youth mixed with non-French people, it became difficult for them to see the good things, the possibilities, the happy life, to retain core values they required, "...donc, que les enfants demeurent sur la terre. Qu'on leur donne le goût du sol, car leur avenir est plus stable et plus rassurant a tout point de vue."<sup>177</sup> His fellow priests concurred. Le curé A. Dugre of Saint-Joseph for example, reiterated Jutras' strategy to concentrate a French population without mixing, to have them see the strength and the beauty of

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<sup>174</sup> The column ran from 1915 until Jutras' death in 1929, typically running during the farming season. Examples from the first year of his column include March 23, May 4, June 29, July 6, July 20, and September 4. All columns ran on page four the first year. "Autour de la Ferme", *La Liberté*, vol.II, no 44, 23 mar 1915, 4.

<sup>175</sup> Translation – "...king on his farm...", he is free; He does his job as he wants and as he pleases. His social position is superior to that of the city's workers. "Autour de la Ferme – Dépeuplement rural", *La Liberté*, vol.X no 41, 20 mar 1923, 8.

<sup>176</sup> Translation – "the mixed culture". Jutras used a play on words to identify the dangers of having a 'mixed culture' with the English by using a new 'mixed farming' technique. "Autour de la Ferme - La Culture", *La Liberté*, vol.X, no 26, 5 dec 1922, 6.

<sup>177</sup> Translation – "...so that the children remain of the Earth. We give them the taste of the soil, because their future is more stable and more reassuring in every point of view." "Autour de la Ferme – Dépeuplement rural", *La Liberté*, vol.X no 41, 20 mar 1923, 8.

its culture, and to look to each other for support and companionship.<sup>178</sup> With this support, Jutras continued to preach the economic benefits of living a farmer's life, and that a mixed farming strategy would best strengthen their communities.<sup>179</sup>

At Jutras' funeral in 1929, his life work as the 'farming priest' was praised. His work was deemed paramount, and it was noted that once the western French-speaker successfully reconnected to the land, and become a true habitant Français, success would result. In his role, Jutras surpassed his mandate to have his flock continue both Catholic faith and traditional lifestyle. The Archbishop of Saint-Boniface, overseeing the funeral, said of Jutras that he had "...un cœur débordant de patriotism".<sup>180</sup>

To assist Jutras and the Catholic Church, the Saint-Joseph community itself had a good deal of arable land, a draw for incoming French-Canadien farmers. Indeed, all of the large purchases and businesses established at this time were utilized for the business of farming. Heeding the advice from 'the farming priest', mixed farming especially would become the norm in the locality.

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<sup>178</sup> Then curé Dugre of Saint-Joseph; "Ce qui fait la force et la beauté du peuple Canadien-Français, c'est la population des compagnes." Translation – "what makes the strength and beauty of the French-Canadien people is their own population, their own companions." Ibid.

<sup>179</sup> Jutras studied in Nicolet Seminary. Born in 1856, he arrived at Saint-Boniface in 1880 and was confirmed by Taché in 1882. in the summer of 1883 Jutras began his work at the mission of Saint-Pie de V and did this for three years. He was also responsible for the mission of Roseau during this time.

<sup>180</sup> Translation – "a heart overflowing with patriotism." "Les Debuts d'Une Paroisse – L'Apotre de la Culture Mixte", n.d., SHSB, Collection Générale de la Société Historique de Saint-Boniface, Folder Letellier – Divers historiques.

Figure 3-3 M. Léon Marion, 1st store owner of Saint-Joseph, circa 1880



source: *Moissonneurs de La Rouge*, 138.

## The Communities

### Le Communauté de Saint-Joseph – on the border

When Saint-Joseph achieved township status at the beginning of 1877<sup>181</sup>, it meant the end of *le Mission Saint-Joseph de la Rivière aux Marais*, and the shift from a missionary focus to colonization and settlement. As part of that process, much of the mission's territory was transferred to Letellier and Saint-Jean-Baptiste's newly created parishes. With this land division, the remaining Saint-Joseph Mission would begin to lose assets; their only chapel at Saint-Pie was transferred to the Letellier Parish and their only post office to the Saint-Jean-Baptiste Parish.<sup>182</sup>

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<sup>181</sup> *Le mission of Saint-Joseph de la Rivière aux Marais* partitioned into Letellier Parish, Saint-Jean-Baptiste Parish and the geographically reformed and now township of Saint-Joseph (all in 1877). To clarify, the Mission of Saint-Joseph (the reserve) then, after being partitioned, became the Township of Saint-Joseph (1877), and then the parish of Saint-Joseph (1889). The same identification steps were used for both Letellier and Saint-Jean-Baptiste. See example from a letter soon after Letellier was partitioned that they used 'Township Letellier' as a designation for the area. Fillion to Taché, 25 feb 1877, SHSB, Collection Générale de la Société Historique de Saint-Boniface, Folder Letellier – Divers historiques.

<sup>182</sup> Villagers would also get their mail from West Lynne, a community with a major non-French identity. "Manitoba Directory – Electoral Division No. 23", 1878, SHSB, Collection Générale de la Société Historique de Saint-Boniface, Folder Letellier - correspondence (copies) 1877-1913, divers.

The truncated mission would also lose riverfront land and the transportation network along the Red River. What was left became *le communauté de Saint-Joseph*.

Saint-Joseph continued as a farm village, and though a missionary priest often attended to the community's needs, he did not reside there at the outset. The town's residents had to travel weekly to Saint-Pie for Sunday mass. Social gatherings would be left to the individual farmer. There was no focused leadership base in that first transition year.

This changed in the summer of 1878 when the colonizing priest, l'Abbé David Fillion, built a new chapel at the center of town. This new structure represented the Catholic Church's attempt to support and rejuvenate the struggling village of Saint-Joseph. The following year, in the fall of 1879, l'Abbé Michel Charbonneau was assigned to the community as resident priest. Charbonneau's time in the community, however, was short-lived.<sup>183</sup> Charbonneau was quickly replaced with M. l'abbé Nazaire Pelletier. Pelletier continued as resident curé in the community for the next fourteen years. He would champion the erection of a new Church in 1887 to replace the first one.<sup>184</sup>

Figure 3-4 First Chapel at Mission Saint-Joseph, 1877



source: *Moissonneurs de La Rouge*, 123.

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<sup>183</sup> Charbonneau, due to the events from 'la bagarre', never fully recovered, returning to Québec soon thereafter. *Moissonneurs de la Rouge*, 123.

<sup>184</sup> Fillion, *L'Abbé Joseph David Fillion*, 52.

This second Church, 80 feet x 32 feet, had a sacristy that was 24 feet x 48 feet, quite an accomplishment for the period and indicative of what the Catholic Church was willing to contribute to see Saint-Joseph succeed. The building was also a testament to what the community of Saint-Joseph was able to accomplish given the challenges of their first ten years since the greater mission was disbanded.<sup>185</sup> It was with this early success that the townspeople of Saint-Joseph would apply for and be granted parish status August 13, 1889. Taché, the Archbishop of Saint-Boniface, would celebrate the event with the purchase and blessing of a new bell for their Church.<sup>186</sup>

As a small Franco-Manitoban farm service center, Saint-Joseph was not overly effective. While the community did show signs of progress in its early years, it could not be maintained. Most farmers lived on their quarter sections and this did not allow them to contribute to and take advantage of the town's social life and infrastructure. And while they easily made friends with nearby neighbors, they were not a close-knit community. A number of the businesses at Saint-Joseph could not be sustained. More than a few farmers had challenges getting their children to a distant school.

The first community school was organized in 1878 by two religious sisters from the Saint Pie V. de Letellier Parish. Because there was no school building that could be supported in the center of the town, these sisters travelled to Saint-Joseph every Monday to teach. Given the

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<sup>185</sup> Ibid., 55.

<sup>186</sup> Of all curés to have resided at Saint-Joseph, M. l'abbé Arcade-Moïse Martin had the greatest impact on the community. Arriving from Québec via Saint-Eustache in 1902, Martin remained Saint-Joseph's Franco-religious leader until his retirement in 1934. Martin's tenure saw the celebration of three town jubilees; a silver jubilee in 1907, a golden jubilee in 1932 and the community's diamond jubilee in 1942. Martin remained in the community after his retirement and was buried at Saint-Joseph's cemetery. An example of letters from Martin to Archbishop Langevin shows the daily issues he dealt with during his residency. Martin to Archbishop Langevin, n.d., SHSB, Corporation Archiépisopale Catholique Romaine de Saint-Boniface, serie Langevin – L21766-L21796.

distance and the age of the two sisters, this arrangement collapsed by 1879.<sup>187</sup> It would be a couple more years until a school was commissioned by the Catholic Church. The structure was built in 1881 and was run by the newly established Saint-Joseph School Commission (District #945).

Aside from the role the Church played, other community leaders also took a role. Toussaint Brault, one of the community's Métis pioneers, would volunteer as the School District's first teacher and Secretary-Treasurer.<sup>188</sup> In 1881, M. Paul Labossière (from Québec) was Saint-Joseph's first paid instructor. He regularly had forty to forty-five students frequenting the chapel turned classroom. Unfortunately, the Catholic Church would only pay Labossière \$34.60 the first year, a paltry salary in comparison to other communities within the locality.<sup>189</sup> In time, decisions made to limit support for education would result in families transporting their children to nearby Saint-Jean-Baptiste for their education. Ultimately, the township of Saint-Joseph would struggle to support its population and infrastructure. Eventually, the School District of Saint-Joseph would be absorbed by the nearby Taché School District #937. Following this merger, a decision was made in 1897 to relocate the existing school to the northeast corner of what was previously *le Mission Saint-Joseph de la Rivière aux Marais*.<sup>190</sup> This new location, much nearer to Saint-Jean-Baptiste, was more representative of the direction the School Commission (and Catholic Church) wanted to go in securing a more accessible school population. The township of Saint-Joseph was simply too spread out to be worth the cost and effort.

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<sup>187</sup> "St. Joseph – Letellier", 1877, SHSB, Collection Générale de la Société Historique de Saint-Boniface, Folder Letellier - correspondance (copies) 1877-1913, divers.

<sup>188</sup> Brault volunteered as the community's first school teacher in 1876. "Les Debuts d'Une Paroisse – L'Apote de la Culture Mixte", n.d., SHSB, Collection Générale de la Société Historique de Saint-Boniface, Folder Letellier – Divers historiques.

<sup>189</sup> In comparison, Saint-Jean-Baptiste's first teacher in 1877 received an annual salary of \$200. *Moissonneurs de La Rouge*, 100, 130.

<sup>190</sup> *Ibid.*, 132.

The Saint-Joseph community located in the southern and westernmost part of the greater locality would also be challenged by an encroaching non-French population. In 1899, a new school was built in the Saint-Joseph area. L'École Langevin reported a total enrolment count of twenty-one students. All students in the first year were from the township of Saint-Joseph and all were French-speaking save one. This would change. By 1905 school records were kept in English, not French. In addition, a review of teachers' surnames from 1899 until 1904 suggests they were of French ancestry. After 1905, however, all teachers had non-French surnames. The school quickly became a non-French-speaking institution. The administrators of L'École Langevin would, within a few years, consolidate its school board with the nearby and non-French speaking town of Altona.<sup>191</sup>

With this loss, the Catholic Church made an effort to replace the school. Unfortunately for Saint-Joseph, this replacement school would not be built at Saint-Joseph as was hoped. Instead, the Catholic Church would find a new school site in distant Taché. The Church's argument for relocating this school was that they could attract a larger French-speaking population at Taché.<sup>192</sup> Again, Saint-Joseph was overlooked.

To meet the challenges of both a dispersed and encroached upon French-speaking population, Saint-Joseph's residing curé Arcade-Moïse Martin arranged with the Reverend Mother M. St. Sindonis of Saint-Boniface to obtain land for a convent in Saint-Joseph Parish in 1909. The Convent *Les Religieuses Notre-Dame des Missions à Saint-Joseph* opened its doors with three sisters. The community called the convent "une petite maison en bois."<sup>193</sup> It served as

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<sup>191</sup> A large contingent of Mennonites also came to this area at this time. Given these challenges and others, a new site would eventually be chosen to replace l'École Langevin in the distant and French-speaking Taché district (1913). Ibid., 100, 130-134.

<sup>192</sup> "St. Joseph Petition for teachers", SHSB, 1 apr 1907, Corporation Archiépisopale Catholique Romaine de Saint-Boniface, Folder Saint-Joseph – serie Langevin, L21774-7. See also *Moissonneurs de La Rouge*, 134.

<sup>193</sup> Translation – "a simple house in the woods." Ibid., 136.



a school, chapel, presbytery and even small store. In addition, the property was used for cultural evenings that included musicals and dramatic plays. In its inaugural school year, all forty-three students were French-speaking. With the help of the community, the convent was able to attract even more students from the greater region, to the point of the convent petitioning the parish of Saint-Joseph to build a new and larger convent, which was built in 1923.<sup>194</sup>

The convent would become the centerpiece of the parish and represent Saint-Joseph's identity as French-Catholics. In a local history book, *Moissonneurs de la Rouge, 1882-1982*, the author noted that the sisters had always instilled in their students the pride of being French-Canadiens.<sup>195</sup>

Notwithstanding the convent's success, Saint-Joseph Parish would struggle to keep its Franco-Catholic population. The railway did not pass through Saint-Joseph like it did Letellier (1891) and Saint-Jean-Baptiste (1888). And while the construction of a water reservoir (1903) did help solve irrigation challenges, it only emphasized to some of its residents how Saint-Joseph was not a communication and transportation center like other French-speaking communities on the Red River. Other French community leaders shared their concern for Saint-Joseph.

L'Abbé Norbert Jutras (of Letellier) wrote to Taché in 1887 about the state of Saint-Joseph. In his letter, Jutras offered his plea and an argument that Saint-Joseph simply needed more church-supported resources in order to thrive. Jutras argued that, if the Archdiocese was unable to allocate appropriate funding for Saint-Joseph, maybe they could withdraw some support from communities they were already committed to and where success was less certain. Jutras followed this argument by suggesting that communities without a French majority would

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<sup>194</sup> Ibid.

<sup>195</sup> The girls' school convent built in 1923 was named 'Couvent Saint-Martin' in honour of residing curé M. le Curé Martin. Ibid., 137.

be good communities to withdraw from. The Catholic Church appeared to listen, and did withdraw Catholic parishes from communities where success was uncertain, but additional funding did not make its way to Saint-Joseph to the degree that was hoped.<sup>196</sup>

Indeed, Saint-Joseph saw little support for their community. In the 1891 federal census data, the new parish of Saint-Joseph (incorporated as parish in 1889) had a population of 236. While populations at Letellier and Saint-Jean-Baptiste grew substantially, by 1916 Saint-Joseph remained relatively stagnant, with a population of only 322. The solace the community took was that only three of these 322 parishioners were non-French-speaking.<sup>197</sup> The community, notwithstanding its lack of growth, remained French.

#### Le Communauté Saint-Jean-Baptiste – *Le Mission Rivière aux Prunes*

The area known as Saint-Jean-Baptiste Parish was first named *Pointe Coupée Nord* but then quickly renamed *Le Mission Rivière aux Prunes*. This mission was so named because of an abundance of wild plums that grew along the shores of the river.<sup>198</sup> Nearer to the French metropolis of Saint-Boniface than Saint-Joseph, Métis peoples from St. Norbert (District of Saint-Boniface) visited in the summers to pick plums and to take advantage of its location as a stopover along the cart trails down to the United States. As early as 1865, the Métis' Vandal brothers, while travelling the road between Winnipeg and the Pembina, would stop at Saint-Jean-Baptiste. Antoine Vandal became the first pioneer to permanently settle west of the eastern *Pointe Longue* community in 1869.<sup>199</sup> He and his wife Scolastique Frobisher took lots #263 and

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<sup>196</sup> Jutras to Taché, 3 may 1887, SHSB, Collection Générale de la Société Historique de Saint-Boniface, Folder Letellier - correspondence (copies) 1877-1913, divers.

<sup>197</sup> *Census of the Prairie Provinces, 1916*.

<sup>198</sup> The mission's first name, 'Pointe Coupée Nord' literally translates to 'North cut point', an indication that those travelling along the cart trails would use the spot to tend to their goods.

<sup>199</sup> "Saint-Jean-Baptiste.", n.d., SHSB, Collection Générale de la Société Historique de Saint-Boniface, Folder Saint-Jean-Baptiste Centenaire Historique.

#265, situated one mile north of present-day Saint-Jean-Baptiste. Their house was situated on the west shore of the Red River and just north of *La Rivière aux Prunes*. Antoine and Scolastique's first house and those of other recent settlers occupied the land that would become the village of Saint-Jean-Baptiste, "...et donc celle d'Antoine Vandal semble avoir été la pionnière."<sup>200</sup>

The community's first French-Canadiens were the Québec born Captain Théophile Thibeault of the Québec militia, and a fellow soldier and repatriate from the United States (Louis Marcil of Fall River). They came to Saint-Jean-Baptiste in 1875. Thibeault and Marcil grew tired of their military careers. While their initial experience at Saint-Jean-Baptiste was not a favorable one (the mosquitoes overwhelmed them), Monseigneur Taché would eventually convince them and other U.S. repatriates to permanently settle.<sup>201</sup> This first group of U.S. repatriates included: Thibeault, Marcil, M. Pélissier, Antoine Lavallee, Napoléon Roy and Charles St. Godard. In 1876 l'Abbé David Fillion and immigration agent Charles Lalime led an excursion from the eastern U.S. to settle on the Red River.<sup>202</sup>

With an increasing population, Archbishop Taché would, on January 5, 1877, canonically erect the parish in the presence of its first curé, l'Abbé David Fillion. Within a month, on February 2, the first parish registry was signed and affirmed by Joseph Turenne,<sup>203</sup> government clerk for Provencher County.<sup>204</sup> The parish now included twenty families of French-Canadian descent and as many Métis families. During the official ceremony creating the parish, all

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<sup>200</sup> Translation - "...that of Antoine Vandal seemingly being the pioneer." Ibid.

<sup>201</sup> "Historique de la Paroisse de St-Jean-Baptiste", *Les Cloches de Saint-Boniface*, vol.35, no 8, aug 1936, 211-212.

<sup>202</sup> On September 12, 1876, with these pioneers and the exploits of their initial voyage used as a beacon of hope for the growing community, Archbishop Taché gave the village the name 'Saint-Jean-Baptiste'. He gave this name to honor and to connect to French-Canada's patron saint as well as to these heroic French-Canadiens that had arrived earlier that year. "L'histoire de Saint-Jean Baptiste 1877-1967", 30 jun 1967, SHSB, Collection Générale de la Société Historique de Saint-Boniface, Folder Saint-Jean-Baptiste Centenaire Historiques; "Historique de la Paroisse de St-Jean-Baptiste", *Les Cloches de Saint-Boniface*, vol.35, no 8, aug 1936, 211-212.

<sup>203</sup> We see Turenne's name earlier in the first chapter as the administrator of the election around the 'la bagarre' events.

<sup>204</sup> Provencher was the federal riding for this area of the Red River when federal ridings were first introduced in 1870.

residents already there were honored by receiving official recognition of their status as landowners from the Federal Government.<sup>205</sup>

Over the next ten years, the Parish Saint-Jean-Baptiste more than quadrupled in size. The federal census of 1888 revealed an increase to seventy-three families of which sixty-eight were French-Canadien and French-Speaking Métis peoples.<sup>206</sup> A second large group of settlers arrived around 1890, of which a good number also came from rural Québec. By 1898 the parish's population also grew to 819 parishioners (both in the village and in rural Saint-Jean-Baptiste). According to the parish census taken that year, there "... continue d'être Canadienne-Française en grande majorité."<sup>207</sup> The following decades reflected this pattern; increases to the general population saw an increase of a French-speaking population in Saint-Jean-Baptiste. In 1906, the Federal Census reported 271 parishioners in the town of Saint-Jean-Baptiste (not including the greater parish). Six years later, in 1912 the population of the entire parish numbered 175 families and 1104 souls. Of these, an overwhelming 1064 people were French-speaking.<sup>208</sup>

These increases and ratios continued through to the beginning of the depression of the 1930s.<sup>209</sup> In the 1931 Federal Census, there were only four persons not identifying as French in

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<sup>205</sup> Of the pioneers to Saint-Jean-Baptiste, the Vandal family was the most prominent in the community, sitting on both municipal boards and as leaders of private associations. Descendants of the Vandal family also migrated west of the Red River Valley, including to some of the communities I have researched in Saskatchewan and Alberta. "Saint-Jean-Baptiste et l'histoire du Canada", apr 1972, SHSB, Collection Générale de la Société Historique de Saint-Boniface, Folder Saint-Jean-Baptiste Centenaire Historique.

<sup>206</sup> These census numbers were collected through two main sources; federal census reports (beginning in 1870 and continuing until 1936) and Catholic Parish registers and reports. For an example of Catholic reporting, see "La Verite – Une Souscription de \$25,000", *La Liberté*, vol.IV no 13, 9 aug 1916, 1.

<sup>207</sup> Translation - "...continued to be a great majority that were still French-Canadien." "La Petite Histoire", mar 1998, SHSB, Collection Générale de la Société Historique de Saint-Boniface, Folder Fillion J-David (abbé) 1907-1963, 14.

<sup>208</sup> "Resencement de la population de langue française de la paroisse de St Jean Baptiste et de la Mission St Alfred de Morris", 1910, SHSB, Corporation Archiépiscope Catholique Romaine de Saint-Boniface, serie Langevin, L21633-L21653.

<sup>209</sup> In 1916 there were 586 parishioners in the village, compared to 186 families, with 95% holding a French surname within the whole of the parish. The year 1918 had 201 French-speaking families resulting in 95% of the total population. 1921 to 1923 saw similar increases. *Census of Canada, 1931*.

the whole of the parish.<sup>210</sup> The 1934 census of Catholics identified 1214 parishioners and 242 families, of which over half lived in the village of Saint-Jean-Baptiste.<sup>211</sup>

One reason for the growing population of Saint-Jean-Baptiste was the active support of the Catholic Church. Saint-Jean-Baptiste was also physically closer to the Archdiocese in Saint-Boniface. The parish had better access to transportation and communication networks given that they were on the banks of the Red River. The just completed railway ran through the center of town, and they were in better position to succeed and therefore receive continued church support.

With this support also came strong, dynamic curés who would be chosen for this prestigious position as the strongest French rural enclave on the Red River. Even though there was a large non-French and non-Catholic presence in nearby Morris, Saint-Jean-Baptiste was protected by its archdiocese and became a destination of choice, and was advertised as such:

La liberté religieuse et le bonheur, vous cherchez? Ici, à St-Jean-Baptiste, vous les trouverez.

Oui, à Saint-Jean-Baptiste règne la joie.  
Et une place dans mon cœur, j'aurai toujours pour toi.

translation

Religious liberty and happiness, what are you looking for?  
Here, at Saint-Jean-Baptiste, you will find it.

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<sup>210</sup> Note that these numbers only include French and non-French-speakers that were Catholic. Other non-French-speaking congregations were not included in this count.

<sup>211</sup> A 1934 catholic census confirmed that 124 of the 242 families in the parish lived within town limits. The Saint-Jean-Baptiste Parish registers also contained lists of surnames of all parishioners that attended mass and contributed financially to the parish's success. Contributions would come through a 'dime' (tithe) and 'banc' (bench rental) system of taxation; through special collections for church maintenance, heating costs, and for purchases of specific items like candles. Parishes would also hold periodic 'bazars', usually after Sunday mass, to raise money for different purposes. For example, a Bazar held December 15, 1926 brought in just under \$2500 for the parish, an amount reflective of the success of the parish and commitment of its parishioners. "L'histoire de St-Jean Baptiste 1877-1967", 30 jun 1967, SHSB, Collection Générale de la Société Historique de Saint-Boniface, Folder Saint-Jean-Baptiste Centenaire Historiques. Still, most revenue came from the 'dime'. In 1918 for example, over half the revenue (\$6995.78) came from this source (\$3557.72). This 1918 register included 201 members and 102 families that contributed. Of the contributors, 95% had French surnames. "Paroisse de Saint-Jean-Baptiste – 1918", 1918, SHSB, Collection Générale de la Société Historique de Saint-Boniface, Folder Saint-Jean-Baptiste Paroisse.

Yes, at Saint-Jean-Baptiste happiness reigns.  
And a place in my heart, I will always have for you.<sup>212</sup>

### Le Communauté Saint-Pie V. de Letellier – une Paroisse Prospère

On Nov 14, 1917, *La Liberté* newspaper published the article “Une Paroisse Prospère - Letellier, Man.”<sup>213</sup> The article recounted the beginnings of the area first known as Saint-Pie, and how twelve Métis families first settled in 1870. The article continued that by 1883 Saint-Pie’s residing curé, the Abbé Norbert Jutras, had arrived from Montréal with twelve more families repatriated from the United States. Colonists continued to arrive to work the land. Unfortunately, the market economy for mixed grains was not yet established in the West, and Letellier farmers could not sell their new crops in bulk. To add to their consternation, the Canadian Pacific Railway installed a station to the north of Saint-Pie instead of within their village. Only in 1900 would economic prosperity finally arrive in this southernmost section of what was once called *le Mission Saint-Joseph de la Rivière aux Marais*.<sup>214</sup>

The first settler in Saint-Pie was Benjamin Marchand, a Métis farmer who arrived in 1870. Possessing the only permanent structure at that time, Marchand’s house was used by visiting missionaries until the ‘colonizer’, the Abbé Fillion began construction of the community’s first chapel in 1876.<sup>215</sup> This was the first Catholic chapel erected south of Saint-Norbert along the Red River.<sup>216</sup> The chapel quickly became a visiting residence for Fillion and

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<sup>212</sup> “L’histoire de la paroisse de Saint-Jean-Baptiste”, n.d., SHSB, Collection Générale de la Société Historique de Saint-Boniface, Folder Saint-Jean-Baptiste Centenaire Historiques.

<sup>213</sup> Translation – “A Prosperous Parish – Letellier, Man.” “Une Paroisse Prospère - Letellier, Man.”, *La Liberté*, vol.V, no 28, 14 nov 1917, 1.

<sup>214</sup> Ibid.

<sup>215</sup> In 1877, Fillion completed work on the chapel at Saint-Pie, around 20 kilometres south of Saint-Jean-Baptiste, and “...a peu pres 3 milles de l’église actuelle de Letellier.” Translation - “...a little near 3 miles from the actual Letellier church”. The chapel, made of wood and standing 20 x 30 feet, would later be engulfed in flames by a lightning strike. A chapel was built in 1880 to replace it. “2ieme causerie (2) [by Curé S. Caron]”, 1946, SHSB, Collection Générale de la Société Historique de Saint-Boniface, Folder Saint-Jean-Baptiste Centenaire Historiques.

<sup>216</sup> This first chapel was situated on the south-east corner of section 21, township 2, range 1 east.

other missionaries, as well as being the small village's Church and school. Established as a parish at the same time as Saint-Jean-Baptiste was (1877), Saint Pie struggled to compete with other already growing farming communities in the region. The Abbé Norbert Jutras, assigned curé of Saint-Pie in 1883, became responsible for addressing the situation.

When Jutras first arrived, the prospects for Saint-Pie were not good. The nearest French-speaking post office was at Saint-Jean-Baptiste almost twenty kilometers to the north or at the non-French-speaking community of West Lynne to the south. In 1888, the terminus of the railway that was to follow the Red River northward was still only at Emerson. At this time the common trek to the West included a train ride from eastern Canada to Emerson, then continuing by horseback, by boat or more often by foot north along the Red River. Coming south from Winnipeg, the typical path was by cart, or by boat if available. Saint-Pie was not a destination of choice. The hope for both church and community at Saint-Pie was that when the decision was finalized to extend the railway north from Emerson (to connect to Saint-Jean-Baptiste), it would include a station for Saint-Pie. Unfortunately, both railway station and post-office were placed a few kilometers to the north of Saint-Pie. The Federal Government initially named the post office site (and railway station) Catherine.

After realizing the dilemma the parish was in with no easy access to communication or services, the Catholic Church allowed Père Jutras to relocate the parish of Saint-Pie. Jutras would argue that the Saint-Pie Parish and Church would be better utilized within the already larger community at the newer Catherine site instead of leaving it at the now secluded site within the Saint-Joseph Mission.<sup>217</sup> Jutras surmised that French-speaking and Catholic farmers would decide to settle around the new railway and post office to the North instead of at Saint-Pie.

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<sup>217</sup> Saint-Pie counted 236 parishioners in the area in 1901. By 1911, the number dropped to sixteen. *Census of Canada, 1916.*

Extrapolating his argument, Jutras concluded that he could more easily secure a larger congregation of French Catholics if the Saint-Pie Church was more central to the greater locality. Jutras' recommendation was approved, leaving the remaining parishioners at Saint-Pie without a church or residing curé. In time, some from the Saint-Pie congregation would relocate.

The second step in the process was to petition the Federal Government to change the town's English-sounding name. Led by Jutras, a petition was circulated among the parishioners at Saint-Pie and in the area around Catherine. Knowing that railway station and post office names often resulted in the names of communities, the French-speakers in the area succeeded in convincing the railway to change their station name to Letellier. The post office followed suit. By 1889, Catherine was renamed Letellier.<sup>218</sup>

Here, Jutras would make his mark as the 'farming priest'. Jutras and the Catholic Church would also show their ongoing commitment to the parish. Within a couple of years of the 'move' of Saint-Pie to Letellier a new church would be built. This church would measure 50 feet x 33 feet and rivalled Saint-Jean-Baptiste's Church in size and architectural design.<sup>219</sup>

By 1913, Letellier had grown to include a building for the post office, a telephone company, a fromagerie, a forge, a bank, and a large school built for and run by *les Soeurs de Notre-Dame de la Maison*.<sup>220</sup> By 1916, the parish of Letellier consisted of 526 parishioners, of which all but six were of French origin.<sup>221</sup>

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<sup>218</sup> The name 'Letellier' was chosen to honor the first minister of Québec, M. Letellier de St-Just. As Senator Letellier also sat as Minister of Agriculture under Prime Minister Mackenzie's government in the 1870s, Letellier the community, it hoped, would be given every opportunity to thrive.

<sup>219</sup> The original church of Saint-Pie that that moved to Letellier would not be forgotten as, in 1925 a memorial and twenty-foot-high cross was placed at the site where the village of Saint-Pie began. This commemorative cross was erected by then Archbishop Beliveau. The 1925 ceremony and events were organized by *l'Association Catholique de la Jeunesse Canadienne-Française (l'A.C.J.C.)* under the direction of M. Leon Bruyere, then postmaster of Letellier. *L'A.C.J.C.* will be investigated further in chapter seven. See "The Memorial Cross of Saint-Pie", n.d., SHSB, Collection Générale de la Société Historique de Saint-Boniface, Folder Letellier - notes du P.Picton.

<sup>220</sup> In 1913 Letellier area had 60 dairy farms producing over 10,000 litres of milk per day.

<sup>221</sup> *Census of the Prairie Province, 1916.*



## Conclusion

The locality once known as *le Mission Saint-Joseph de la Rivière aux Marais* encapsulates many themes of French settlement in the West, including: how French-speaking settlers arrived, how decision-makers (especially those within the Church) made choices and how these choices affected and were driven by a community's progression.

Ultimately, support from the Catholic Church and the Archdiocese of Saint-Boniface determined whether a Franco-Manitoban community would succeed. The community of Saint-Jean-Baptiste prospered because of the Church's commitment to the area. Support given to its infrastructure and overall growth helped limit opposition from English-speaking and other European settlers, and from the government. French settlers in rural Manitoba were able to establish thriving French-speaking enclaves, especially in the locality under review, when the church actively supported this endeavour.

There were difficulties, especially on its borders. Emerson's French-speaking community would be absorbed into a non-French population. The situation at Saint-Joseph would illustrate how a French community that was close to the non-French settlers, and one without an established infrastructure to support a school, and without church support, could lead to decline. Saint-Joseph was overwhelmed by the changing environment.

But there was also hope. At Letellier, we see how a resident priest willing to adapt to the situation and relocate his parish church and community to a location with better opportunities could succeed. Saint-Jean-Baptiste, with the most-preferred French parish site established along the Red River, attached to the railway, and in close proximity to the economic centre of the West. They would attract church support and French immigrants.

In all of these instances the support of the Catholic Church was paramount to success. The Archdiocese of Saint-Boniface utilized what they knew would work as they built their Manitoban communities from concepts and traditions borrowed from Québec. As well, many of their religious leaders and settlers came from Québec. They focused on protecting and improving those communities they could (Saint-Jean-Baptiste), modifying and adapting when able (Saint-Pie move to Letellier) and making the difficult decisions to reassign resources elsewhere when their communities were not established enough to protect their identity (Saint-Joseph). With leadership and support from the western Catholic Church, Saint-Jean-Baptiste and Letellier were able to create insulated communities that allowed them to prosper economically and protect their French residents from the encroaching non-French majority.

Three points can be taken from this chapter. First, Franco-Manitobans established themselves early in relation to the other western provinces. They created at Saint-Boniface and surrounding communities a strong beginning, one that included Québécois and U.S. repatriates who built upon a knowledgeable French-Métis pioneer base. This allowed them and their Church the ability to prepare for a non-French settlement that they knew would come. They negotiated with government for preferred tracts of land, on the Red River. This gave them the ability to recreate traditions from their motherland, their 'patrie' – without being overly challenged. The result would be a French area more engrained and better able to withstand pressures that challenged them.

Second, farming and rural life continued as part of their core identity as well as their Catholicism. With this mindset transposed from 'la patrie', they realized that their best chance of retaining a strong Franco-Manitoban identity came from a connection to the land. Jutras the

farming priest was one of many focused on keeping further generations on their farms, and away from urbanity.

Last, Church oversight was critical. The Catholic Church at Saint-Boniface made decisions creating and protecting borders; they removed Emerson on its outskirts, allotted less to Saint-Joseph and gave more to Saint-Jean-Baptiste. They carried out an adaptive strategy to give them the best chance to succeed. Another important part of church direction came from within their communities. As in Québec, resident curés continued to be the cornerstone of a successful French enclave. They were ‘la patrie’ of their French parishioners. L’Abbé Fillion would drive much of what would become *le Mission Saint-Joseph de la Rivière aux Marais*. He and other religious leaders would travel the territory extensively to create and sustain networks of communication. None travelled more during these beginning years than l’Abbé Norbert Jutras. Only through the leadership of the Church and a strong base and infrastructure was a strong Franco-Manitoban presence and identity established, one not that far removed from ‘la patrie’ of Québec.

## Chapter 4 *L'Abbé Gravel; Le Diocèse de Gravelbourg*

In 1905, the socio-economic landscape of Saskatchewan was different than Manitoba. Years earlier in Manitoba, the Catholic Church had arranged for large segments of land to be settled by French-Catholics. In Saskatchewan, three decades later, the Catholic Church entered a competitive market for land at a time when mass immigration was bolstered by the creation of the province. It became increasingly difficult for the Catholic Church to make land available for the Franco-Catholics. Ethnic groups struggled to maintain their communities as the French and the many more non-French speakers arrived in the new province. Often land was acquired piece by piece, making it difficult for ethnic groups to purchase land together as they had done in Manitoba. While the leadership of Saskatchewan French communities still came from within the Catholic Church, their engrained sense of Catholic tradition and an outdated organizational structure did little to provide a solution. These issues and developments made French colonization in Saskatchewan different than it had been in Manitoba. The Catholic Church needed a new strategy.

### **Evolving Strategies**

What were the differences between *le Mission Saint-Joseph de la Rivière aux Marais* locality on the Red River and the area focused on in this chapter, *le Diocèse de Gravelbourg*? We know that the Red River locality was organized by the Catholic Church. This had been accomplished by employing loyal and compliant missionaries, resident curés and supporting religieuses. A relatively flat organizational structure ensured a clear decision-making process direct from the Archbishop's office to his front-line clergy and support network. This allowed the Archbishop in Saint-Boniface to have both direct and timely involvement in all decisions.

Resident curés had relatively no decision-making authority, instead they acted as the eyes, ears and legs for the Archbishop. They, at most, made recommendations. Through the Archbishop, the Catholic Church made decisions to bolster immigration, the economy, and the social and cultural structure of chosen communities. Above all, the Catholic Church was paramount in the efforts to increase and protect a French-speaking and Catholic faithful. This structure was not new. It was a continuation of what had already been done in Québec and before that, France and Europe. It was assumed that this model would also work in the new province of Saskatchewan. The second Archbishop of Saint-Boniface responsible for Saskatchewan in 1905, Adelard Langevin, however, took a different tack.

Archbishop Langevin allowed decisions to be made by an arm of the Saint-Boniface Archdiocese in Saskatchewan instead of directly from Saint-Boniface. He did this because by 1905 conditions in the West had changed. When the province of Manitoba entered into Confederation in 1870, the Catholic Church realized it would need to make a concerted effort to colonize French-speaking immigrants in the new province, given the prospect of the arrival of large numbers of non-French immigrants. Fortunately, the Catholic Church had enough influence to secure sections along the Red River for French-Catholic settlers. The Catholic hierarchy in Manitoba and Saskatchewan would attempt a similar strategy after 1905.

In Saskatchewan however, there was no land set aside for Franco-Catholics. The Catholic Church could not negotiate directly with the Government for blocks of land. They had to get in line with others wanting to acquire land. This posed a problem. Saskatchewan already had settled populations within its new borders, and there were large numbers of non-French immigrants looking for land. The French population in Saskatchewan, in comparison to non-French, was small in 1905, and most were located farther north. As a result, the French-speaking population

in Saskatchewan was far less influential than it had been in Manitoba. But like Manitoba thirty-five years earlier, leaders were again chosen (at least initially) from within the Catholic Church.

In the current chapter, I examine the French locality in the southern portion of Saskatchewan. And as was the case with the Saint-Joseph Mission in Manitoba, the strategies taken by its leaders would be vital to the community's survival. As it turned out, a new type of leadership was required in this locality. If the Catholic Church could not or would not meet their commitments as they had in Manitoba, or adapt appropriately to the different climate in Saskatchewan, the community's inhabitants would need to look elsewhere for leadership.

The Saint-Boniface Archdiocese, if it were to recreate the successes it had in Manitoba, in Saskatchewan, needed leaders who understood and could cope with the new situation. They needed leaders to compete with the much larger contingent of non-French-speakers already there. Within a year of the creation of the province of Saskatchewan, Archbishop Langevin of Saint-Boniface believed he had found such a leader. In 1906, Langevin promoted the Abbé Louie-Pierre Gravel to carve out a French enclave in Saskatchewan. He was asked to be the 'moving spirit' in guiding a French-Catholic contingent to open up the new country and to build towns, schools and libraries. He was to be a leader in which a new French culture and new traditions would radiate.<sup>222</sup> Within twenty years, Père Gravel would succeed in populating southern Saskatchewan with thousands of Franco-Catholics creating a dozen French-speaking communities in this section of the province.

Langevin first approached Gravel to help with the new challenges the Catholic Church and French-speakers were facing in Saskatchewan. Langevin expected that Gravel would use his

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<sup>222</sup> "The Colonizing Work of 'Pere Gravel'", n.d., SHSB, Collection Générale de la Société Historique de Saint-Boniface, Folder Gravel – Louis-Pierre (notes).

unique skillset to bring French-Catholic immigrants to this Saskatchewan section of his archdiocese. Langevin wrote in *Le Canada Journal* on October 27, 1905 that:

Une oeuvre splendide vient d'être entreprise par M. L'Abbé Gravel, prêtre Canadien-Français très distingué, curé à New-York, ce prêtre patriote a jeté, en... Il a la noble ambition de doter la Partie du Diocèse de Saint-Boniface dans la Saskatchewan de cinq ou six nouvelles paroisses canadiennes.

translation

A splendid work has just been undertaken by Mr. L'Abbé Gravel, very distinguished French-Canadian priest, curé in New York, this patrician priest has thrown [his hat in the ring] .... He has the noble ambition to endow the greater community of the diocese of Saint-Boniface in Saskatchewan with a total of five or six new [French-]Canadian parishes.<sup>223</sup>

L'Abbé Gravel was first offered a settlement site inside what was *le Mission Saint-Joseph de la Rivière aux Marais* locality, in Manitoba. Gravel rejected this offer. He did not want to establish yet another community on the Red River. It was too easy, too safe. He was more interested in the challenges and opportunities in Saskatchewan. Gravel was more than a Catholic priest. He was a colonizer, he was an educator, and most important he was a businessman.

Figure 4-1 L'Abbé Louis-Pierre Gravel, circa 1900



source: <http://gravelbourgcocathedral.com/fabbelouis.html>.

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<sup>223</sup> "L'Abbe Louis-Pierre Gravel, Prêtre Missionnaire Colonisateur [sp]", n.d., SHSB, Collection Générale de la Société Historique de Saint-Boniface, Folder Gravel - Louis-Pierre (notes).

In the fall of 1906, Langevin requested a meeting with Gravel to discuss which Saskatchewan site would best suit him. They met in Montréal, and after a long negotiation it was determined that Gravel would, as noted by Langevin, "...fonder une paroisse dans la région [in Saskatchewan] qu'il choisira."<sup>224</sup> As part of the agreement, Gravel was immediately appointed curé at Moose Jaw where he would begin work with the Federal Land Agents' office to oversee the process of obtaining a new tract of land to implement his own colonization and settlement strategy.<sup>225</sup>

On December 4, 1906, Gravel wrote to Langevin and confirmed he had already taken the opportunity to meet with Prime Minister Laurier in Ottawa to discuss the options of establishing a new Franco-Catholic settlement in southern Saskatchewan. According to Gravel, the meeting with the Prime Minister went well. Gravel advised Langevin that he had secured not only the section of land required but also a future post office and a promise for a future railway station if the area progressed the way he hoped it would. Given the steps already taken, Gravel advised Langevin that he would be ready to accept his new responsibility for this area in southern Saskatchewan on January 1, 1907.<sup>226</sup>

Two weeks after assuming responsibility for his new post, and after further communication with the Federal Government, Gravel again instructed Langevin that Prime Minister Laurier would be providing Langevin with a letter of demission for the Reverend Father

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<sup>224</sup> Translation - "... establish a parish in the area [Saskatchewan] that he will choose." "Monument National a la Memoire du Fondateur de Gravelbourg, Sask.", 2 aug 1957, SHSB, Collection Générale de la Société Historique de Saint-Boniface, Folder Folder Gravel, Louis-Pierre (notes).

<sup>225</sup> Gravel never did reside in Gravelbourg, preferring to run the locality from his office at Moose Jaw. To assist Gravel, the government appointed Leon Roy as Immigration Agent. Roy arrived from Québec with his family and settled in what would be the community of Dollard. Dollard was first named Valroy after the number of pioneers named Roy that settled there. Gravel to Archbishop Langevin, 4 dec 1906, SHSB, Corporation Archiépisopale Catholique Romaine de Saint-Boniface, colonisation et immigration - serie Langevin 1900-1909, L40854-6.

<sup>226</sup> Ibid.



Blais who was currently assigned to the area in southern Saskatchewan. This demission was needed so that Gravel could assume responsibility for the territory newly set aside for him by the Federal Government.<sup>227</sup> By the end of January 1907, Gravel had provided Langevin with two documents from the Federal Government that approved the land grant in the locality which was to be called Gravelbourg.<sup>228</sup> According to Gravel's personal papers, Langevin was not offended by Gravel's aggressive and decisive removal of one of his priests nor in being left out of the land acquisition negotiations. Instead, Gravel wrote that Langevin seemed pleased with the progress made.<sup>229</sup>

In February 1907, Gravel was named official colonization agent by Ottawa for the territory in southern Saskatchewan. Gravel immediately assumed colonization responsibilities for four connecting townships. The land chosen by Gravel was of prime quality. One of these sections included the area then known as la Montagne Bois in the Qu'Appelle Valley that had "le sol y fertile, l'eau abondante, [et] le chemin de fer à proximité."<sup>230</sup> On March 12, Ottawa officially recognized this grant and agreed with Gravel's suggestion of naming the central township as 'Gravelbourg'.<sup>231</sup>

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<sup>227</sup> Reverend Father Blais was the first colonization agent named by the Federal Government for the southern section of what would be Saskatchewan. Langevin to curé St-Amant, 5 mar 1908, SHSB, Corporation Archiépiscope Catholique Romaine de Saint-Boniface, serie Langevin, L47743-4; Painchaud, *The Catholic Church and the Movement of Francophones*, 49.

<sup>228</sup> Confirming what Gravel claimed, details of the agreement were laid out by the Gabri brothers. Fabri frères to Langevin, 12 feb 1907, SHSB, Corporation Archiépiscope Catholique Romaine de Saint-Boniface, Louis Pierre Gravel – serie Langevin, L47748-L47753.

<sup>229</sup> Langevin to Gravel, 22 feb 1909, SHSB, Corporation Archiépiscope Catholique Romaine de Saint-Boniface, serie Langevin, L435-L436.

<sup>230</sup> Translation "...ground [that is] fertile, the water is abundant, [and] the railway comes close." "Les Nôtres Dans La Saskatchewan – Détails Intéressants Fournis par un Missionnaire de la Colonisation dans cette Partie du Pays", 22 mar 1909, SHSB, Collection Générale de la Société Historique de Saint-Boniface, Folder Gravel, Louis-Pierre (notes). The area assigned in south Saskatchewan included ranges 4 to 20 of townships 6 to 11 inclusive.

<sup>231</sup> "Monument National a la Memoire du Fondateur de Gravelbourg, Sask", 2 aug 1957, SHSB, Collection Générale de la Société Historique de Saint-Boniface, Folder Gravel – Louis-Pierre (notes).

With the approval of the Federal Government and the Archdiocese of Saint-Boniface, Gravel took control of the area. Having already demissioned Father Blais, Gravel took the next step by having the area's Catholic missionary (and colonizer), the Abbé Marie-Albert Royer, ordered for reassignment. Royer, having already been in the area for some time, had made his own recommendations to the Saint-Boniface Archdiocese to establish a permanent parish in the area with himself head of the project. In letters to Archbishop Langevin in early 1907, Royer requested that he and not Gravel, continue as the leading presence in the area and build upon the base he had already begun.<sup>232</sup> Langevin, however, would not go against the wishes of Gravel. Later, Royer conceded that Gravel's influence at Ottawa and his overall business savvy had won the locality. Royer realized the influence Gravel had as he noted in passing that Gravel had "une montagne de lettres, aux-quelles je [il] n'ai [a] pas achève de répondre."<sup>233</sup> Royer reported that many of these letters were from affluent French-speakers from Québec and the United States who wanted to settle in the Saskatchewan locality with Gravel himself at its head. Many of the letters confirmed they would settle on property, sight unseen on Gravel's recommendation.

Knowing he could not persuade Langevin to choose himself over Gravel as religious leader for the new Gravelbourg and neighboring townships, Royer suggested an alternative. He could instead move his mission work to a nearby community and build a parish there under the umbrella of what Gravel was doing. Royer concluded his letter by adding that, if his alternate recommendation was approved, he would also do what he could to bring any disgruntled French-

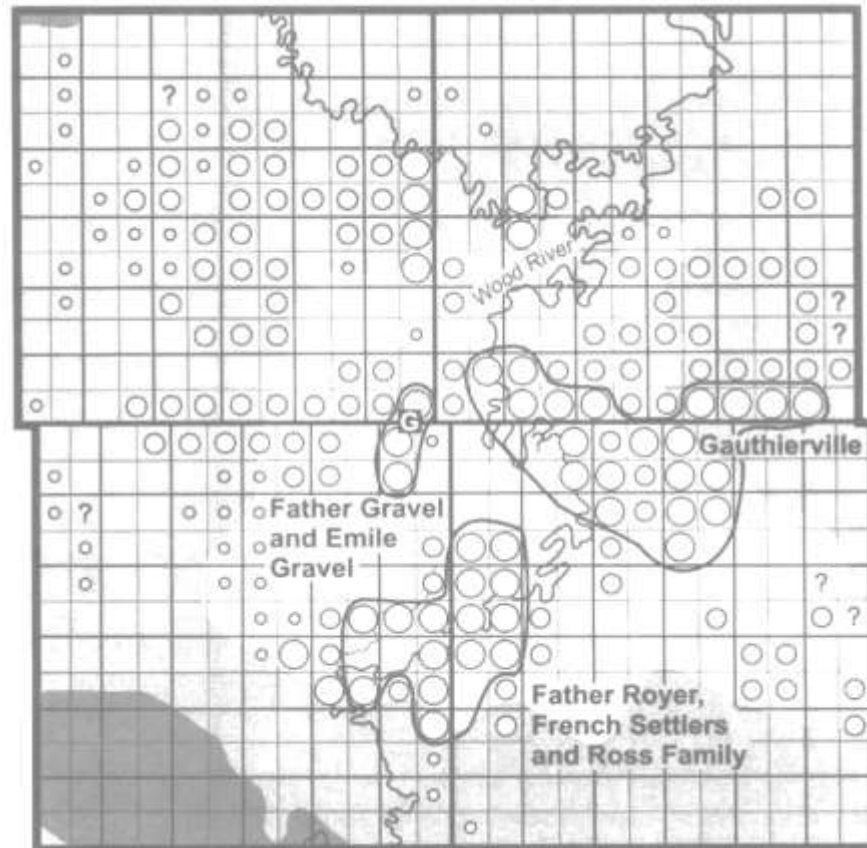
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<sup>232</sup> In a three-page letter from Royer to M. Dugas, Vicar General of Saint-Boniface, Royer made his argument without success. L'Abbé A. Royer to Mgr. Dugas, *Les Cloches de Saint-Boniface*, vol.6, no 9, 1 may 1907, 120-122.

<sup>233</sup> Translation - "a mountain of letters, to which I [he] did not yet answer." "Emparons-Nous Du Sol", *Les Cloches de Saint-Boniface*, vol.6, no 9, 11 mar 1907, 122. These letters were actually on the desk of Gravel's brother and lawyer Emile Gravel. Emile Gravel helped his brother with much of the early colonization efforts. A list of Emile Gravel's accomplishments were included in *La Liberté's* 1926 edition. "A La Memoire D'Emile Gravel", *La Liberté*, vol.XIV, no 6, 30 jun 1926, 7.

speakers who had yet to hear back from Gravel back into the fold, and hopefully to the new community he proposed to lead.<sup>234</sup>

Figure 4-2 Gravelbourg initial settlement, circa 1908



Source: Bernard Thraves, *Saskatchewan: Geographic Perspectives* (Regina: Canadian Plains Research Center, University of Regina, 2007), 147.

### Gravel the Colonizer

Before Gravel chose the locality and later diocese of Gravelbourg, the area had been used and settled by Métis and Indigenous traders, and was known by the names ‘La Vieille’ or ‘Wood River’ for the river running through the valley.<sup>235</sup> When l’Abbé Gravel renamed the locality

<sup>234</sup> “Emparons-Nous Du Sol”, *Les Cloches de Saint-Boniface*, vol.6, no 9, 11 mar 1907, 122.

<sup>235</sup> The river is still named ‘La Vieille’. There were conflicting explanations for how the original name ‘La Vieille’ may have been decided. For example, the name may have been given for the importance of ‘the old farm’, or the role ‘the old wives’ played in these early years. Both are loose translations of the term ‘la vieille’.

Gravelbourg, a few original settlers objected but Gravel dismissed their grumblings. He was not interested in satisfying the few French-speaking Métis stragglers in the area any more than other non-French squatters who may have been there. He was more interested in rebranding the locality as part of his greater colonization strategy. Gravel and the Federal Government believed the new name Gravelbourg would better solidify colonization efforts and bring in the desired numbers and types of French-speaking businessmen and settlers to the area.<sup>236</sup> Above all else, Gravel wanted to create a thriving locality in southern Saskatchewan by populating the townships with affluent French-speakers who would be able to continue to grow and maintain the locality.

With support from the few French-speaking leaders he had already enlisted, Gravel wasted no time putting his colonization strategies in place. Gravel would, in his first two years, settle 250 French-Canadian families in the Gravelbourg township, and another 300 French-Canadian families elsewhere within the allotted townships. In these first years, Gravel would create eight French-speaking communities.<sup>237</sup>

Gravel realized this success through a number of strategies, but none were more effective than his use of newspapers. He promoted his colonization scheme in many of eastern Canada's French-speaking newspapers. His goal was to attract as many financially responsible French-Canadians to southern Saskatchewan's Gravelbourg district. In an April 1, 1907 article in *L'Echo*

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<sup>236</sup> "Lettre d'Un Colonisateur de l'Ouest – Fondation de la Colonie de La Riviere La Vieille", *Les Cloches de Saint-Boniface*, vol.7 no 6, 15 mar 1908, 71-2.

<sup>237</sup> In two years, l'Abbé Gravel opened the following communities: Gravelbourg, with 250 Canadian-French families; Lafleche, 70 families; Meyronne, 50 families; Courval, 20 families; Notre-Dame d'Auvergne 100 families; Lac Pelletier, 55 families; Les Cypres and Val Marie, with several French-Canadian, Belgian and French families. "Les Nôtres Dans La Saskatchewan – Détails Intéressants Fournis par un Missionnaire de la Colonisation dans cette Partie du Pays", 22 mar 1909, SHSB, Collection Générale de la Société Historique de Saint-Boniface, Folder Gravel, Louis-Pierre (notes); "La Colonisation du Sud de la Saskatchewan", *Les Cloches de Saint-Boniface*, vol.8, no 12, 15 jun 1909, 158-9.

*des Bois-Francs* out of Arthabaska, PQ, Gravel targeted families working in the United States.<sup>238</sup>

In May, 1908, Gravel "... appealed to [French-] Canadiens by tracts, conferences, lectures, newspaper articles, etc... to come back [to Canada] ...especially in Saskatchewan."<sup>239</sup> During these early years, Gravel advertised free land and rich soil as the main attraction for affluent French-speakers to come live in southern Saskatchewan.<sup>240</sup>

Gravel's efforts did not go unnoticed. The editor of *La Patrie* newspaper of Montréal wrote on March 22, 1909 of the great successes Gravel realized in the two years since the locality of Gravelbourg was established. Gravel was commended for his ability to repatriate French-speaking countrymen through his offer of land in this Saskatchewan locality. Once committed to his cause, these immigrants were directed to the French communities within the Gravelbourg locality: Lafleche, Meyronne, Courvale, Ponteix, Val Marie, Lac Pelletier, Les Cypres, Dollard, and others. *La Patrie's* editor attributed Gravel's success to his administrative and business acumen and to the fact that these settlers had the privilege of selecting the choicest land that Gravel had already secured.<sup>241</sup>

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<sup>238</sup> "Some Extracts Taken From Many Articles Published on the Life and Work of Father L.P. Gravel Missionary-Colonizer and Founder of Gravelbourg, Saskatchewan", 28 nov 1908, SHSB, Collection Générale de la Société Historique de Saint-Boniface, Folder Gravel, Louis-Pierre (notes).

<sup>239</sup> Ibid.

<sup>240</sup> "La Terre Pour Rien", *Le Courrier de l'Ouest*, vol.V, no 23, 17 mar 1910, 1.

<sup>241</sup> Gravel opened offices at Gravelbourg, Moose Jaw, Montréal, and New York. "Some Extracts Taken From Many Articles Published on the Life and Work of Father L.P. Gravel Missionary-Colonizer and Founder of Gravelbourg, Saskatchewan", n.d., SHSB, Collection Générale de la Société Historique de Saint-Boniface, Folder Gravel, Louis-Pierre (notes).

Figure 4-3 South Saskatchewan French Locality



source: <https://quebeccultureblog.com/2014/11/18/our-32-accents-series-post-7-92/>.

Aside from his use of newspapers, Gravel was also able to influence government administrators, especially those connected to land procurement and disbursement. He lectured extensively on his strategy, and during the beginning of yet another concerted push to secure French-speaking settlers in 1911, he boasted of how he tricked the Government in order to maximize the opportunity to place his preferred settlers in places he desired and instead of having them dispersed over the larger region. Given that available lands were quickly being taken, Gravel's 'trick' was for French-speakers to enter and build permanent structures on land not yet surveyed or placed on the market. When the land was finally surveyed and did come onto the market, the Government would see the land as already occupied. The Government would then have little choice but to favorably consider these squatters.<sup>242</sup>

Many heeded Gravel's advice. Some squatters, like French-Canadiens Benjamin Soury-Lavergne, Marcel Diugas, Edouard Roy and Ferdinand Géraux all secured squatters' rights by bringing in lumber from Moose Jaw to build their first shacks on desired land and deny other

<sup>242</sup> Croquis Historiques Des Paroisses Du Diocèse De Gravelbourg, Sask. : À L'Occasion De Son Jubilé D'argent, 1930-1955 (Winnipeg : La Liberté et le Patriote).

non-French the same advantage.<sup>243</sup> Gravel proudly claimed that many of the southern French-speaking centres within Gravelbourg township were created using this strategy.<sup>244</sup> Historian Becky Hamilton's essay 'Francophone Land Settlement in Southwestern Saskatchewan: Homestead Choices of French Speaking Settlers in the Gravelbourg-Meyronne Area' corroborates both this squatting strategy and the eventual and successful land settlement by French-speakers into southern Saskatchewan.<sup>245</sup>

Over the years, the French-speaking leaders of the locality, which would become known as *le Diocèse de Gravelbourg* adapted in order to thrive. This entailed the transition from strictly Church leaders to a leadership group that included entrepreneurs who created businesses, associations and newspapers. Gravel supported these initiatives and emphasized having what he called an 'Announcement System'. To this end, Gravel recommended that a permanent association called *l'Association des Professions Libérales* be created. This association would link the French-speakers in Saskatchewan to Gravel's connections in the East. This new association was meant to be the eyes and ears and front-line support for any French-speakers considering settlement.<sup>246</sup> There were different sections of the association to assist with the queries and assistance requested. A teachers' section of the association would address school issues, a lawyers' section would address notary and financial concerns, and physicians assigned would address issues from within their level of expertise. Gravel recommended that these various

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<sup>243</sup> In May of 1908, and before the land was surveyed, the core of the center of the village of Meyronne was created in this manner. *Croquis Historiques Des Paroisses*, 79.

<sup>244</sup> Gravel attributed the creation of Gravelbourg, Lafleche, Mazenod, Rouen, Carrignan, Bonvouloir, Milly, Meyronne, Notre Dame d'Auvergne, Ferland, Lac Pelletier, Dollard, Val Roy, Vallee Ste-Claire, Filiatreault, Rosevoiee, Little North and Villefranche to this strategy.

<sup>245</sup> Becky Hamilton, "Francophone Land Settlement in Southwestern Saskatchewan: Homestead Choices of French Speaking Settlers in the Gravelbourg-Meyronne Area," *Saskatchewan: Geographic Perspectives vol.5* (Regina: Canadian Plains Research Center, University of Regina, 2001), 231-256. See also Becky Hamilton, "Father Louis Pierre Gravel and the Settlement of the Gravelbourg Area," *Saskatchewan History* 59, no. 2 (Fall 2007), 3-19.

<sup>246</sup> This association was affiliated to the greater association *La Société du Parler Français* to help in its beginning phase of implementation.

sections of the association meet as often as possible, exchange views, and create and modify strategies as required. This would all be done with the sole purpose of colonization in mind.

Gravel summarized this strategy:

Avec un 'système d'annonce' bien organisé, et en ayant à la tête d'entreprise des hommes intéressés à tous les points de vue, il est certain que nous pouvons attirer dans cette province une foule de colons désirables, une foule d'artisans et d'hommes de profession, ce qui, avec le temps, nous permettrait de prendre une place importante dans la direction des affaires de cette province. Il est certain qu'il faut annoncer sa marchandise pour pouvoir la vendre, il faut, la faire connaître aux colons sérieux qui désirent préparer un bel avenir pour leurs enfants, tout en apportant le secours de leur force et de leur nombre au profit de l'élément Canadien-Français.

translation

With a well-organized 'announcement system' and having at its head the businessmen interested in all points of view, it is certain that we can attract in this province a host of desirable settlers, a host of craftsmen and which, with time, would enable us to take an important place in the direction of the affairs of this province. Just like one must announce his merchandise in order to be able to sell it, it is necessary to make it [these benefits of living in Saskatchewan] known to the serious colonists who wish to prepare a bright future for their children, while bringing the help of their strength and their number to the benefit of the French-Canadian.<sup>247</sup>

Gravel concluded that with Bishop Mathieu's ascension to his new seat of the Regina Diocese in 1910, and with the recent appointment of the Francophone and Honorable A. Turgeon as Attorney General of the Province of Saskatchewan that same year, the timing was right for such a venture and strategy. Gravel emphasized that it would only be through these 'liberal professionals' that a successful French enclave in southern Saskatchewan would result. Gravel said that once this was done, once there was a French base of not just farming settlers but affluent French businessmen, they would be able to "...bientôt fait d'acquérir une influence qui

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<sup>247</sup> "Groupement des Nôtres par la Colonisation – Discours de M. L'Abbé L.P. Gravel à La Convention De Duck Lake", *Le Patriote de l'Ouest*, vol.3, no 3, 21 mar 1912, 4.



commandera le respect de la majorité."<sup>248</sup> In the ensuing years, Gravel, and these new leaders, worked to this end.

Even with the large influx of non-French speakers to Saskatchewan after 1905, the Gravelbourg locality remained resolutely French-speaking, increasing its proportion French population by 1916. This trend was also apparent among the Catholic Population. Of the total 2386 Catholics outside the town of Gravelbourg and within the locality of nine townships, almost 90% (2118) were French-speaking. Inside the town of Gravelbourg itself, 87%, or 396 of the 456 Catholics claimed French as their mother tongue.<sup>249</sup>

These trends continued to 1921. In the 1921 Federal census, the total population of the Rural Municipality of Gravelbourg totalled 2224. Of these, 1025 claimed European French ancestry. Within the town of Gravelbourg itself, census data taken from that same year is even more telling of the work began by Gravel. Of the 1106 town dwellers, 866 claimed French ancestry (both Québécois and European), or just over 78%, this at a time when Saskatchewan's French population was only 6% of the total population of the province.<sup>250</sup> What would be the Diocese of Gravelbourg showed an even greater confirmation of the French factor.

An editorial by Eugène Cadieux in a spring 1918 edition of *Le Patriote de l'Ouest* summed up Gravel's effectiveness. Cadieux attributed Gravelbourg's success and sustainability to the locality's elite, their professions and to Gravel himself. Cadieux considered their ability to interact with and influence both government and business at all levels as critical to the success of the Gravelbourg district.<sup>251</sup>

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<sup>248</sup> Ibid.

<sup>249</sup> As of 1930, time of the creation of the Gravelbourg Diocese, the Catholic population was 30,000 people. The total population of this diocese according to the 1931 census was 124,000. The diocese included 30 parishes, 37 missions, 33 diocesan priests, 16 religious priests, 112 nuns. It covered over 70,000 square kilometres in the southwestern corner of the province. "Lettres au "Patriote" – La population française de Gravelbourg", *Le Patriote de l'Ouest*, vol.6, no 21, 3 aug 1916, 2.

<sup>250</sup> *Census of Canada, 1921*.

<sup>251</sup> "Le Progrès de Gravelbourg", *Le Patriote de l'Ouest*, vol.7 no 52, 6 mar 1918, 7.

Gravel's strategies, his use of newspapers, land procurement strategies, and use of front-line liberal professionals, had created a successful French-speaking enclave in southern Saskatchewan. Gravel was more than just a priest and colonizer. He was an administrator, a financier, and a businessman.

## Population Dynamics and Communities

Table 4-1 Ethnic makeup of Saskatchewan 1901-1931 – Federal Census Data

Saskatchewan	Population	British races <sup>252</sup>	French-speaking races	Indian races
1901	91,279	43.9%	2.9%	19.4%
1905 Saskatchewan joined confederation				
1906	257,763	Not avail	Not avail	Not avail
1907 Gravelbourg locality established				
1911	492,432	54.7%	5.5%	2.4%
1916	647,835	54.5%	5.3%	1.7%
1921	757,510	52.9%	6.0%	1.7%
1926	820,738	50.8%	6.2%	1.6%
1930 <i>Le Diocèse de Gravelbourg</i> established				
1931	921,785	47.5%	6.0%	1.7%

source: *Census of Canada, 1931*

### Gravelbourg census numbers<sup>253</sup>

	1901	1906	1911	1916	1921		1926		1931	
	total pop	total pop	total pop	total pop	total pop	French	total pop	French	total pop	French
<b>Gravelbourg Locality / Census Div#3</b>	467	756	14,363	32,670	38,900		45,776		46,881	8,540
<b>RM#104 Gravelbourg</b>	n/a	n/a	1,344	2,015	2,224	1,025	2,304	983	2,061	983
Gravelbourg vl.	n/a	n/a	n/a	463	1,106	866	1,201	806	1,137	806
Meyronne	n/a	n/a	n/a	109	247	n/a	357	n/a	337	n/a
Lafleche	n/a	n/a	n/a	162	356	n/a	555	n/a	523	n/a
<b>RM#76 Auvergne</b>	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	1,765		1,582		1723	
Ponteix	n/a	n/a	n/a	335	330		588	441	535	441
<b>RM#74 Wood River</b>	n/a	n/a	n/a		2,003		2,257		2042	
<b>RM#42 Willow Bunch</b>	n/a	n/a	n/a		2,402		3,090		2550	

source: *Census of the Prairie Provinces, 1926; Census of Canada, 1931.*

<sup>252</sup> The terms 'races' and 'racial origins' were used in census data and therefore the term 'race' was copied here to designate either those born in the British Commonwealth (according to census data source this includes English, Irish, Scottish, and other British-speaking races), those born in France, Québec or other 'French-speaking' localities or nations (French races), or those from a Canadian Indigenous locality (Indian races). The term 'Indian' was used in the 1931 Census and designated all but the most northern Indigenous peoples. For use of terms, see *Seventh Census of Canada, 1931* (Ottawa: Printer to the King), 148.

<sup>253</sup> While the Gravelbourg Diocese covers roughly 20% more land than the Federal Census Division #3, in place in southern Saskatchewan since 1906, the boundaries will be used to compare what would be the greater Diocese of Gravelbourg to the municipalities (including RM #104) and towns (including Gravelbourg) and villages within it.

The first Catholics who came to the Gravelbourg area were Métis. In 1870, about forty of them travelled from Saint Boniface and the Red River Valley to spend their first winter in the vicinity of le Montagne de Bois near the present parish of Saint-Victor. They settled here through the 1870s, hunting buffalo. After the buffalo disappeared, so did most of the Métis. The Métis mission dissolved, and the remaining Métis settled at Talle de Saules (or St-Ignace des Saules). The name, literally ‘clump or cluster of trees’, came from the natural foliage of the rich soil in the area and would eventually become the parish of Willow Bunch in 1889.

The first settlers in this area included Jean-Louis Légaré, a merchant from Québec who opened a trading post in 1871. L’Abbé Lestanc, following the Métis hivernements, had built a chapel the year prior. After the chapel was built, l’Abbé St-Germain became Willow Bunch’s first residing curé, baptizing Métis settlers as well as his first French-Canadien, Edward Beaupré.<sup>254</sup> Other French-Canadiens arrived through the 1880s, including more of the Beaupré family, and the families Lapointe and Desautels. The area and population remained mostly static through these early years, and the Catholic Church’s presence in the area likewise did not progress much. In 1905, when Saskatchewan achieved provincehood, the Catholic Church renewed their efforts to obtain land and recruit French-speakers, as already noted.

At the time Saskatchewan joined confederation in 1905, the Abbé Alphonse Lemieux, formerly of nearby Cantal community, became Willow Bunch’s residing curé. Lemieux, upon his arrival, helped build the Parish’s new and much larger church to accommodate the increasing French population in the area. Both Lemieux and another parishioner, Edmond Gauthier, decided to settle an area at La Vieille, a day’s travel further west. These two French-Canadiens built the first structure at La Rivière la Vieille and planted Gravelbourg’s first cross. With this beginning,

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<sup>254</sup> Clovis Rondeau and Adrien Chabot, *La Montagne De Bois, 1870-1920*. (Willow-Bunch : A. Chabot, 1970), 33-36; *Croquis Historiques Des Paroisses*, 3.

other French-speaking communities in the Gravelbourg locality would also begin to be established.<sup>255</sup>

Ponteix, a nearby parish, was established in 1907 by the Abbé Royer, and became another French bastion in the district. First named Nôtre-Dame d’Auvergne, after his birthplace in France, Royer would enlist original settlers from his French hometown. In August of 1907, Royer went to Swift Current to collect as many recently arrived settlers as he could. In October, and with these French settlers now squatting on their land, the Lands’ Title Office in Moose Jaw formally opened the area in and around Ponteix for settlement. The strategy to squat on the land worked as most if not all of the new French settlers were able to claim these lands. Royer stayed in the community, acting as spiritual leader until his death in 1922. The curé who replaced Royer would go on to build an impressive Church in 1923 at a cost of \$175,000.00. Aside from the Church and College at Gravelbourg, this structure at Ponteix was the most imposing of its time in southern Saskatchewan.<sup>256</sup>

There were many French-Catholic communities established in what would be the Gravelbourg Diocese in these building years. They included: Willow Bunch (1870), Swift Current (1882), Lac Pelletier (1906), Assiniboia (1907), Gravelbourg (1907), Ponteix (1907), Dollard (1908), Courval (1908), Laflèche (1908), Ferland (1909), Frenchville (1909), Meyronne (1909), Coderre (1910), Val Marie (1910), St-Victor (1914), Mazenod (1915), and Lisieux (1916).<sup>257</sup>

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<sup>255</sup> *Croquis Historiques Des Paroisses*, 107-112.

<sup>256</sup> *Ibid.*, 83-84.

<sup>257</sup> Dates listed reference the first permanent French-Catholic or Métis settlers. Many of these communities would later be elevated to parish status.

Blumenfeld, another community in the Gravelbourg District is worth mentioning for the mix of French and German-speakers in the community. Blumenfeld became a mixed settlement of Catholics by 1908.<sup>258</sup> Another mixed settlement included Fife Lake, on the southern part of the Gravelbourg locality, which comprised Catholics that were French, Belgian, German, Scottish, and English.<sup>259</sup>

In an early report to Ottawa on March 28, 1910, Gravel updated the Prime Minister's office on the status of his venture, noting that townships 10, 11, 12 in ranges 4, 5, 6 west of the 3rd meridian were now occupied with a large contingent of French-speakers.<sup>260</sup> Nearly 19,000 homesteads were taken up in the Gravelbourg District and area in 1909 alone.<sup>261</sup> The Government recognized this population and settlement growth by immediately establishing the Rural Municipality #104 of Gravelbourg. Gravel's 1910 report confirmed that mail service was already in place, that three school districts were now established, and that a detachment of Royal North West Mounted Police was permanently on site. Further, the community of Gravelbourg was in the process of raising a telegraph line to connect to Moose Jaw. A Dominion Lands Office was also expected to be in place in 1910, and the town's first medical doctor opened an office. The Abbé Gravel also reminded the Federal Government that the Canadian Northern Railway was going to complete a line through Gravelbourg in a few months. The railway would connect Moose Jaw to Swift Current. Gravelbourg was flourishing. A post office opened in 1913,

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<sup>258</sup> *Ibid.*, 13.

<sup>259</sup> *Ibid.*, 32.

<sup>260</sup> Abbé Gravel to Immigration Superintendent W.D. Scott, 28 mar 1910, SHSB, Corporation Archiépisopale Catholique Romaine de Saint-Boniface, Colonisation et Immigration – serie Langevin, L41061-6.

<sup>261</sup> *Ibid.*

relocating to Gravelbourg's main street in 1915 to accommodate the booming population and economy.<sup>262</sup>

As of 1911, homestead entries were no longer available in the town of Gravelbourg.<sup>263</sup> Regardless, Gravel continued to publish letters in *L'Etoile de Gravelbourg*, *Le Courier de L'Ouest*, and *La Patrie* for more settlers. Gravel never ceased his search for settlers. The third annual report of the Commissioner of Immigration attached an update to the Federal Government in 1911 with names of over 2000 recent homestead entries from French-speakers.<sup>264</sup>

### Gravelbourg's Leaders

While this French population was being established, Gravel encouraged both religious and non-religious persons to assist with his overall plan. He also proved willing to work with the non-French majority.

In 1912, the Abbé Gravel expanded his view of the role of leadership among the Saskatchewan French-Catholics pointing to the role that business leaders could play in order to achieve their goals. Gravel was there to lead by example. He compared the situation in southern Saskatchewan to the eastern townships in Québec, suggesting that professional men (lawyers, doctors and notaries) needed to lead this endeavor in Saskatchewan as they had in Québec.

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<sup>262</sup> The railway was actually completed in 1911. *Gravelbourg: A Walk Through History = Une Croisade Dans Le Temps* (Gravelbourg, Sask.: Gravelbourg and District Museum, 2000), 3.

<sup>263</sup> For more information, see a 1911 fiscal report from Gravel. Gravel to Scott, 24 mar 1911, SHSB, Corporation Archiépiscope Catholique Romaine de Saint-Boniface, Colonisation et Immigration – serie Langevin, L41992-8; Gravel to Scott, 28 mar 1910, SHSB, Corporation Archiépiscope Catholique Romaine de Saint-Boniface, Colonisation et Immigration – serie Langevin, L41061-6.

<sup>264</sup> Leon Roy was the Commissioner of Immigration at this time. The immigration hall at Gravelbourg was also now considering enquiries from settlers of all nations, not just those that spoke French. A suggestion was made by the hall to begin to receive all settlers from all ethnicities, and to shift efforts from the first years of colonization when only French-speakers were sought. This source provided over 2000 settlers' names. "Third annual report", n.d., SHSB, Corporation Archiépiscope Catholique Romaine de Saint-Boniface, Colonisation et Immigration – serie Langevin, L41109-L41121.

Gravel implored those at Duck Lake to become the avenue for a greater French identity and success for Saskatchewan. Gravel was encouraged with some early results. He called these leaders of industry “les chefs naturels du peuple”.<sup>265</sup> Gravel would also, through the efforts of editors Eugène Cadieux and Armand Lauzon of *Le Patriote de l'Ouest* Newspaper, provide a continuing update to the southern locality through an article titled ‘Le Progres de Gravelbourg’. This running column provided weekly updates on successes as well as important contact information for the liberal professionals in their areas. These articles were used by Gravel to promote the strength and solidarity of French culture in business.<sup>266</sup>

The creation and use of French-language newspapers across the West illustrated how French-speaking leadership efforts had evolved. In the locality *le Mission Saint-Joseph de la Rivière aux Marais* of Manitoba for example, *La Liberté* and *Les Cloches de Saint-Boniface* publications were owned and edited by the Catholic Church. In Saskatchewan, where a more peer relationship existed between Church and business, these respective leaders shared a responsibility in many of the locally and regionally run newspapers. For example, *Le Patriote de l'Ouest's* first editor was a Catholic priest (A.G. Morice), yet the paper was established and funded on the recommendations of a conference of business leaders, who vowed to uphold the rights of French-speakers. The newspaper's first publisher was not the Catholic Church but instead ‘La Bonne Presse,’ a company established by the more secular leadership base. In Saskatchewan (and as we will also see in Alberta), the Catholic Church had less of a leadership role in both newspapers, as in the communities.

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<sup>265</sup> Translation – “the natural chiefs of the people”. Quotation taken from lecture given in 1912 at Duck Lake. “Groupement des Nôtres par la Colonisation – Discours de M. L'Abbé L.P. Gravel à La Convention De Duck Lake”, *Le Patriote de l'Ouest*, vol.3, no 3, 21 mar 1912, 4.

<sup>266</sup> For first article, see “Le Progrès de Gravelbourg – Réveil”, *Le Patriote de l'Ouest*, vol.9, no 17, 2 jul 1919, 10.

The publishing company of *Le Patriote de l'Ouest* was one such instrument which merged both the Catholic Church and business into a symbiotic relationship. This new organization charged Morice, and the paper's subsequent editors, with instilling two thoughts into their readership base. Their first direction was to insist readers of *Le Patriote de l'Ouest* uphold a Catholic life. This commitment must take precedence over everything else. Second, *Le Patriote's* leadership insisted that the goal of the newspaper was to be patriotic and to serve all like-minded French-speaking citizens in all endeavors; French identity must always be defended when attacked.<sup>267</sup>

Underlying these two directives was the mandate to preserve the French language under the same laws as were available to the English. As well, given its business leadership, the newspaper was committed to French-owned private business, and an emphasis on building a prosperous market economy. This, according to both Gravel and this growing leadership base, was critical to having a thriving French community. According to the French-speaking leaders of the *Le Patriote* Newspaper, there were to be no exceptions to these simple rules, and *Le Patriote* became the preeminent protector of the French culture in the Canadian West. Their mantra 'Grouper, Unir, Protéger' highlighted a strategy and focus to help the French of western Canada become a lasting regional influence.<sup>268</sup> Like *La Liberté* in Manitoba or Alberta's *L'Union* and *La Survivance* newspapers, *Le Patriote* was instrumental in organizing its leadership base and promoting their common goals in Saskatchewan.

The connections between leaders of newspapers and associations were also apparent. In Saskatchewan, *L'Association Catholique Franco-Canadienne de la Saskatchewan (L'A.C.F.C.)*,

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<sup>267</sup> "Notre Programme", *Le Patriote de l'Ouest*, vol.1, no 1, 22 aug 1910, 4.

<sup>268</sup> "Grouper, unir, protéger", *Le Patriote de l'Ouest*, vol.2, no 49, 6 feb 1913, 1.



probably the most influential French-speaking association in Saskatchewan, began through the efforts of both *Le Patriote de l'Ouest*'s editor and publisher.<sup>269</sup> Initially an arm of *Le Comité du Parler Français* out of Montréal, *l'A.C.F.C.*'s inaugural conference in 1910 focused primarily on provincial issues.<sup>270</sup> With the newspapers and French-speaking associations inter-connected on a provincial level, French-speaking leaders of community had a good opportunity to better organize themselves. As a first step, many of these French-Catholic associations started up in conjunction with and worked alongside many of the newspapers' publishers and editors. In 1911, Gravel himself began the association *La Société St-Jean-Baptiste* and one hundred members immediately joined.

Soon, community-run associations, or 'cercles', began to materialize and coordinate with French-language newspapers to find ways to encourage the leadership that was needed. These 'cercles' became the strength of the association and through them a new community leader concept emerged. These *cercles*' activities were widely reported by newspapers. For example, an article written in the *Gravelbourg Star* newspaper in 1927 contributed a full two pages to the regional *A.C.F.C.* conference held earlier that month in Gravelbourg. The Association's full agenda and outline of events was printed.<sup>271</sup>

The Church-business partnership in Saskatchewan was on full view at a conference held for French and Catholic leaders of the province and greater western region in 1912. This conference was held after Gravel began his work in southern Saskatchewan and soon after the Regina Diocese of southern Saskatchewan had split from the greater Archdiocese of Saint-

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<sup>269</sup> "Règlements de l'Association Franco-Canadienne de la Saskatchewan", *Le Patriote de l'Ouest*, vol.2, no 47, 23 jan 1913, 1.

<sup>270</sup> The main focus for this new chapter was to ensure French was taught in the schools. "Comités Régionaux – Pour le Congrès de la Langue Française", *Le Patriote de l'Ouest*, vol.2, no 35, 2 nov 1911, 5.

<sup>271</sup> "Impression d'un Compatriote de l'Est sur la Saskatchewan – Française", *L'Etoile de Gravelbourg – The Gravelbourg Star*, vol.5 no 52, 28 jul 1927, 5.

Boniface. The conference, held at Duck Lake Saskatchewan, was planned by an assembly of *l'Association Saint-Jean-Baptiste* in Winnipeg to help organize an independent association for the Fransaskois.<sup>272</sup> Associated with 'Le Grande Convention Nationale pour la Langue Française' this inaugural convention helped to solidify a new provincial chapter in Saskatchewan. Held on February 28 and 29 of 1912, and named 'Un Convention - le Parler Français', keynote speakers included the Archbishop Langevin of Saint-Boniface, Bishop Mgr. Mathieu of the newly formed Regina Diocese, and the Honorable Adelard Turgeon, Québec Minister of Public Lands and advocate for western French-speakers.<sup>273</sup> Other contributors to the conference included elite French business leaders from eastern and western Canada. Some of the topics and prominent speakers included:

- Noms de Lieux Français dans l'Ouest : Anciens et Nouveaux. L'honorable Juge L.-A. Prud'homme
- La Situation Juridique du Français au Manitoba. L'honorable Juge L.-A. Prud'homme
- Immigration Canadienne-Française dans l'Ouest. M. Joseph Bernier, M.P.P.
- Métis Français. M. Roger Goulet
- Français de France. M. Henri de Moissac
- Belges de Langue Française. M. Louis Hacault
- Le Français dans la Famille. M. l'abbé J.-H. Prud'homme
- Le Français dans l'École Bilingue. M. Adrien Potvin
- Le Français au Collège de St-Boniface. R. P. A. Dugré, S. J.
- Le Français à l'Université. M. l'abbé A.-A. Cherrier
- Le Français dans nos Sociétés Nationales. M. L.A. Delorme
- Le Français dans les Relations Sociales. M. F. Lachance, M. D.
- Presse Française Manitobaine. M. Noël Bernier
- Littérature Française Manitobaine. L'honorable Juge L.-A. Prud'homme.
- Nécessité de Développer les Groupes de Langue Française dans l'Ouest pour le Maintien et l'Équilibre de la Confédération. L'honorable Juge J.-E.-P., Prendergast
- Apôtres et Défenseurs du Français dans l'Ouest. M. l'abbé Denys Lamy

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<sup>272</sup> On December 14, 1911, a resolution was adopted the previous month at a November 26 assembly of *L'Association St. Jean-Baptiste*. They arranged this first *Association du Parler Français* in Saskatchewan. "L'Association St-Jean-Baptiste de Gravelbourg et le Parler-Français", *Le Patriote de l'Ouest*, vol.1, no 41, 14 dec 1911, 3.

<sup>273</sup> "Grande Convention Nationale 28 et 29 Fevrier 1912 – Pour la Langue Française", *Le Patriote de l'Ouest*, vol.1, no 47, 25 jan 1912, 1.

The purpose of the convention was to create a leadership group who could send a clear message to its community *cercles*. These leaders encouraged “...nos frères par la foi, par le sang et par la langue”<sup>274</sup> to unite and work together to overcome the vast distances between them. The goal was simple; to re-awaken a Catholic France in the West, and most specifically in Saskatchewan. These leaders believed that there were already thousands of ‘soldiers’ ready to take up the cause and fight for a re-awakened French region. The hope was to engage these French-speakers to sacrifice and devote themselves to preserve the French language, their culture and their faith. Included in this message was the imperative to form a strong ‘bloc’ in order to fight for rights they believed were theirs. Attendance at the convention included representatives from many of the Franco-Saskatchewan communities. Given the work Gravel had been doing in southern Saskatchewan for the five years leading up to the conference, it is not surprising that almost all French-speaking communities from the area in and around the Gravelbourg locality were represented.<sup>275</sup>

These kinds of conferences would continue to be held in Saskatchewan (and later in Alberta) throughout the settlement and growth years. Leaders of cultural groups and business continued to attend and speak and do what they could to influence and empower the French factor. A conference in Regina the following year (1913) illustrated the continuing growth of French-speaking leadership. In attendance were Langevin, Mgr. Pascal, Mgr. Roy, Mgr. Mathieu, Mgr. Charlebois, the Premier of Saskatchewan (M. Adjutor Rivard), and the Honorable Juge Prendergast. The program list included other French leaders and topics affirming their solidarity and purpose, including a welcome from leading businessmen MM. Gariépy, Boudreau,

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<sup>274</sup> Translation – “...our brethren by faith, by blood, and by language.”, “Bienvenue !”, *Le Patriote de l’Ouest*, vol.1, no 52, 27 feb 1912, 1.

<sup>275</sup> *Ibid.*

Delorme, and a great mass sung by Langevin himself. The conference broke into committee groups to focus on rules of *l'A.C.F.C.*, statistical analysis of populations, advantages for business professionals, the care and protection of abandoned children, the status of the *Federation of the Catholic Society*, an overarching discussion on the status of the French race in Saskatchewan, temperance, the work of the Catholic press, the history of colonisation of Saskatchewan, and an update on colonisation and immigration.<sup>276</sup> The resolutions that emerged from this conference would produce the “Règlements de l’Association Catholique Franco-Canadienne de la Saskatchewan.”<sup>277</sup>

L’Abbé Gravel, his family of five brothers, one sister, and numerous other relatives all became a large part of the locality’s leadership group. As the population of the Gravelbourg district increased, the influence provided by the Gravel Family of Gravelbourg became even more prevalent. The Abbé Gravel’s sister, Élisée, initiated and coordinated much of the health systems required in the community. On July 11, 1897, and well before Gravelbourg was even a consideration, Ms. Gravel was writing to the venerable Dom Benoît of the Catholic Church about the need for a hospital in the area, and a Mother Superior to be assigned to the hospital once established.<sup>278</sup> The first of the Gravel clan would begin to take up permanent residence after Abbé Gravel finalized the establishment of the community in 1907. Heralded as “...professionnels de valeur” by the *Le Patriote de l’Ouest* Newspaper, brothers Alphonse (lawyer and first Judge of Gravelbourg) and Emile (lawyer and notary) expanded from their law

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<sup>276</sup> “Programme de la Convention de Regina – 28-29-30 Juillet”, *Le Patriote de l’Ouest*, vol.3, no 18, 17 jul 1913, 1.

<sup>277</sup> Translation – “the Rules of the Association Catholique Franco-Canadienne of Saskatchewan”. “Règlements de l’Association Catholique Franco-Canadienne de la Saskatchewan”, *Le Patriote de l’Ouest*, vol.3, no 27, 18 sept 1913, 4.

<sup>278</sup> Élisée Gravel to Dom Benoît, 11 & 15 jul 1897, SHSB, Corporation Archiépiscopale Catholique Romaine de Saint-Boniface, serie Benoît 1896-1898, BG 1651-7.

office already at Moose Jaw with a new office at Gravelbourg in 1912.<sup>279</sup> Earlier, Guy Gravel became Gravelbourg's first pharmacist in 1908 and constructed the landmark Guy Gravel building that same year on main street to house his and other businesses.<sup>280</sup> Élisée (sister and activist) frequented the area even earlier, beginning in 1902.<sup>281</sup>

During the building years of Gravelbourg, Emile was especially influential. As a lawyer, he helped to organize the locality's chapter of *l'A.C.F.C.*, and would be its President from 1923 to 1925. Emile would also represent the Provincial Liberals in the 1921 election, losing a close race, but showing his influence by winning over 47% of the popular vote in his Gravelbourg riding.<sup>282</sup> Other influential Gravel family members included; M. Georges Gravel (Postmaster) and brothers Henri and Albert, both curés of nearby communities.<sup>283</sup>

In addition to the Gravel family, other community leaders included Dr. Joseph Antoine Soucy, who in 1913 became the first medical doctor to permanently reside in Gravelbourg.<sup>284</sup> Dr. and Mme. Soucy were a mainstay in the community, almost from the beginning. The Soucys owned property on main street and a large and pristine house near Dr. Soucy's business. Dr. Soucy opened a new office on Main Street in 1929 after the old drug store was remodelled to accommodate his practice. He brought both a valuable service to the community through his work and both he and Mme. Soucy were considered part of Gravelbourg's upper class. Mme.

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<sup>279</sup> Translation – "...valuable professionals". *Le Patriote* Newspaper published a 1930 commemorative article on the timing and value of much needed professionals to start up the village of Gravelbourg and how the Gravel family provided this need. "Le Diocèse de Gravelbourg et Sa Ville Episcopale", *Le Patriote de l'Ouest*, vol.20, no 28, 17 sept 1930, 1,5. Alphonse and Emile Gravel had their own law offices, one in Moose Jaw, the other in Gravelbourg. An example of one of their advertisements for their offices was taken out at the earliest opportunities. This advertisement was from 1912. "Gravel & Gravel – Avocats et Notaires", *Le Patriote de l'Ouest*, vol.2, no 8, 25 apr 1912, 2.

<sup>280</sup> *Gravelbourg: A Walk Through History*, 2.

<sup>281</sup> Élisée periodically visited the Gravelbourg area from 1902 to 1905. "various letters from Elisée Gravel", 29 mar 1902 – 17 apr 1905, SHSB, Corporation Archiépisopale Catholique Romaine de Saint-Boniface, serie Langevin, L1941-L2326.

<sup>282</sup> "Résultats complets des élections provinciales", *Le Patriote de l'Ouest*, Vol.11, no 15, 15 jun 1921, 2.

<sup>283</sup> "Les Centres de Franco-Canadiens – Feu M. Georges Gravel [death of M. Georges Gravel]", *Le Patriote de l'Ouest*, vol.15, no 9, 13 may 1925, 7.

<sup>284</sup> Dr. Soucy's house still stands today. *Gravelbourg: A Walk Through History*, 10.

Soucy was often reported in newspapers for holding afternoon tea and organizing other get-togethers for the community's French-speaking elite.

The Huel family also carried weight in Gravelbourg as they, upon arrival, quickly purchased and ran important businesses. They, like the Gravel and Soucy families, utilized their business acumen to full effect. The Huels owned or owned shares in a number of companies within the Gravelbourg district. One business venture, the ownership of the Gravelbourg Electric Power Plant, saw the Huel Brothers first build up and then sell the electric plant to Gravelbourg Electric at a cost of \$30,000.00.<sup>285</sup> Other business purchases and ownership by both the Gravels and Huels illustrated the control these families had on the district and community.<sup>286</sup> These two families were so influential that *L'Etoile de Gravelbourg's* editor published continuous stories about their exploits in the community. In one edition, an unsigned tribute in 1938, singled out Gravel for special praise.

Nothing exists today in this town that Father Gravel did not plan, foresee or prophesy; the first commercial undertakings, the agricultural experiments, the Court House, the railroad, the institutions, nay more, the very pioneer settlers were his selection. But it is undoubtedly, in the field of education that he spent his best efforts...<sup>287</sup>

Gravel realized, that aside from organizing the business leaders of the French in Saskatchewan, he would also need a strategy to perpetuate the leadership group of future generations. He would do this with the creation of a college to educate young French-speakers in both their ethnic and religious responsibilities.<sup>288</sup>

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<sup>285</sup> This sequence of events was much publicized in Gravelbourg's 'other' newspaper, *L'Etoile de Gravelbourg*. "The New Electric Light and Power Controversy", *L'Etoile de Gravelbourg – The Gravelbourg Star*, vol.6, no 4, 25 aug 1927, 1.

<sup>286</sup> For example, M. Lambert's auto garage was sold to the Huels and their majority ownership of their Gravelbourg company who had two other Huels sitting on its board. "J.H. Lambert's Garage is Sold", *L'Etoile de Gravelbourg – The Gravelbourg Star*, vol.6, no 9, 29 sept 1927, 4.

<sup>287</sup> "From the Prairie Optimist, February 24, 1938", 24 feb 1938, SHSB, Collection Générale de la Société Historique de Saint-Boniface, Folder Gravel - Louis-Pierre (notes).

<sup>288</sup> "La formation d'une élite - Discours prononcé par le R.P. J. Guy, O.M.I., supérieur du Collège Mathieu de Gravelbourg, à la convention de mars", *Le Patriote de l'Ouest*, vol.19, no 9, 8 may 1929, 1,9.

## Gravel the Educator

Throughout his career, Gravel focused on education as a way to help the French in Saskatchewan thrive. He established many French-speaking and French-run schools, ensuring there would be at least one place of learning in every French-speaking community within the Gravelbourg district. As part of this responsibility, Gravel would also oversee the administration of all schools, school boards, and teachers. He was very much the chief school administrator for the district. Forty French-run schools were opened in southern Saskatchewan in the first years of Gravel's work, and his importance was underscored by the Government as it appointed him one of the School Inspectors for the Province of Saskatchewan beginning in 1915.<sup>289</sup> Soon after this appointment Gravel would receive government approval to establish two French-speaking colleges in southern Saskatchewan. One would be built in Gravelbourg in 1918.<sup>290</sup> This became a critical step in seeing Gravel's overall vision to completion.

With the establishment of the Gravelbourg College, Gravel helped to ensure that a French education system in Saskatchewan would continue indefinitely. He would write the French College's charter, and have it approved by the Saskatchewan Legislature in December of 1917. This charter gave Gravel full authority to establish, maintain and manage his college, which would offer general diplomas in both the Arts and Sciences. A specific focus would be on commerce, classics, religious studies and philosophy.<sup>291</sup> All classes were taught in French. On 14 December 1918, the College opened its doors to its first sixty-seven students.<sup>292</sup>

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<sup>289</sup> "Ding! Dang! Dong!", *Les Cloches de Saint-Boniface*, vol.14, no 15, 1 aug 1915, 241.

<sup>290</sup> Another French college was opened in Regina, also in 1918. "Fondation de Deux Collèges Dans La Saskatchewan", *Les Cloches de Saint-Boniface*, vol.17, no 2, 15 jan 1918, 17.

<sup>291</sup> "Ouverture du Collège de Gravelbourg", *Le Patriote de l'Ouest*, vol.9, no 37, 19 nov 1919, 1.

<sup>292</sup> "Le Collège de Gravelbourg", 1921, SHSB, Collection Générale de la Société Historique de Saint-Boniface, Folder Gravelbourg. Father C.N. Deslandes was the college's first rector. First named le Collège Thevenet (after one of Gravelbourg's French-

Gravel's dream was to have a major French College that all French-speakers from across the prairies could attend. It would be the educational culmination for French-speaking students who had graduated from secondary school and needed further preparation to become French community and business leaders in the West. In essence, Gravel was preparing a next generation of French-speakers to successfully manage their affairs within a non-French business environment. The heart of the College was both religious and linguistic; to instill in the youth a French soul, a French culture, and a French mind.<sup>293</sup>

In 1918 both *La Liberté* and *Le Patriote* Newspapers printed an article that outlined what the College represented. The College was to be a symbol of what it was to be French-Canadian in the West. Above all, the College symbolized French strength. Specifically, the College, according to *Le Patriote's* A.F. Auclair, was a tool to be used to fight for the French peoples against any who would want to anglicize and assimilate them.<sup>294</sup> The college would also be affiliated to the University of Ottawa beginning in 1924. By 1924, the College had already turned out over 150 professionals, almost two-thirds more than its graduating priests.<sup>295</sup>

Donatien Frémont, editor of *Le Patriote de l'Ouest* Newspaper into the 1920s, and great proponent of enlivening a French identity in western Canada, wrote many articles defending and supporting the cause of education. The basic premise of many of his articles was the importance of having a strong French-speaking leadership elite. And these elites, should they be traders,

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speaking pioneers), the name was changed to Le Collège Mathieu (after Bishop Mathieu of the Regina Diocese). In 1920 direction for the college changed hands from secular priests to the Oblates. *Le Patriote de l'Ouest* Newspaper reported that only 60 students were enrolled that first year with nine teachers providing instruction. "Le Nouveau Collège de Gravelbourg", *Le Patriote de l'Ouest*, vol.8, no 41, 18 dec 1918, 1-2.

<sup>293</sup> "Le Collège Catholique de Gravelbourg", 1921, SHSB, Collection Générale de la Société Historique de Saint-Boniface, Folder Gravelbourg.

<sup>294</sup> "Fondation d'un College a Gravelbourg", *La Liberté*, vol.V, no 35, 9 jan 1918, 4. Gravel also built the Nuns a convent to encourage their arrival and continued participation in helping run the college. "From the Prairie Optimist, February 24, 1938", 24 feb 1938, SHSB, Collection Générale de la Société Historique de Saint-Boniface, Folder Gravel - Louis-Pierre (notes).

<sup>295</sup> During this same time period, the College also graduated 65 priests. "Le Collège Catholique de Gravelbourg", 1921, SHSB, Collection Générale de la Société Historique de Saint-Boniface, Folder Gravelbourg.



doctors, lawyers, or farmers, must then excite the French youth, to better equip them and support them, and, most importantly, educate them. Frémont commended l'Abbé Gravel and his peer group for doing what they could to encourage such an environment. The teachers of the schools, according to Frémont, should teach more than general knowledge. They should teach modern agriculture and fill their students' minds with practical information. According to Frémont, and consistent with the College's mandate, they should awaken a curious French mind. Frémont estimated that within fifteen years;

...nous aurons l'élite qui nous fait défaut. En son sein, nos différentes organisations trouveront des administrations compétentes, nos œuvres nationales des apôtres zélés, le pays des électeurs conscients, les ouvriers des patrons soucieux de leur bien-être, le curé, enfin, des paroissiens fidèles et exemplaires et des collaborateurs dévoués.

#### Translation

...we will have the elite that we lack. Within it, our various organizations will find competent administrators, a nation of apostolic zealots, a country of conscious voters, workers and patrons concerned with their own culture's well-being; to be the cure. Finally, they must be faithful and exemplary parishioners and devoted collaborators.<sup>296</sup>

Le Collège Mathieu and its administration made every effort to promote itself both within and outside the Gravelbourg district. In the summer of 1925, for example, some students from the College travelled to nearby Ponteix to help celebrate the 'Fête de Dollard' by helping to sell tickets. In turn, the students encouraged the younger population from Ponteix to join them at the College that summer for an open-house. A group from Ponteix would later visit the College, as reported by *La Liberté*.<sup>297</sup>

The success and status of Le Collège Mathieu prompted other French-speaking institutions to open their doors. Ten years after Le Collège Mathieu opened its doors, a business college opened at Gravelbourg. The new business school was one of a chain of seventeen schools

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<sup>296</sup> "Formons une élite rurale", *Le Patriote de l'Ouest*, vol.10, no 3, 24 mar 1920, 1.

<sup>297</sup> "Saskatchewan – Gravelbourg", *La Liberté*, vol.XIII, no 1, 10 jun 1925, 6.

across the province, nine of which opened in the Gravelbourg locality. The supervisor of the new college, M.J.G. Goss, named the school 'The Success Business College of Gravelbourg'. Their mandate was to train men and women for business services as part of the National Association of Accredited Commercial Schools. Arthur Moquin, former student and past graduate of Le Collège Mathieu became the business college's first Principal.<sup>298</sup>

With the locality's pillars of business and education in place, the Catholic Church at Gravelbourg still had a role to play. Mostly, the Church remained involved (aside from spiritual leadership) in being responsible for the education throughout the 1920s.<sup>299</sup> In 1930 *Le Diocèse de Gravelbourg* was established and in July that same year, Gravelbourg's first Bishop, Fr. Jean-Marie Rodrigue Villeneuve OMI, was appointed.<sup>300</sup> *Le Diocèse de Gravelbourg* covered an area west to the Alberta border, south to the American border, east to Viceroy, and north past Ernfold as it followed the South Saskatchewan River to the Alberta boundary. The town of Gravelbourg became the Diocesan See. Thirty-one parishes made up the Gravelbourg Diocese, some of which included Swift Current, Gravelbourg, Assiniboia, Gull Lake, Shaunavan, Maple Creek, Ponteix and Willow Bunch.<sup>301</sup>

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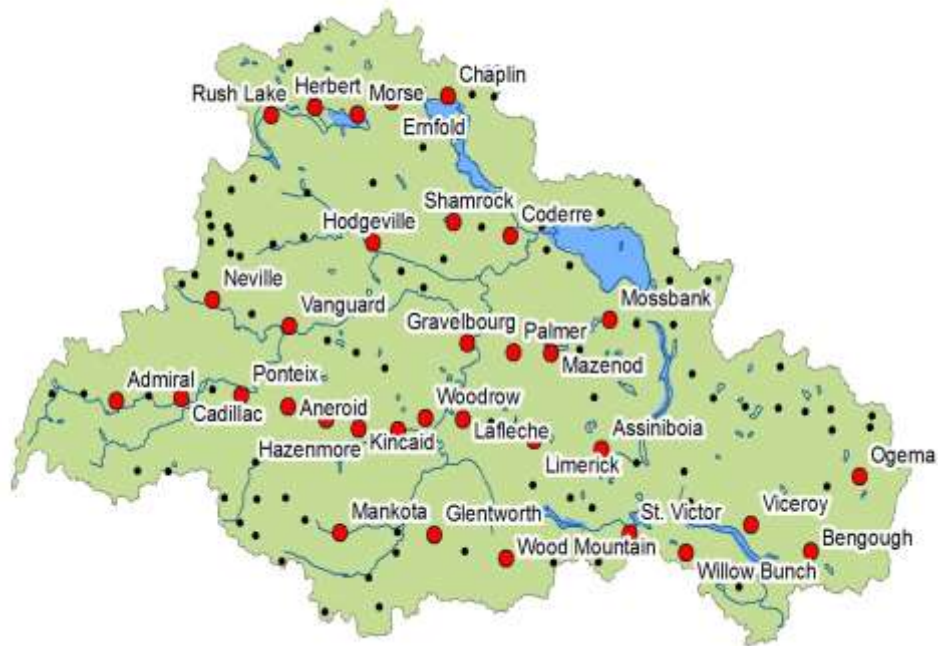
<sup>298</sup> "Gravels and Huels", *L'Etoile de Gravelbourg – 'The Gravelbourg Star'*, vol.7 no 13, 13 sep 1928, 1.

<sup>299</sup> Maillard was the community's first resident priest, installed eleven years after Gravelbourg became a town. Maillard remained as curé until 1929. Aside from Gravel, the first missionary priest (Arthur Magnan 1907-17), and first resident priest (Abbé Charles Maillard 1917-1929) of Gravelbourg, the Oblates of Mary Immaculate would teach at Le Collège Mathieu beginning in 1920. Both a kindergarten (est. 1920) and boarding school for young boys (est. 1929) were also under their responsibilities.

<sup>300</sup> The Diocese of Gravelbourg was taken from territory of the Archdiocese of Regina, yet still remained a responsibility of the Regina Archbishop. Adrien Chabot, *Histoire Du Diocèse De Gravelbourg, 1930-1980: History of the Diocese of Gravelbourg, 1930-1980* (Saskatchewan: s.n., 1981), 35.

<sup>301</sup> Mgr. Villeneuve was consecrated Bishop of Gravelbourg September 11 of that same year in Ottawa. In 1929, the newspaper printed separate English (*The Gravelbourg Star*) and French (*L'Etoile de Gravelbourg*) editions. This article was also printed in both English and French. The French version is referenced. "Mgr. Beliveau, Archeveque de St. Boniface, lit les bulles papales concernant l'erection du nouveau diocese episcopal de Gravelbourg", *L'Etoile de Gravelbourg*, vol.9 no 1, 31 jul 1930, 1.

Figure 4-4 Le Diocèse de Gravelbourg, circa 1930<sup>302</sup>



source: <http://www.southsaskriverstewards.ca/old-wives.html>.

By 1930, the Gravelbourg Diocese had established itself as a strong and vibrant region, with a strong French and Catholic leadership, even as the locality became less monolithically French.

### Isolation or Competition

On March 28, 1910, and years before *Le Collège Mathieu* and *Le Diocèse de Gravelbourg* became permanent fixtures, Gravel wrote to Archbishop Langevin of Saint-Boniface, boasting that the Gravelbourg area had produced a stronger French-Canadian presence and culture than elsewhere in western Canada. Gravel noted that French-speakers in southern Saskatchewan already equalled the numbers of French-speakers who had been in northern Saskatchewan for twenty-five years. He further claimed that the combined Fransaskois

<sup>302</sup> The Diocese of Gravelbourg followed approximately the same boundaries as what would be known as the Old Wives Lake Watershed, and a little larger than what was Federal Census Division #3.

population now made up one-tenth of the total population of the young province. According to Gravel, this strength in the south arose in competition with other non-French peoples. He argued that the people of his locality were now in position to compete for land and jobs. Gravel advised that "...nous combattons sur le même terrain avec les autres races, et, étant au commencement de l'établissement de la province en gouvernement autonome, les carrières sont ouvertes pour tout le monde indistinctement."<sup>303</sup> Gravel embraced competition as a way to strengthen the French culture within southern Saskatchewan, arguing that with the incoming non-French settlers, an even stronger French culture could result.

The Abbé Jean Gaire, a colonizing priest who grew up in a secluded village of the Alsace region of France, argued the opposite. Gaire, having already established a French-speaking enclave in western Canada, wrote to Langevin a year before Gravel's letter of 1910. As part of his argument, Gaire advised Langevin that the Oak Lake area near the Saskatchewan-Manitoba border where he had established his first French-speaking community in the 1880s had become successful primarily because of its isolation from the non-French majority.<sup>304</sup> According to Gaire, it was because of this isolation that his community of Grande Clairière had been able to survive. Gaire, in making his point, recalled his first few months after his assignment as curé, and his decision to call his community Grande Clairière because it was "...un nom bien Français, inspiré par la nature du site, et qui ne serait pas facile à angliciser."<sup>305</sup> By 1892, only five years after

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<sup>303</sup> Translation - "... We fight on the same ground with other races, and, being at the beginning of the establishment of the province in an autonomous government, careers are open for everyone indistinctly." "Gravel to Archbishop Langevin", 28 mar 1910, SHSB, Corporation Archiépiscope Catholique Romaine de Saint-Boniface, Colonisation et Immigration - serie Langevin, L41058-L41060.

<sup>304</sup> Although first page of the twenty-page letter from Gaire to Langevin is missing with the date and salutations, given the context of the update on the communities Gaire provides, 1909 was likely the date of this letter to Langevin. "Gaire to Langevin", n.d., SHSB, Corporation Archiépiscope Catholique Romaine de Saint-Boniface, Grande Clairiere – serie Langevin, L47307-L47327.

<sup>305</sup> Translation - "... a good French name, inspired by the nature of the site, and that would not be easy to anglicise." Donatien Frémont, "Un Apôtre de la Colonisation Française dans l'Ouest Canadien : L'Abbé Jean Gaire", *Proceedings and Transactions of the Royal Society of Canada, series 3, vol.45* (Ottawa: Royal Society of Canada, 1951), 10.

Gaire's experiment began, the population of his community reached 600. All were French-speaking.<sup>306</sup>

Gaire strategized that the reason less populated land should always be sought was that French-speaking immigrants could never match the numbers of non-French-speakers. Gaire wrote:

Nous devons nous garder de laisser les nôtres s'éparpiller un peu partout. Il est bon que nous prenions plutôt moins de localités, mais plus solidement, afin de pouvoir faire un bloc imprenable partout où nous aurons jugé bon de nous cantonner.

translation

We have to keep ourselves from letting our own scatter everywhere. It is good that we take rather fewer localities, but more firmly, so that we can make an impregnable block wherever we have seen fit to confine ourselves.<sup>307</sup>

Unfortunately for Gaire and Grande Clairière, as years passed, new economic opportunities were most often found outside the enclave than within it, and more French-speakers left than arrived. Gaire's experiment and town declined.<sup>308</sup>

Gravel followed a hybrid path or plan. He aggressively sought only French-speaking settlers in the beginning years. He tried to build a French base that could withstand what he knew would come. Gravel, as we have also seen, was a businessman. He ultimately determined that a continued isolationist strategy would mean economic marginalization and ultimate failure. And while Gravel's integrationist strategy could also mean a loss of French identity if the non-French faction overwhelmed and assimilated the French factor within it, he decided that, if handled

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<sup>306</sup> *Ibid.*, 11.

<sup>307</sup> "Notre Plan", *Les Cloches de Saint-Boniface*, vol.2, no 33, 18 aug 1903, 423-425.

<sup>308</sup> Already by 1911, less than 500 parishioners lived in the community. After World War I, the censuses of 1921 to 1931 both realized just over 11% of its population that declared French as its mother tongue. Only a handful of French-speakers remained through the 1930s. Census data captured the greater Oak Lake area within the Souris district. Only 61 French-speakers (58 from France, 3 from Belgium) were recorded in the censuses taken between 1921 and 1931. The census of 1891 showed the highest recorded population at Oak Lake – 723. Gaire, while continuing to oversee the community of Grande-Clairière, would include other communities farther west into Saskatchewan to accommodate the growing French populations from those he enticed from Europe. *Census of Canada, 1921; Census of Canada, 1931.*

correctly, it could also mean a French identity would survive. This was the critical first step within Gravel's strategy – create a French stronghold within a non-French region early. Then allow non-French speakers in when the time was right. This inclusion of a non-French factor would strengthen the French-speaking community. *L'Etoile de Gravelbourg* newspaper supported Gravel in his strategy as they often published articles enticing British settlers to the Gravelbourg locality. These articles, published later in the 1920s, catered exclusively to the English population who read its pages, even though the majority population of Gravelbourg at that time was French-speaking.<sup>309</sup>

We know what happened with the Gravelbourg experiment. Securing a block of land and aggressively searching for eligible French-Canadiens in the beginning, helped to create a strong French base. In this situation, utilizing a block settlement strategy made sense, and acquiring land before settlement occurred gave French settlers a head start. Gravel and the Catholic Church could not afford to slowly populate the land for fear that the land would quickly be taken up or squatted upon by a non-French contingent. Gravel was afraid that if he did not quickly populate his land with French-speakers, issues regarding land ownership would consume his administration. He would lose his advantage. He therefore exerted much of his early efforts into colonizing by shipping in 'blocks' of repatriates from the U.S. or immigrants from Québec or France. As part of the strategy, Gravel needed to control who was allocated land.

After this was accomplished, after the French 'block' was in place, Gravel implemented step two of his scheme. He looked to connect and compete with the non-French market

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<sup>309</sup> "Boys for Canadian Farms", *The Gravelbourg Star*, vol.3 no 4, 30 apr 1925, 3; "Opinion of a Schoolmaster - British Boys of the Right Type Will Succeed in Canada", *The Gravelbourg Star*, vol.3 no 4, 30 apr 1925, 6; "Radio Plays Important Part in Maintaining Communication with Canada and Old Country [of Britain] - Will Work Together on Immigration", *L'Etoile de Gravelbourg* – *The Gravelbourg Star*, vol.5 no 47, 23 jun 1927, 5; "Opportunities for Britain in Canada", *L'Etoile de Gravelbourg* – *The Gravelbourg Star*, vol.6, no 8, 22 sep 1927, 6.

economy. By arranging these steps in order, Gravel met two critical criteria. First, he gave an initial advantage to the French-speaking businessmen of Gravelbourg. Second, Gravel allowed Anglo-Protestant settlement to boost the economy of the locality.

He also recognized that with opposition came strength. True to the teachings of Le Collège Mathieu, Gravel opined that when someone in your community speaks English, you recognize them, and you understand them, and you speak their language. Then you remember your own culture and language and you speak French. Gravel's strategy worked, at least until the 1930s, and in 1927 almost all the town officials in the Town of Gravelbourg were of French ancestry.<sup>310</sup>

## Conclusion

Saskatchewan and *the Diocese of Gravelbourg* was different than the French enclaves in Manitoba. Louis-Pierre Gravel took initial direction from the church at Saint-Boniface but also determined for himself how best to create a Catholic French presence and identity in Saskatchewan. As in Manitoba, church leaders were important to both the establishment and maintenance of French-speaking enclaves in Western Canada. However, as we have seen in the Saskatchewan locality, changes were made. Leadership and control of the French-speaking communities shifted somewhat from Church to secular leadership. While the Catholic Church continued to be an integral part of a French identity and community life in Saskatchewan, other important leaders emerged.

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<sup>310</sup> The list included: Mayor - H.J. Coutu; Deputy Mayor - J. Thorson; Alderman - Wm. St. Germain, A. Doutre, A. Raymond, S. Cardinal, A. Huel; Town Clerk - G. Hebert; Chief of Police - J.F. Brillou; Supt. Waterworks, M. Grady; Supt. of Public Works - T. Tetrault; Medical Health Officer - Dr. M. Gravel. In the Rural Municipality of Gravelbourg No. 104, the list included: Reeve - L. Braconnier; Councillors- H.J. Belisle, J.G.S. Bradley, W. Arguin, H. Keller, L.S. Nugent, A. Fischman; Sec. Treas.- J.H. Fortin. "Officers of the Town & Municipality of Gravelbourg", *L'Etoile de Gravelbourg – 'The Gravelbourg Star'*, vol.6, no 3, 18 aug 1927, 4.

By the 1920s, the ranks of the Catholic Clergy in Saskatchewan were increasingly non-French in response to the changing ethnic makeup of the province. As early as 1910, the administrators of the new Diocese of Regina confirmed that only forty-three of sixty clergy in the Diocese came from a French-speaking background while previously they had made up the complete contingent of Catholic Clergy.<sup>311</sup> This transition corresponded to the developing population dynamics of the province as more non-French-speaking Catholics settled there.

The Catholic Church in Saskatchewan needed to adapt if they were to achieve their goals of seeing a Catholicism flourish in the West. It made sense then that the Catholic Church would want to shift their own clergy's ethnic makeup to be more aligned with the evolving demographic and ethnic landscape. In the growing communities of Saskatchewan, this shift in the clergy's ethnic make-up simply reflected an increase in non-French parishioners within their community's borders. This was less of an issue in Manitoba. French enclaves led by French-speaking clergy would continue there unabated. In Saskatchewan, French-Catholics and the Catholic Church could not keep the same strategy.

L'Abbé Gravel pursued a different strategy. He had the political agility to acquire fertile land in the southern section of Saskatchewan much sought after by other interest groups and individuals. His skills as a negotiator in dealings with both government and private groups and leaders was more than apparent. He used newspapers to great advantage, and his mentorship of a secular leadership group was critical in the success of the Gravelbourg locale, especially after the Catholic clergy became less monolithically French. His independence of will and natural leadership, something not prevalent within the Catholic Church's ranks, allowed him to spread his vision and authority across much of southern Saskatchewan.

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<sup>311</sup> "La Population Catholique du Nouveau Diocese de Regina", *Les Cloches de Saint-Boniface*, vol.9, no 21, 1 nov 1910, 264-5.



Gravel realized from the beginning that he must prepare a strong French community that could withstand the changing environment. He implemented a strategy that would first build a strong French population from within a base of Catholic Church support but also from culturally aware business leaders. Gravel would utilize French-speaking and French-run newspapers in addition to a strong French association (*A.C.F.C.*) to establish a connection between French farmers and the French business elites in the region.

Critical to this plan, and once a French infrastructure was established, Gravel welcomed, not avoided, non-French settlers. He advocated that, through struggle, a regional French identity would be stronger. This ideology, to struggle in order to strengthen a French identity, would become the theme of the Fransaskois in the years that followed. It would not be a little Québec, nor like French localities in rural Manitoba, but instead a French bastion fully connected to both market economy and those that drove it.

The success achieved by Gravel and Gravelbourg came from the challenge of a non-French immigrant population in the area. It came from the Catholic Church willing to adapt to a recognized difference between Saskatchewan and what was already achieved in Manitoba by appointing Gravel and allowing him to do what was best for a French identity to survive. What resulted was a shift in Saskatchewan toward a heavier reliance on its French business leaders and less on the Catholic Church for building and sustaining French-speaking communities. It was a shift to a French identity unique from Québec but also from Manitoba. Simply, Gravel and his leaders were able to group, unite and then defend themselves and their communities. Something Manitoba had done years earlier, and something Alberta would be even more challenged with than Saskatchewan.

## Chapter 5 French Settlements in Central Alberta

Like the French communities in Manitoba and Saskatchewan, the Catholic Church and French business leaders in Alberta had to decide either to defend themselves or cooperate with the overwhelming non-French majority. Mass immigration would affect Alberta's French population as much, if not more, than it did the French in the other western provinces. My examination of these dynamics will encompass French settlement in Alberta in general, with a particular focus on two central Albertan communities: one near the large urban centre of Edmonton (the community of Morinville), and a more isolated one to the east (at St. Paul).

In 1870, when Manitoba joined confederation, the French-speaking population made up approximately 50% of the total population in that new province.<sup>312</sup> By 1901, this percentage dropped significantly to less than 7%.<sup>313</sup> In 1901, Saskatchewan had a French population who was only 3% of the total population of the territory, while Alberta had a French population who was 6.2% of the total population.<sup>314</sup> By 1911, the French population of Saskatchewan was 5.2% of the total of the province, and Alberta's French population was 5.5% of the total population. These percentages remained relatively stable through to 1930. The Franco-Manitoban population remained at around 7.5% through to the end of the settlement period. The Fransaskois remained at 5.5% and Franco-Albertans would continue to drop slightly, ending at 5.2% over the same period. In 1911, there were approximately 32,000 French-speakers in Manitoba and 25,000 in Saskatchewan. In Alberta there were just over 20,000 French-speakers out of a population of

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<sup>312</sup> The Manitoba census, unlike the rest of Canada was carried out in 1870, not 1871. The 1870 census of Manitoba listed 12,228 residents of which 5452 were Catholic, 4841 were Protestant, and there were 1,935 individuals for whom no religion was given. Assuming that the Catholics were French speaking, which is an easy assumption, and assuming that a fair proportion of the 1,935 were also French speaking, this puts their percentage at, or over, 50%. *Census of Canada, 1870*.

<sup>313</sup> 16,021 French-speakers resided within the 255,211 total population. Belgians were not included in this number. *Census of The Prairie Provinces, 1936*.

<sup>314</sup> A population of 73,022 and French contingent of 4,511 was realized within a summary of the 1901 census reporting captured in the 1936 census. *Ibid*.

375,000 from that same census year. By 1930, there were only 135,000 Francophones living in the three western provinces out of a total population of 2,350,000.<sup>315</sup>

Despite these relatively low numbers, the French in the West were still hopeful of retaining their language and culture. Manitoba was able to retain French bastions within their province's capital and along the Red River through their colonizing strategies and their abilities to group the French into enclaves. The French leadership group in Saskatchewan was able to achieve similar results in southern Saskatchewan. This strategy, however, did not initially seem to work among the Franco-Albertans. While French numbers almost doubled (20,000 to 38,377) by the end of the settlement period to 1930 in Alberta, the total population of the province had increased from 375,000 to over 730,000 over that same period, dwarfing the French numbers.<sup>316</sup> A short dozen years after Alberta's entry into confederation, few homestead lands remained in the preferred French localities of central Alberta.<sup>317</sup>

### **French Settlement in Alberta**

Alberta's Catholic Church did not have a Père Gravel of Saskatchewan to foster a settlement plan. The old guard of the Catholic clergy in Alberta had, prior to the rapid growth in settlement, made strides creating French missions in Alberta. Yet they would struggle to maintain and build on these first settlements and to group French-speakers into large protected congregations. By 1905, when Alberta became a province, the pioneering clerics, who had

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<sup>315</sup> Federal Census data from 1901 to 1911 used. Between 1901 and 1911, Manitoba's population increased by 78%. In the same period, Saskatchewan and Alberta increased their population by approximately 400%. Canada's population increased from 5,371,288 to 6,508,950 while Québec increased from 1,648,898 to 2,000,697. Alberta increased by 411% (73,022 to 372,919) and Saskatchewan by 397% (91,279 to 453,508). *Census of Canada, 1901; Census of Canada, 1911*. *Le Patriote* would also publish these results. "Le Résultat du Recensement", *Le Patriote de l'Ouest*, vol.1, no 34, 26 oct 1911, 3.

<sup>316</sup> 1911 census data showed a total Alberta population of 374,663. In the 1931 census data, Alberta's population was 731,605. *Census of Canada, 1911; Census of Canada, 1931*.

<sup>317</sup> As defined by *The Dominion Lands Act, 1908* (Ottawa: Department of the Interior, 1917).

established the first Franco-Albertan communities, were either dead (Thibault, Lestanc, Grandin) or, like Lacombe, in their last years, and the Catholic Church was still struggling to establish a consistent and ongoing colonization scheme. Instead, French-speaking settlers who were able to acquire homesteads were left to themselves, spread over the vast Albertan Prairie. Only when the railway reached Edmonton in the 1890s, would the Catholic Church move beyond a missionary focus and begin a focus on French settlement. Three settlement periods can be identified; early missions, provincehood to 1920, and the later 1920s.

### Early Missions

The majority of French-speaking settlements that were established early retained a primary goal to provide missions for the Indigenous and Métis populations. While missions were established all over Alberta prior to the 1890s, the majority were located in central Alberta. Missions at Lac Ste. Anne (1843), Lac La Biche (1853), Fort Edmonton (1857), St. Albert (1861), and St. Paul des Cris (1865)<sup>318</sup> were the first significant Catholic communities established in central Alberta.

Father Jean-Baptiste Thibault, missionary priest from Québec, first arrived at Fort Edmonton in 1842. A year later, he established the first Catholic mission at Devil's Lake, later called the Mission at Lac Ste. Anne. Thibault was the first Catholic missionary to navigate the vast area of central Alberta.<sup>319</sup> The community at Lac La Biche was erected as a permanent

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<sup>318</sup> St. Paul des Cris would later be renamed Brosseau as part of that community's attempt to settle French immigrants. Émile-Joseph Legal, *Short Sketches of the History of the Catholic Churches and Missions In Central Alberta* (Winnipeg, Man.: West Canada Pub. Co., 1914).

<sup>319</sup> In actuality, the first French-Catholic missionaries to work in the area (on their way to Fort Vancouver) were Norbert Blanchett and Modeste Demers. They erected a cross and performed baptisms and marriages over a four-day period September 6-10, 1838 at Fort Edmonton. Provincial Archives of Alberta (PAA), Oblate Papers (OP), Albert Lacombe, O.M.I., *Memoirs of Father Lacombe, O.M.I.*, 24-25.

mission in 1853. In 1852 the Reverend Albert Lacombe joined the western mission.<sup>320</sup> Realizing in time that these earliest missions had less than optimal farmland and hoping to erect a Catholic mission closer to white and Métis populations, Lacombe founded St. Albert in 1861 near Fort Edmonton.

According to parish records, St. Albert would increase in importance beginning in 1871, its population soon reaching 700 to become the first Catholic Bishopric west of Saint-Boniface.<sup>321</sup> At this time its parishioners were almost exclusively French-Métis. In 1877 the curé Hippolyte Leduc assumed responsibility for the Parish of St. Albert, and within a year began welcoming French-speaking white immigrants. With these new arrivals, St. Albert became a destination for French immigrants. A grist mill was commissioned and built, and with the railway connecting Calgary to nearby Strathcona in 1891, it was hoped that settlers would now arrive with more consistency. Unfortunately, there remained challenges navigating the distance from Strathcona to St. Albert, and the few French-speakers who did arrive by train chose to settle in Strathcona or Edmonton.

In 1877, with land donated by entrepreneur Malcolm Groat, St. Joachim's Church in Edmonton was blessed as a separate mission by the St. Albert Diocese's Reverend Henri Grandin.<sup>322</sup> At this time, a large contingent of the early population at Edmonton was still French-speaking, albeit overall population numbers were very small. Of the approximately 300 people in Edmonton at the time of the 1884-1885 census, one-half were considered French.<sup>323</sup> This same

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<sup>320</sup> Donald B. Smith, *Les Francophones De L'Alberta : Aperçu Historique* (Calgary : s.n., 1984), 4.

<sup>321</sup> Legal, *Short Sketches of the History of the Catholic Churches*, 19.

<sup>322</sup> The Catholic Church had previously added this French Catholic mission at Fort Edmonton's St. Joachim Mission in 1857. After Alberta's entry into confederation, another key French-speaking parish was established in Edmonton (Immaculate Conception - 1906). Rev. J.A. Ouellette was curé in 1912. A.E. Ethier, later curé of St. Albert, was also curé for a time.

<sup>323</sup> In 1899 there were 195 French-Canadiens, 116 Irish, 175 Métis, 29 English-speakers, 16 Germans, 10 Polish, and a few others out of a total population for the City of Edmonton of around 550. "Notes locale", *L'Ouest Canadien*, vol. 2, no 5, 2 feb 1899, 3.

census of the greater Edmonton sub-district (one of three sub-districts in the territory of Alberta at the time) reported a total population of 5616.<sup>324</sup> Of these, by far the largest ethnic group was the Indigenous population (3017), followed by the Métis population (940). French immigrants would make up 10% of this early population (582). Of this immigrant population, those of French origin made up an impressive 35% of the group.<sup>325</sup> If the Métis, who were mostly French-speaking, were included with those of French origin, then a total French-speaking population came to 50% of the total immigrant population of the Edmonton District in 1884-1885.<sup>326</sup>

If one includes this Métis population and the early French immigrants into the greater St. Albert Diocese, then this Diocese could also be considered an impressive French population. By 1888, the Catholic population of the greater St. Albert Diocese reached 1000, with 126 French immigrants and 840 French Métis.<sup>327</sup> By 1894, the Diocese of St. Albert stretched south to the American border, west to British Columbia and north to the Athabasca-Mackenzie Diocese and included; twenty-eight Catholic Priests, four Secular Priests, two industrial schools, thirty-six Catholic schools, three orphanages and four hospitals to administer to its faithful.<sup>328</sup> By the 1890s there was a French and Catholic infrastructure in place in central Alberta to receive French immigrants and this new infrastructure began to replace the one that had been established to minister to Indigenous and Métis populations in the region.

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<sup>324</sup> The other two sub-districts in the Alberta territory included Calgary-Red Deer and Mcleod. *Census of Canada, 1884-1885*.

<sup>325</sup> A 5616 population count minus the Indigenous population of 3017 and the Métis population of 940 left a total immigrant population of 1659, or  $582/1659 = 35\%$ .

<sup>326</sup>  $(940 + 582) / 3017 = 50.45\%$ . *The Census of the Three Provisional Districts of the North-West Territories, 1884-1885*. identifies the Edmonton sub-district (one of three sub-districts of Alberta). Alberta, at that time, was one of three districts of the North-west Territories with Assiniboia and Saskatchewan being the others. *Ibid*.

<sup>327</sup> In all likelihood, these numbers taken from the Youville Homes Archives in St. Albert inflated the total population of Métis homesteaders. More likely, their Métis count included transients. Sister M. M. Côté, S.G.M.: "St. Albert, Cradle of the Catholic Church in Alberta," *Canadian Catholic Historical Association* 32 (1965), 29-35.

<sup>328</sup> The Diocese of Athabaska-Mackenzie was established 1862, just months after the St. Albert Diocese was established. Both dioceses were taken from land from the Archdiocese of Saint-Boniface. "Ce Que Nous Présentons Aujourd'hui", *L'Union*, vol.10, no 36, 27 jul 1927, 1.

In addition to augmenting existing French-speaking communities, new French colonies were also established beginning in the 1890s. The man responsible for organizing these French colonization efforts was Père Jean-Baptiste Morin. Morin's main focus would remain central Alberta, and he encouraged the creation of farming communities in areas surrounding the urban centre of Edmonton. His direct efforts resulted in the establishment or advancement of the majority of communities in the area that would include; Morinville (1891), Lamoureux (1875; 1891), Rivière qui Barre (1877; 1895), Beaumont (1892), Legal (1894), Vegreville (1894), Leduc (1896), Villeneuve (1899) and Lacombe (1900).<sup>329</sup>

Typical of Morin's strategy, he would often look to supplement existing French-speaking communities whenever possible, taking advantage of existing infrastructure. For example, the community at Rivière qui Barre was first a mission for the Cree and Stoney nations.<sup>330</sup> The community remained an Indigenous one until 1893 when white settlers began to arrive, albeit slowly. With a missionary priest already at this site, a small chapel would be erected in May of 1895.

### Provincehood to 1920

After becoming a province in 1905, and with an immediate influx of French-speakers and others to the area, there was hope that French immigrants would be able to take advantage of the work done by Morin and the Catholic Church. Many of the existing French-speaking communities (Métis as well as immigrant communities) were still led by French clergy, making a transition for French immigrants to these parish communities more seamless. As a result, communities like St. Paul des Cris (later called Brosseau), established first in 1865, augmented

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<sup>329</sup> Two dates in the same brackets signifies both the initial and then re-establishment attempts by Morin.

<sup>330</sup> Rivière Qui Barre would be assigned as responsibility to Reverend Father Fafard in 1877.

its population with French-speaking immigrants beginning in 1907. Communities in the St. Albert Diocese from central Alberta included: Brosseau (1865; 1907), St. Paul des Métis (1896; 1909), Spruce Grove (1900), Egg Lake (1900), St. Edouard (1906), Bonnyville (1907), Edson (1907), Moose Lake (1907), St. Vincent (1907), Lafond (1908; 1916), Fort Kent (1910), Vermillion (1910), Lac La Nonne (1911), La Corey (1911), Pickardville (1914), Ste. Lina (1914), Duvernay (1915), Thérien (1933) and Mallaig (1941).<sup>331</sup>

Figure 5-1 Central Alberta's French Communities



source: <https://quebeccultureblog.files.wordpress.com/2014/11/ab-sk7.jpg>.

Within the city of Edmonton itself, St. Joachim's Parish constituted a significant French and Catholic element to the city. Realizing this opportunity, in 1910, a juniorate school of the Oblate Order was transferred to the nearby Strathcona District. The goal of Henri Grandin, its founder, was to have "...une élite bilingue et cultivée, à tous les niveaux de la société."<sup>332</sup>

<sup>331</sup> Both the communities of Mallaig and Thérien had French settlement early after Alberta became a province but did not officially become parishes until much later. Legal, *Short Sketches of the History of the Catholic Churches*.

<sup>332</sup> Translation - "... a bilingual and cultivated elite, at all levels of society." "Faculté St. Jean: A New Faculty but an old Institution," History Trails University of Alberta Alumni, University of Alberta, accessed July 1, 2019, <https://sites.ualberta.ca/ALUMNI/history/faculties/80augfsj.htm>.



Another Catholic mission in Edmonton, the Mission at Immaculate Conception would also become home for arriving French-speakers.<sup>333</sup> Located three kilometres to the east and north of St. Joachim's on the northern tip of the main downtown core, the new Parish would be responsible for placing many French-Catholic immigrants. French-run St. Joachim's also supported the establishment of other ethnic parishes for the Italians (Santa Maria Goretti), Spanish (Our Lady of Guadalupe), Portuguese (Our Lady of Fatima) and Croatians (Nativity of Mary).<sup>334</sup>

With the establishment of the Province in 1905 and with an influx of immigration, the Catholic Church helped maintain a Franco-Catholic presence in a number of these communities into the 1920s. *Le Patriote de l'Ouest* noted in 1921 that the Catholic Church was able to retain a strong French presence amongst its Catholic faithful in many of the communities they focused on; these communities included Beaumont (98%), Bonnyville (95%), Leduc (100%), Legal (97%), St. Paul des Métis (98%), and Villeneuve (96%).<sup>335</sup> More often, however, Catholic communities in Alberta would increasingly become non-French.

## 1920s

In the 1920s, attempts were made to build on the early successes of the French in Alberta. A challenge to this goal, however, was posed by the shift in Church leadership toward a non-French clergy which meant more Catholic communities would be run by non-French-speaking priests and administrators. As well, the shortage of free land in central Alberta would mean that

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<sup>333</sup> The mission was named Sacred Heart Parish in 1913.

<sup>334</sup> "History," Sacred Heart Church of the First Peoples, accessed July 1, 2019, <http://sacredpeoples.com/history/>.

<sup>335</sup> "Archeveche D'Edmonton - Recensement de la population-catholique", *Le Patriote de l'Ouest*, vol.10, no 3, 24 mar 1920, 5.

the northern Peace River District, over 400 kilometres northwest of Edmonton, would be targeted for the settlement of new French-speaking immigrants.

Beginning in the latter part of the 1920s, French hamlets were established in the northern district, including; McLennan (1928), Tangent (1929), Guy (1931), Jean-Coté (1932), Eaglesham (1943), Marie-Reine (1950) and St-Isidore (1953). The pre-1920s communities of Falher (1912) and Donnelly (1916), stalled until the 1920s, grew with these other communities to become almost 100% French-speaking parishes.<sup>336</sup> While these communities were small in number, this further attempt at French settlement in Alberta would renew hope for a Franco-Albertan identity.

The establishment of these more northern communities exposed an inherent limitation of French community building in Alberta. The communities in central Alberta, and now those farther north, highlighted the physical expanse and geography of the prairies. French-speaking communities were not easily connected by communication or transportation systems (rail, road, or boat). This posed a challenge for the Catholic Church's infrastructure to administer to these communities. Worse, Alberta's Catholic Church and the St. Albert Archdiocese was but a distant arm of the Saint-Boniface Archdiocese, more often forgotten than focused on. Other priorities and responsibilities took away from the western Catholic Church's ability to support these distant and hard to reach communities.

The new French communities that were able to develop in the years immediately before and after Alberta became a province, did their best to sustain their French Identity and population base, but to survive they had to augment their population with non-French-speakers who changed the ethnic makeup of their communities.

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<sup>336</sup> Legal, *Short Sketches of the History of the Catholic Churches*.

Table 5-1 Census of French-Speakers in Central Alberta 1901-1936<sup>337</sup>

	1901	1911	1916	1921	1926	1931	1936
Edmonton West	18,578	58,855	86,913	95,334	106,592	126,832	139,017
French origin	no data	no data	5710	no data	no data	8413	8610
Battle River	1,490	7,300	13,908	no data	no data	24,936	30,602
French origin	no data	no data	3657	no data	no data	6,567	6815
French in all of Alberta	4,511	20,600	24,286	30,913	31,582	38,377	39,800
Alberta population	73,022	374,663	496,525	588,454	607,599	731,605	772,782

source: *Census of the Prairie Provinces, 1916; Census of Canada, 1931; Census of the Prairie Provinces, 1936*

Of the almost 25,000 people of French origin in the province of Alberta in 1916, almost 40% came from two districts in the central part of the province.<sup>338</sup> And while this concentration can be viewed as testament to the Catholic and French infrastructure and work done in these districts, it was probably more indicative of the province attracting few French immigrants elsewhere. The Battle River District that included the Parish of St. Paul des Métis and the Edmonton West District that included the outlying communities of St. Albert and Morinville contained the most concentrated French-speaking population in Alberta. However, even these localities included much larger non-French populations. Indeed, French speakers in central Alberta made up under 10% of the total population.<sup>339</sup> Both Manitoba and Saskatchewan had French enclaves with much higher concentrations of French speakers. The result was that a number of these central Alberta French-speaking communities would often assimilate to English or become stagnant.

<sup>337</sup> Population numbers were taken from Federal Census Division #11 (includes Morinville, St. Albert, Edmonton as part of 'Edmonton West') and Census Division #13 (includes Saint-Paul-des-Métis as part of 'Battle River'). Census division #11 contains the urban centre of Edmonton as well (3654 + 215 Belgians = 3869 French-speakers in Edmonton city limits). Therefore, the total 'rural' French population of Census Division #11 was arrived at by subtracting the total French population in the division (9148) and subtracting French-speakers that lived in Edmonton (3869). This number (5279) was then added to division #13 French-speakers (6606) to arrive at total French rural central Alberta of 11,885). For Edmonton West, for example, the total population numbers come from Table 6, *Census of the Prairie Provinces, 1936*, 848-895.

<sup>338</sup> *Census of the Prairie Provinces, 1916*.

<sup>339</sup> *Ibid.*

## **The Role of the French-Catholic Church in Alberta**

Like French-speakers in Manitoba and Saskatchewan, Franco-Albertans accepted the governance of the Catholic Church. But in Alberta, two significant issues challenged a continued oversight by the Catholic Church. First, the older Church leaders continued their focus on evangelization and mission work. Thus, when immigration began in earnest, Alberta's Catholic Church was less prepared to shift their mandate to include French settlement. They were challenged in how best to include settlement efforts into their mandate. This meant a delay in the shift to a non-indigenous French settlement focus. A second challenge came from direction given to the western Catholic Church by their Holy See. They were ordered to be better at instructing a growing non-French Catholic population. Alberta was especially impacted. A large number of existing French-speaking clergy and administrators would be replaced with those more representative of the ethnic communities they would be given responsibility for. What was once a French-speaking Catholic leadership and administration in parishes in central Alberta, for example, would now increasingly be replaced by Catholic priests and leaders of a non-French ethnic background. These two challenges made collecting Franco-Albertans into viable communities difficult.

In Alberta, early Church leaders evangelized and helped settle Indigenous and Métis peoples for a longer period of time than in the two other western provinces. Factors related to the 1885 Rebellion, the failure of the Métis Scrip program in providing a land base for the Métis, and the decline in work after the C.P.R. was completed meant that off-reserve Indigenous peoples and the Métis were in a precarious position by the 1890s. The Catholic Church, in this situation, extended their mission work among their off-reserve indigenous flock.

This continuation of their missionary role contributed to the lack of any sustained emphasis in attracting new French-speaking settlers. Fewer French immigrants came to Alberta and they arrived later than they did in Saskatchewan or Manitoba. The shift to focus more on French settlement, only began later in the 1890s and again after Alberta became a province. In comparison, the shift for the Catholic Church from missionary to settlement efforts in Manitoba happened at a time when French immigrants were coming into the area in the 1870s and 1880s. Manitoba's church reacted immediately to both French and non-French arrivals. It made sense for Alberta's Catholic Church to attempt a similar strategy. An emphasis on missionary work stalled this plan.

The delayed shift toward colonizing work, when it did happen, had a cumulative effect. It meant fewer resources were in place or assigned to this task, with the result that fewer French immigrants were recruited to settle. This caused a problem for the Church as they were also faced with a dearth of available homestead lands, making the concentration of French-Catholics difficult. As a result, French-speaking communities remained smaller than those of the other western provinces. A non-French population, in contrast, continued to grow unabated.

**Table 5-2 French Population Growth, Western Provinces 1871-1931**

The Prairies	1871	1901	1911	1921	1926	1931
Manitoba French	5452	16,021	31,293	40,638	42,574	47,039
Manitoba population <sup>340</sup>	12,228	255,211	461,630	610,118	639,056	700,139
Saskatchewan French		2634	23,251	42,152	47,030	50,700
Saskatchewan population		91,279	492,432	757,510	820,738	921,785
Alberta French		4,511	20,600	30,913	31,582	38,377
Alberta population		73,022	374,663	588,454	607,599	731,605
source: <i>Census of Canada, 1931.</i>						

<sup>340</sup> The Manitoba population (and French contingent) was not included in the original 1871 Census of Canada. These numbers were later extrapolated from information known by the time of the 1931 Federal Census. *Census of Canada, 1931.*

As happened in the other western provinces, the Catholic Church in Alberta would eventually shift their role from a focus on missionary work to one of colonization. The older clergy however (Thibault, Lacombe, and Grandin), resisted relinquishing their main focus on missionary work. As immigrants began to arrive, however, the younger clergy (Thérien, Morin, Ouellette, Langevin and Legal) would adapt more easily to a focus on colonization. They soon realized that the best chance for establishing successful French enclaves would be to augment the already existing rural French communities in Alberta.

**Figure 5-2 Albert Lacombe (1856-1916)**



source: PAA, Missionary Oblates, Grandin Collection at the Provincial Archives of Alberta, OB3150 - OB3571.

**Figure 5-3 Adéodat Thérien (1886-1933)**



source: PAA, Missionary Oblates, Grandin Collection at the Provincial Archives of Alberta, OB3150 - OB3571.

The colonization scheme of the Catholic Church in Alberta after 1890 had to make do with the relatively few clergy and use the existing administration in the Diocese of St. Albert to attract French-speaking immigrants to their rural communities. It was in this situation that the role of Le Prêtre-Colonisateur was born. These priests were assigned by the Church and recognized by the Federal Government as official immigration and repatriation agents. This allowed them to tap into both Church and government immigration schemes and resources in place at the time.

The first Prêtre-Colonisateur of Alberta was the Abbé Jean-Baptiste Morin who made an immediate impact in the period 1890-1898. Based out of Montréal, Morin focused on bringing French-speakers from the eastern United States and from Québec to rural Alberta. However, after Morin's term ran its course, it would be another five years before his replacement was found (due to funding and other issues). Thereafter, Les Prêtres-Colonisateurs would continue their attempts at boosting French settlement in Alberta.

**Table 5-3 Alberta's Les Prêtres-Colonisateurs / Alberta's Catholic Church Colonization Agents 1890-1917**

J.B. Morin	1890-1898	Appointed government agent in 1895. Returned to Montréal in 1898.
L. Laganière	1903-1905	Founded Brosseauville (Brosseau) in 1904.
Osias Corbeil	1905-1907	Terminated on Bishop Legal's recommendation.
J.A. Ouellette	1907-1912	Resigned in 1912 to help organize La Société de Colonisation d'Alberta. Later, he became Director of Les Bureau des Prêtres-Colonisateurs.
A.E. Ethier	1912-1913	Second curé of Morinville.
A. Normandeau	1913-1917	Wrote brochures on Alberta.
source: Painchaud, <i>"The Catholic Church and the Movement of Francophones..."</i> , 244.		

Les Prêtres-Colonisateurs in Alberta focused on specific sections of central Alberta and not the greater province. Morin had a large impact on multiple French communities. L. Laganière, Le Prêtre-Colonisateur from 1903 to 1905, would have less of an impact, as he focused his colonization efforts mostly only on what would be the Brosseau hamlet in east-central Alberta. This both helped and hurt settlement efforts. While the French-speakers in the

Brosseau hamlet happily accepted the full attention of the only official Catholic colonization agent for Alberta, other communities received no support at all. The next priest-colonizer, Osias Corbeil, accomplished even less. He was terminated by the Government on the recommendation of his superior, Bishop Legal, for a lack of results.<sup>341</sup>

Aside from Morin, there was one other Prêtre-Colonisateur who was effective. The Reverend J.A. Ouellette, who was given responsibility for colonizing a number of areas in Western Canada, would work with the Abbé Thérien in east-central Alberta, with Morin in rural central-Alberta, and even with Gravel in southern Saskatchewan. Specifically, Ouellette worked with Thérien in 1907 to found the parishes of St. Vincent, St. Edouard and Moose Lake near St. Paul des Métis. Based in Montréal, Ouellette would seldom come west without bringing French-Canadiens with him.<sup>342</sup>

These efforts to increase French-Catholic settlement in Alberta by Les Prêtres-Colonisateurs were hampered in the 1920s when French clergy began to be replaced with non-French clergy. Up until this point almost all the Catholic parishes in Alberta were administered by French-speaking curés who proved invaluable in aiding the Les Prêtres-Colonisateurs. In 1920, when the Irish Henry Joseph O'Leary was assigned the Edmonton Archdiocese to replace the French-born Emile Joseph Legal, he already knew his residing curés were overwhelmingly of French origin and his Catholic parishes were not. By that time, 64 of 98 Catholic priests residing in Alberta's communities were French-speaking. O'Leary immediately put a plan in place to change this. During O'Leary's tenure, the number of French-speaking curés dropped to 16 of 98 and the number of English-speaking priests increased to 64 by 1931.<sup>343</sup> This was a significant

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<sup>341</sup> Painchaud, *"The Catholic Church and the Movement of Francophones..."*, 244.

<sup>342</sup> "Notes Locales", *Le Courrier de l'Ouest*, vol.X, no 16, 23 jan 1908, 6.

<sup>343</sup> The majority of the remainder of residing Catholic priests were either Ruthenian or German.



blow to the French-speaking and French-run communities in central Alberta who were heavily reliant on the Catholic Church. In the aftermath of this change, French communities in Alberta, many of which had remained small and isolated, would increasingly have to rely on non-Church leaders.

### **The Role of Alberta's French Businessmen**

The sponsorship of French-speaking communities in central Alberta was also taken up by business leaders. And while their focus was on business, some attempted to help rural Franco-Albertan communities survive. Influential French-speaking leaders in central Alberta in these first decades included: MM. Wilfrid Gariépy, Prosper Edmond Lessard, Stanislas Larue and Joseph Henry (J.H.) Picard.<sup>344</sup>

Gariépy was a businessman first. He specialized in real estate, inheriting much of his business acumen and wealth from his father Joseph, one of Alberta's first influential French businessmen. By the age of 21, and before the turn of the twentieth-century, the younger Gariépy already owned offices and properties in Edmonton, especially along the flourishing Jasper Avenue. He was responsible for the construction of Gariépy Block on Jasper Avenue in 1898, and this was where he owned a number of properties. He also partnered with P.E. Lessard to open a retail store in the small village of Morinville that outfitted French gold-rush seekers on their journey north.<sup>345</sup> Gariépy used his success to support French business ventures, he remained active in French issues, and he encouraged French-speakers to become active community members.

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<sup>344</sup> "Ce Que Nous Présentons Aujourd'hui", *L'Union*, vol.10, no 36, 27 jul 1927, 1. See also Legal, *Short Sketches of the History of the Catholic Churches*.

<sup>345</sup> The retail store was opened in 1901.

Gariépy would be appointed Alberta's Minister of Municipal Affairs in 1913 and he became the first Franco-Catholic individual to hold a government portfolio west of Manitoba. Educated as a lawyer, Gariépy was also senior partner in his own law firm, representing, among other issues, French small business and grass roots interests. Among his larger clients, he represented the Franco-Canadien Mortgage & Loan Company. Gariépy also sat as Alderman for the City of Edmonton between 1906 and 1910 and was an executive member of both *La Société Saint-Jean-Baptiste* and *La Société Les Chevaliers du Colomb*, two of the few successful French associations in the province at the time.<sup>346</sup> Gariépy and another French business leader, J.H. Picard, also served as presidents of the Edmonton Chamber of Commerce.

Figure 5-4 Gariépy Block – Jasper Avenue and 100 Street, circa 1912



source: City of Edmonton Archives (EA), 10-208.

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<sup>346</sup> Gariépy was also President of *L'Association Liberal*, *Le Club Canadien*, and *L'Association French Canadien*. He was also member of the Legislative Assembly (1913-1921), Minister of Municipal Affairs (1913-1918) and Provincial Secretary (1918-1921). He moved back to Québec in 1921.

J.H. Picard moved to Edmonton from Québec in 1887 and focused his business portfolio on contracting and construction. He was a director of the Jasper Coal Mine Company, Edmonton Portland Cement Company, and the Arrow Lake Lands Company. Picard also retained a majority interest in the Franco-Canadien Mortgage & Loan Company that provided financial support to arriving French-Canadiens. He, like Gariépy, owned significant sections of the Edmonton and area's real estate market. Picard likewise did his civic duty and was elected as Alderman of Edmonton City Council, serving from 1893 to 1906.

Stanislaus Larue arrived in Edmonton in 1883, forming a partnership in 1889 with Picard that would corner large portions of the land surveying market. Larue held many investment properties and thus many of the prominent real estate properties in Edmonton. Larue made his fortune handling and owning farming, timber and coal lands in British Columbia, Alberta and Saskatchewan.<sup>347</sup> Larue was able to help the smaller French communities and farmers by providing guidance and financial support. From these, and other French-speaking leaders, the French-speaking communities in central Alberta had strong patrons to look after their interests. An article published in *L'Ouest Canadien* newspaper in 1898 celebrated the work these men and others had done for the French-speaking communities in central Alberta.<sup>348</sup>

Some Franco-Albertan communities also received support from French-language newspapers which promoted a sense of Franco-Albertan identity and connected them with other French-speakers in the province. With an aggressive mandate to secure their own business goals, these newspapermen did what they could to encourage French-speakers to unite and promote the French language in Alberta.

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<sup>347</sup> Legal, *Short Sketches of the History of the Catholic Churches*, 170.

<sup>348</sup> "Correspondence", *L'Ouest Canadien*, vol.1, no 10, 7 apr 1898, 3.

In 1911, the publisher of Morinville's newspaper *Le Progrès*, Wilfrid Gariépy, wrote an article 'Le Morinville de Demain'.<sup>349</sup> Published only in French, the article was meant to entice his compatriots to settle the Morinville area. Gariépy understood that publishing this article might upset some of his non-French readership and therefore business relationships in Edmonton. He published it nonetheless, promoting the fertile farmland and recently discovered coal as reasons for French-speakers to apply for homesteads. Gariépy called the Morinville area the "...futur centre industriel de premier ordre", arguing that those French immigrants considering a move to Morinville should take a long look at the business opportunities "...maintenant en plaçant leurs capitaux sur de si belles perspectives."<sup>350</sup>

Before Gariépy's publishing venture in Morinville, the first significant French-language newspaper to promote both the French language and business in Alberta was *L'Ouest Canadien*. From the beginning of this newspaper in 1898, its first and only editor was Frederic Villeneuve who arrived in Alberta in 1897. He immediately took up office space in downtown Edmonton opening a law office and a newspaper. Villeneuve would soon open an office in St. Albert, which he would visit every Saturday working toward bettering the Francophone community there.

Villeneuve ran a column 'Ca et La' focused on raising awareness of settlement opportunities for French-speakers. He emphasized the work done by the Abbé Morin who became the role model for Villeneuve, and he adopted Morin's mission of settling French immigrants in central Alberta. 'Ca et La' regularly noted either the arrival of Morin with settlers to be placed in the district or that Morin was once again leaving for the eastern United States to look for more colonists. Morin would often offer choice of land to would-be settlers in French

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<sup>349</sup> "Le Morinville de Demain", *Le Progrès*, vol.3, no 32, 10 oct 1911, 1.

<sup>350</sup> Translations – "...future first-rate industrial centre"; "... now by placing their capital on such beautiful prospects." Ibid.

communities in and near Morinville, and Villeneuve would publicize these opportunities.<sup>351</sup>

Morin's work, with the support of Villeneuve and *L'Ouest Canadien* newspaper, soon produced a network of French communities which included: Beaumont, Morninville, Fort Saskatchewan, Stony Plain, and what would later be called Villeneuve in honor of his work.

Rodolphe Laplante, editor of the *La Survivance* Newspaper, summarized the situation in 1929 when he wrote about the challenges French-speakers and their leaders had faced in Alberta.

Ici en Alberta les distances sont grandes et la population de langue française peu nombreuse. Et ce groupe restreint est de plus divisé, comme partout ailleurs. La situation, nous le déclarons tout de suite, n'est pas pire qu'ailleurs mais l'inconvénient de cette fragmentation s'accroît du fait de notre petit nombre. Il y a des factions.

translation

Here in Alberta the distances are great, and the population of French is few. And this restricted group is moreover divided, as everywhere else. The situation, as we say, is not worse than elsewhere, but the disadvantage of this fragmentation is accentuated because of our small number. There are factions.<sup>352</sup>

In consideration of these challenges, Laplante berated those French-speakers who protected their own individual pursuits over that of the greater French population. Called by Laplante "la famille agrandie,"<sup>353</sup> he argued that French-speakers in Alberta needed first to look to and support their own Parish and each other, and then continue by reaching out to others in the district and province. Laplante, frustrated with failed attempts of constructing a cohesive network of Franco-Albertan communities pled for unity in overcoming their challenges. "Nous fraction nous [sp] nos forces, et par conséquent nous nous affaiblissons, pour la malheur de notre race."<sup>354</sup>

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<sup>351</sup> "Ca et La", *L'Ouest Canadien*, vol.1, no 10, 7 apr 1898, 3.

<sup>352</sup> Laplante wrote in *L'Union* before establishing his own newspaper. *L'Union*, vol.11, no 38, 12 jul 1928, 1.

<sup>353</sup> Translation – "the enlarged family". Ibid.

<sup>354</sup> Translation - "We split our strength, and therefore we weaken ourselves for the misfortune of our race." Ibid.

It is important, however, not to paint too bleak a picture implied by overall population figures. Smaller French-speaking communities could still preserve a sense of their French culture in Alberta.<sup>355</sup> On June 16, 1898, *L'Ouest Canadien* newspaper, reporting on the annual Saint-Jean-Baptiste celebration in Morinville, exhorted the French to show up in force to express to the other ethnic groups in Alberta that they were strong. "Rendons-nous en foule et montrons aux autres nationalités [sp] que l'union règne parmi nous; et l'union c'est la force."<sup>356</sup>

By the end of the 1920s, however, there were fewer thriving French parishes and communities than these leaders would have liked. While southern Alberta was void of any significant French communities, in the Peace River District to the North, French communities were beginning to be established. In central Alberta, some communities had more success than others. Two of these French enclaves, Morinville and St. Paul des Métis, are worth examining to highlight both the challenges and successes of French-speakers in the Alberta province.

### **Alberta's Central Communities**

#### Morinville and area

In 1891, Bishop Vital Grandin of the St. Albert Diocese decided to help strengthen the Catholic position in central Alberta area by bringing in as many French-Canadiens as possible. He assigned the Abbé Jean-Baptiste Morin from Montréal to this task. Within weeks, Morin,

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<sup>355</sup> Historian Denise Stocco argues this point in *French-Canadian Colonization In Alberta* (Edmonton, Alta.: Provincial Museum and Archives of Alberta, 1973).

<sup>356</sup> Translation - "Let us show the crowd and other nationalities that unity prevails among us and that this union is our strength." "Notes Locales", *L'Ouest Canadien*, vol.1, no 15, 16 jun 1898, 3.

called by many the first true missionary-colonizer of Alberta, would arrive from the east with the first contingent of sixty settlers.<sup>357</sup>

Leaving Montréal on March 17 by railway, Morin and his entourage arrived in Calgary on March 24. From Calgary, and without the railway completed to Strathcona, they would rent horses and carriages to take them the rest of the way.<sup>358</sup> To help with the journey, the caravan was divided into two groups. Behind the caravans, purchased farm implements and cattle from Calgary followed. When they arrived at Red Deer, they were met with fresh supplies and horses, and guides arranged by Grandin to take them the rest of the way. Morin and his colonists reached the Sturgeon River at St. Albert on April 6. In a letter written some months later, Morin recalled the momentous arrival as a triumphant one, with a large reception at the door of the cathedral, replete with the ringing of bells. Morin remembered their emotions as they arrived late in the day, and as the "...sun flashed its last rays blanketing the town in a flow of light; my colonists, at that moment, thought they were back in a small town of the province of Québec."<sup>359</sup>

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<sup>357</sup> Many versions of this first 'trek' made by Morin can be found in newspapers and local history sources. Parts of this specific recollection are found in *L'Union* newspapers' 1927 editions. "Nos Faites et Nos Gestes – Morinville", *L'Union*, vol.10, no 43-45, 18 aug 1927 – 22 sept 1927.

<sup>358</sup> A trunk line of the Canadian Pacific Railway was already completed to Red Deer, but Morin's colonists refused to pay the high price. The train would be completed to Edmonton in August that same year.

<sup>359</sup> Alice Trottier, *Faith and Tenacity: History of Morinville 1891-1991* (Morinville, Alberta: Saint-Jean-Baptiste Parish, 1991), 22.

Figure 5-5 L'Abbé Jean-Baptiste Morin, circa 1885



source: letter from L'abbé Morin to unknown, 1885, PAA, Missionnaires Oblats - Collection Grandin, OB8699.

M. Paul Auvé and M. Fleury Perron, two of the first white pioneers to settle in the Morinville area, helped acquaint the new colonists with their surroundings.<sup>360</sup> Morin intended to settle this first group at Stony Plain, but Auvé, speaking of the rich soil at Grand Brûlé à Lac des Oeufs, thirty-four kilometres north of Edmonton, encouraged them to settle there instead. Morin agreed. This first group of settlers worked on building houses that spring and early summer.<sup>361</sup> The name of the community was soon changed from Grand Brûlé to Morinville in honor of their founding Father.

Instead of remaining to help settle these first colonists, Morin immediately returned east to continue his colonizing efforts. He made two more trips in 1891, focusing on bringing settlers from Québec and the northeastern United States. He would make another five trips to Morinville

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<sup>360</sup> The first white men to the area also included: the Lamoureux brothers, M. Boulet, David and Louis Chevigny, Leon Harnois, M. Juneau, G. Gagnon, L. Beuapré, A. Arcand and J. Latulippe. *Ibid.*, 22-23, 135.

<sup>361</sup> Some of the original 'trekkers' accompanying Morin included: Noël & Philomène Boissonnault, Norbert and Delima Houle, Uldère Labbé, Charles Lemire and Dieudonne Tellier.



in 1892.<sup>362</sup> That year 206 settlers arrived as a result of Morin's efforts. By October 1893, Morin had made eleven trips, and the population of Morinville and surrounding area reached 461. Morin believed that it was critically important to saturate the settlement area of central Alberta with French-speakers as quickly as possible. "Il veut que les Canadiens[-Français] ne se perdent pas parmi ceux qui ne parlent pas leur langue."<sup>363</sup> In support of Morin's efforts, the newly formed colonizing association *La Société de Colonisation du District d'Edmonton* helped place new settlers in the area. By January 1899, Morin boasted to Grandin that he and *La Société* were responsible for placing 620 French-speaking families in Edmonton, St. Albert, Morinville, Fort Saskatchewan, Beaumont, Villeneuve, Stony Plain, Vegreville and Rivière qui Barre. *L'Ouest Canadien* newspaper suggested Morin's efforts had resulted in the settlement of 800 families.<sup>364</sup>

Morinville and area residents took advantage of the rich soil. *L'Ouest Canadien* newspaper in 1898 announced: "La meilleure mine d'or est un champ soumis à une culture intelligente [de la ferme]."<sup>365</sup> The area became a prosperous farming community, and by 1898, residents in the area owned 12,000 acres of land, producing over 500,000 bushels of grains annually. According to *L'Ouest Canadien* this translated into half a million dollars revenue from the previous year's annual exports.<sup>366</sup>

The Catholic Church arrived in the area with the first settlers, and in 1894, a plot of land was given by the Oblates to the Parish's first residing curé, the Abbé Harnois, to build a house

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<sup>362</sup> The prominent Gariépy family was among this group of new colonists. A larger majority of French-speakers from Québec would choose to migrate to Edmonton whereas the majority of rural Alberta would collect from French-speakers from Europe and the north-eastern United States.

<sup>363</sup> Translation – "He wants [French]-Canadiens not to get lost among those who don't speak their language." "Paroisse de Morinville", *L'Union*. Vol.10, no 'special', 1 jul 1927, 3.

<sup>364</sup> "Ca et La", *L'Ouest Canadien*, vol.1, no 10, 7 apr 1898, 3.

<sup>365</sup> Translation - "The best gold mine is a field subject to an intelligent [farm] culture.", "Correspondences", *L'Ouest Canadien*, vol.1, no 10, 7 apr 1898, 1.

<sup>366</sup> These same farmers owned 2000 horses, 5000 cattle, almost 2500 sheep, almost 4000 pigs and approximately 50,000 poultry. Value of all farms for 1898 included 500,000 bushels of grain of which 75% was wheat (\$600,000). Farms also produced cattle and horses (\$400,000), pigs (\$250,000), 5,000 tons of hay (\$75,000), dairy (\$25,000), and miscellaneous (\$15,000). "Correspondences", *L'Ouest Canadien*, vol.1. no 51, 2 feb 1899, 1-2.

and second floor chapel. When the Abbé Ethier later assumed responsibility for the Parish, he added a convent (1904), a larger church (1908) and a boarding school for young girls (1909). The curé Pilon, who took over the Parish in 1921, would add to the Church an organ, bells, and other signs of a successful parish community. The Catholic Church also took over the educational responsibilities of the Morinville district. Beginning in 1892, Ms. Delima Deschenes taught in the curé Harnois' second floor chapel. In 1904, *Les Soeurs de Jesus*, extending their work from St. Albert, opened a convent and assumed responsibility for teaching at Morinville. By 1927, there were 23 nuns serving in the community.

From this base, residents would build their community infrastructure. A few of these early establishments and more prominent businessmen included: Morinville Hardware (1910; Th. Knudson from St. Boniface via Rivière qui Barre), Morinville Garage (1920; H. Cormier from St-Angéle de Laval, PQ in 1903), Barber (J.E. Brault from county Wolf, PQ. He arrived in 1912 and married L. Girard of Beaumont), Auto Salesmen (1907; J.H. Perras from county Laprairie, PQ. Perras arrived west in 1890 and was in Morinville since 1907), General Merchant (T. Chalifoux from Ste. Rose du Laval, PQ via Beaumont in 1905 and in Morinville since 1920. Chalifoux had 18 children), Alberta Hotel (Ed Comeau from Kansas in 1894), Salon de Rafrachissements (1917; I.D. Coté from Drummondville, PQ via Ste. Anne des Chênes, Manitoba in 1902), and celebrated Lawyer & Notary (Omer St. Germain).<sup>367</sup>

### St. Paul des Métis and area

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<sup>367</sup> In 1927 there were two financial institutions, a doctor, a lawyer, six retail/grocery/hardware stores, a pharmacy, two hotels, a bakery, two garages, three agricultural machinery agencies and five warehouses for grain shipment. Four coal mines continued to be in operation. The majority of this article and from above review of Morinville was extracted from the history of Morinville published by the initiative of their *cércele de l'A.C.F.A.*, in "Action Catholique" of Québec, edition of May 7, 1927. "Paroisse de Morinville", *L'Union*. Vol.10, no 'special', 1 jul 1927, 3.

St. Paul des Métis,<sup>368</sup> a French-Métis reserve, was established in 1896 for the destitute Métis of the North-West Territories. When the Catholic Church, which administered the reserve, began to despair that the Métis would not become a stable farming community, it made a deal with the Federal government in 1909 to open the reserve to general settlement, more particularly French settlers. Under a cloak of secrecy to allow the Church to make arrangements, French-Canadiens from Québec were collected and told to wait outside the Edmonton Lands Agents' Office. Then, when the reserve was officially opened to outside settlement, these French-Canadian applicants were assigned plots of land the morning of April 10, 1909.<sup>369</sup>

By that time there already existed a church, presbytery, convent and a boarding school on the reserve. By the end of May 1909, just over a month after the community was formally opened for homesteading, landowners already enjoyed their divided lots with connecting streets. New flour and sawmills were immediately erected. That same summer, a hotel, post office, hiring stable, farming machinery agency, blacksmith shop, and a butchery also appeared. The existing mission was immediately transformed. The 'Reserve of St. Paul des Métis' was no more. With the community's infrastructure established, colonizing work could now be done to add to its existing community. Le Prêtre-Colonisateur l'Abbé J.A. Ouellette, as well as resident curé and founder l'Abbé Adéodat Thérien, O.M.I., took advantage of this exposure in both Canadian and American markets, working with both colonizing groups from Québec and the United States. Outside the village, Thérien and Ouellette would, like Morin before them, look to

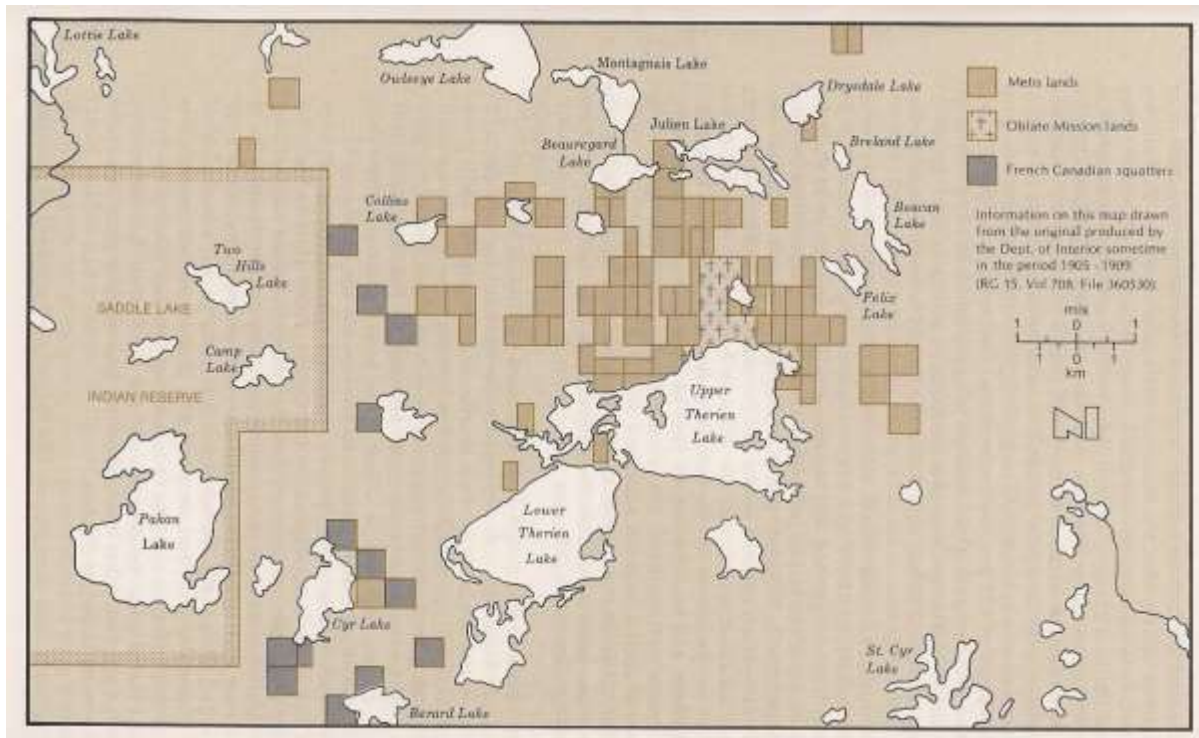
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<sup>368</sup> St. Paul des Métis remained the legal name of the village until 1929, when the name was changed simply to St. Paul. "Drop 'Des Metis' Now", *St. Paul Journal*, 29 aug 1929, vol.4, no 52, 1.

<sup>369</sup> St. Albert Diocese Bishop Emile Legal gave the official direction to the government to dissolve the lease. Letter from applicants Short, Cross, Biggar & Cowan to Frank Oliver, 2 March 1909, Library and Archives Canada (LAC), RG 15, Vol. 708, File 360530.

repeat the strategy of saturating the area with French-speakers. Communities would quickly become established in an area surrounding St. Paul des Métis.

Figure 5-6 Land Disposition St. Paul des Métis in 1909 on the Eve of the Public Opening of the Reserve



source: LAC, RG 15, Vol. 708, File 360530.

In the following years, the community and area would grow. The village at St. Paul des Métis was legally established in June 1912, and the first council was elected the following July. The community's municipal councillors, all French-speaking, and along with their residing curés, also became their business leaders. Some of these more influential leaders were: Ed Brosseau and J.E. Primeau (1914), Moise Duquette (1915-1916, 1922), Pierre Charron (1915-1916, 1921-1922), Sylvestre Cyr (1915, 1921-1922), Wilfrid Pepin (1924-1927), J.W. Beaudry (1924-1927).

J.E. Primeau was born in the county of Chateauguay, Québec in 1889, moving to St. Paul des Métis on the recommendation of the Honorable P.E. Lessard in 1909. An early pioneer to the area, Primeau would later open his own grocery store in St. Paul des Métis in 1920. He also

added a general store which he purchased from E. Brosseau, making Primeau a fixture in this sector of the economy. Primeau would later add to his community portfolio, becoming the district's School Commissioner and President of two of the French culture associations in the area, *La Ligue du Sacré-Cœur* and *l'Association Catholique Française de l'Alberta*. Primeau, who also spent time as member of the Chamber of Commerce of St. Paul des Métis, often called the district in which he lived "...le petite province de Québec."<sup>370</sup>

Like Primeau, Furniture salesman and French businessman Sylvestre Cyr arrived with the first French immigrants in 1909. He immediately became President of the newly formed *La Société Saint-Jean-Baptiste*, became a church councillor, and spent time as president of the local chamber of commerce. According to the *St. Paul Journal*, Cyr was a "Homme estime de tous. Travaille au progrès de St-Paul."<sup>371</sup>

Pierre Charron, born in the county of Timiscounta, Québec in 1874, also arrived with the first group of settlers in 1909. Upon his arrival, he claimed over 2,200 acres of land, eventually farming almost half of it. He would occupy a seat on the town council and was a driving force behind the community for years. According to the *St. Paul Journal*, his was "...une des braves familles de St-Paul."<sup>372</sup>

An important step to grow the community was to get a railway connection to Edmonton. The Canadian National Railway was by 1920 only sixty miles away at Vegreville, and strenuous efforts were made by St. Paul des Métis' business leaders to connect their community to the line. In November 1920 the railway finally reached the village. As proof of the railway's immediate

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<sup>370</sup> A *L'Union* special edition newspaper on Alberta's rural communities was produced. "Village de Saint-Paul / Paroisse de St-Paul", *L'Union*. Vol.10, no 'special', 1 July 1927, 4-5.

<sup>371</sup> Translation - "Man esteemed by all. He worked for the progress of St. Paul [des Métis]." Ibid.

<sup>372</sup> Translation - "...one of the brave families of St. Paul [des Métis]." Ibid.

impact, that same autumn the community added three grain elevators, with two more built soon after. A further extension of railway connections to Saskatchewan would be considered in 1928.<sup>373</sup>

With the railway in place, the community and area's infrastructure were complete. General stores and farming supply businesses combined with churches, schools, medical facilities and financial institutions to create a thriving community.<sup>374</sup> In 1922, the financial worth of St. Paul was an estimated \$150,000, and there were good access roads connecting St. Paul des Métis to at least twenty-four neighboring communities.<sup>375</sup> Fish from Cold Lake would be brought to St. Paul des Métis for shipping. Beaver River and Moose Lake would freight timber. And the grain elevators in St. Paul des Métis would take shipments continuously throughout the day. Both the communities at Morinville and St. Paul des Métis were, by the 1920s, thriving Franco-Albertan communities with church and business support.

The challenge for these French communities was now how they would interact with the non-French majority that surrounded them. Morinville, being much closer to the urban and non-French centre of Edmonton, had experienced this from the outset. St. Paul des Métis was different. Farther away from Edmonton, it was able to isolate itself early on, and to build up its French base. But the non-French majority arrived, nonetheless. With the arrival of the railway,

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<sup>373</sup> A proposed line for the C.N.R. in Alberta in 1928, the new line from Elk Point (east of St. Paul) would continue, where it would eventually connect with a westward growing C.N.R. line from Saskatchewan. The last branch of the first line was completed from Spedden to St. Paul des Métis in 1920. "New C.N.R. Lines for Alberta", *L'Union*, vol.3, no 12, 24 mar 1927, 3, 18.

<sup>374</sup> There existed nine general stores, four blacksmiths, three real estate offices, three livery barns, four doctors, five lawyers, four lumber yards, a flour mill, two churches, five schools, five restaurants, six cattle buyers, two banks, two harness shops, two veterinary surgeons, two dentists, three barbers, two pool rooms, two resident Alberta Provincial police officers, one fire hall, one hospital, one phone system, and the Agricultural Society of St. Paul des Métis.

<sup>375</sup> Some of these hamlet communities included Boyne Lake, Lafond, Brosseau, Abilene, Rife, Bonnyville, Beaver River, Glendon, St. Edouard, Lake Ellen, Cork, Shamrock Valley, Ferguson Flats, Columbine, Owl's Eye Lake, St. Vincent, Dennisville, Thérien, Ste. Lina, Flat Lake, Cold Lake, Elk Point, Bordenave and Malloy.

French community leaders realized that, in order to continue to grow, they would need to incorporate the non-French settlers into their communities.

Between 1909 and 1912, the French-speaking population made up 95% of the total population of the town of St. Paul des Métis. While these percentages would decline through the settlement period and beyond, the community remained a successful French-speaking community, at least into the 1930s.<sup>376</sup> The population figures highlight these dynamics. While the overall French-speaking population did not change, the non-French-speaking population steadily increased (see Table 5.4).<sup>377</sup>

**Table 5-4 St. Paul des Métis and area French Populations 1911-1931**<sup>378</sup>

	County of St. Paul des Métis			Town of St. Paul des Métis French ethnic origin		
	French	Total		French	total	
1911				143	150	95.3%
1921	1,726	5,662	30.4%	678	869	78.0%
1931	2,229	8,269	26.9%	673	938	71.7%
source: <i>Census of Canada, 1931</i>						

Realizing this shift in the area’s ethnic make-up, French-speaking business leaders looked for ways to incorporate the non-French population into their calculations.

With support from *The St. Paul Journal* (to be discussed in the next chapter) and its French leadership group of both church and business, the community seemed to have responded positively to the influx of the non-French population. *L’Union* from Edmonton, reporting on the situation at St. Paul des Métis, corroborated this claim. “Il faut dire que tous vivent [à St. Paul

<sup>376</sup> Edmund A. Aunger, *The French-Speaking Population in Alberta: Introduction to a Population Survey in St. Paul, Alberta* (Edmonton: Faculté Saint-Jean, University of Alberta, 1989), 12.

<sup>377</sup> By 1927, the population of the town, according to *L’Union* newspaper, was 1100, of which 70% were French-Canadian, the rest speaking English. The population numbers reported by *L’Union* were higher than the census data used in table above. “Village de Saint-Paul / Paroisse de St-Paul; Histoire du Développement Canadien-Français du Village Depuis sa Fondation”, *L’Union*, vol.10, no ‘special’, 1 jul 1927, 4-5.

<sup>378</sup> Data from County #19 of 1931 Federal Census of Canada was used as it best represents the borders of the county of St. Paul des Métis. *Census of Canada, 1931*.

des Métis] dans la plus parfaite harmonie, et aucune dissension de race n'a encore apparu dans le village.”<sup>379</sup> With an apparent ‘harmony’ however, came challenges.

In 1920, *Le Patriote de l'Ouest* of Saskatchewan published an article ‘Un Avant-Poste Albertain’, explaining that the village of St. Paul des Métis and neighboring French communities were easily passed over when travelling through the territory; that there was nothing in east central Alberta that resembled organized life, a town, or collection of like-minded people of French origin. They wrote; “Comme on n'entend d'on [sp] ne voit partout que de l'anglais, il est assez naturel de se faire impression qu'il n'y a que cela dans l'Ouest.”<sup>380</sup> Yet, the article continued, there were French-speakers in this part of the country. Land was occupied by French-Canadiens, and however dispersed they were, they still connected to their community. According to the article, the Catholic Parish was also key to this connection. French-speakers were therefore connected through farming and the soil and through the Church. This was the oft repeated argument for what was necessary if a French identity in Alberta was to survive; that a Catholic faith and a fertile soil must drive the continued evolution of its French-speakers. With this in mind, the article emphasized that a French culture and infrastructure must continue to grow in order to better establish these French-Catholic farmers in east-central Alberta. The article concluded that St. Paul des Métis was in fact successful, and that;

...cette belle colonie vit fortement de l'esprit Catholique et Français. Toute la population est à l'église le dimanche et ne craint pas les longs trajets pour s'y rendre, les communions sont nombreuses même sur semaine; un même élan de foi fait vibrer les âmes et unit les cœurs: on se croirait transporté dans l'une des plus édifiantes paroisses du vieux Québec.

translation

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<sup>379</sup> Translation - “It must be said that all live [at St. Paul des Métis] in the most perfect harmony, and no race dissension has yet appeared in the village.” “Village de Saint-Paul / Paroisse de St-Paul; Histoire du Développement Canadien-Français du Village Depuis sa Fondation”, *L'Union*, vol.10, no ‘special’, 1 jul 1927, 4.

<sup>380</sup> Translation - “Given that you can only see English-speakers everywhere, it is natural enough to feel that there is only that in the West.” “Un avant-poste albertain”, *Le Patriote de l'Ouest*, vol.10, no 24, 18 aug 1920, 1.



...this beautiful colony lives strongly of the Catholic and French spirit. The whole population is in the Church on Sundays and is not afraid of long journeys to get there, communions are numerous even on weekdays; A single thrust of faith makes the souls vibrate and unites the hearts: one feels transported in one of the most edifying parishes of old Québec.<sup>381</sup>

At Morinville, a blending of the French and English population happened much earlier, making it more difficult for the French faction to survive. With Edmonton's large English-speaking population so close to Morinville, the strategy of building a French foothold and a thriving business community simultaneously was difficult, even though French business leaders from Edmonton did what they could in support. We have seen how Gariépy and Villeneuve and others tried. The Catholic Church and other French leaders, however, needed a more inclusive strategy from the outset. Accepting that a non-French factor was already entrenched in their community, both the Church and business leaders included non-French populations in celebrations, events, and other social events. They argued that it mattered not to the French farmer that his neighbor was not French. German-speakers, for example, were welcomed to participate in community functions. From the establishment of the Parish in 1891, and at midnight mass each year, German songs were often included in the program.<sup>382</sup> In another example, the annual pilgrimage to Morinville's cemetery to honor the area's pioneers was celebrated with sermons in English and German, as well as French.<sup>383</sup> Even with this recognition of other ethnic groups, however, Morinville was able to maintain its French orientation, and as late as 1927 all civil administrators of the town were of French origin. These included: Mayor L.T. Chalifoux and his councillors Ch. Lajoie, H. Cormier, W. Beaupre, G. Ricard and A. Roy.<sup>384</sup>

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<sup>381</sup> Ibid.

<sup>382</sup> "Morinville", *La Survivance*, vol.1, no 8, 3 jan 1929, 2.

<sup>383</sup> "Morinville – Pèlerinage", *L'Union*, vol.10, no 50, 6 oct 1929, 4. In the parish in 1927 there were 245 French-Canadian families and 40 families of German origin, making a total of 1,160 Catholics. 600 Catholics lived in the village. "Paroisse de Morinville", *L'Union*, vol.10, no 'special', 1 jul 1927, 3.

<sup>384</sup> "Paroisse de Morinville", *Ibid.*, 6.

## Conclusion

The story of the Saint-Paul-des-Métis experiment illustrates the main themes of this and previous chapters. It illustrates the Catholic Church's attempts to evangelize the native populations of the West as well as recognize a shifting mandate from missionary to colonizing work. The shift to focus on French-Catholic settlement was necessary at a time when mass immigration west changed the rules. This story is not a singular one. The St. Paul des Métis experiment parallels many other French-speaking communities in western Canada; how pioneer settlers were more often first Métis French-speakers, only to be added to or replaced by a white French-Catholic contingent.<sup>385</sup> The Catholic Church was at the center of both this initial Métis settlement (through their missionary work) and subsequent white colonization efforts.

The St. Paul des Métis story also illustrates the efforts made, and lengths taken, to group French-speakers into communities in Alberta. In Manitoba, along the Red River, the Catholic Church had success creating and sustaining a Franco-Western infrastructure at the onset of mass immigration. In Saskatchewan, a French bastion was carved out during the period of mass immigration at the beginning of provincehood. Alberta, while similar, was a harder story.

With the Catholic Church focusing on missionary work with both Indigenous and Métis groups, and with fewer French immigrants arriving in Alberta in the early settlement period, the Church was understandably slower to shift their focus from missionary to settlement work. It would not be until the 1890s that the Catholic Church would assign official French immigration agents, and slowly begin this process. With limited resources assigned this task, Les Prêtres-Colonisateurs were charged with the responsibility to colonize this area of the West with French

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<sup>385</sup> Of the communities I have reviewed, a Métis base began at: St. Paul des Métis, Grande Clairière, Saint-Joseph, and Saint-Jean-Baptiste. They were not the first inhabitants of: Morinville, Letellier, Gravelbourg (nor other southern Saskatchewan French communities I have reviewed).

immigrants. From these efforts, and from the work of the Abbé Morin and Abbé Ouellette and others, some communities in central and rural Alberta were added to other existing French villages. However, unlike in Manitoba where the Catholic Church had, from the outset, realized the necessity of French bastions along the Red River, and in Saskatchewan where a similar plan was put in place, at least in the beginning, Alberta's French colonization was delayed.

This delay did a couple things. First, it made it difficult to establish French strongholds in the province. Outnumbered by non-French-speakers, it was difficult for the late arriving French immigrants to group together into communities already established. Land was simply less available in preferred French-speaking areas. More often, French-speakers would settle wherever they could find a homestead or in the larger urban centre of Edmonton, focusing their attention on economic opportunities. Second, it became increasingly apparent that French leadership would be challenged to unite those French-speakers already in the province. The French communities in Alberta would have to decide whether they would try to defend their own cultural identity or welcome the non-French majority into their communities for economic reasons. Most thought they had little choice but to attempt both simultaneously.

French newspapers, while they did exist in Alberta, followed more the line of Franco-Alberta settlement, as they also had neither the early start nor the staying power that other newspapers in Saskatchewan and Manitoba did. They often struggled with low subscriptions because of a lack of a concentrated Franco-Albertan population. Newspapers were also challenged to convince French-speakers to support a French identity in Alberta. As a result, and amidst an overwhelming non-French economy and population, some French newspapers and their leaders promoted more radical viewpoints to promote a sense of French identity. More

often than not, all this did was alienate a non-French subscription base they could not afford to lose.

Without a lasting and secure connection to the Catholic Church during the latter part of the settlement period, only a few strong French enclaves arose in Alberta. Those that did settle were left more to their own devices to survive. As we will see in the following chapters, some would look to Saskatchewan and other places for support. For Alberta, it was a time of trying new things to create their own identity without the backing of the Church or an established infrastructure of French communities in place.

With these challenges, however, French business and cultural leaders came to the fore. Leaders like Wilfrid Gariépy and J.H. Picard were able to use their acumen and strength to create their own business empires while at the same time be in tune enough with their own ethnic self-awareness to become role models for a French population. Gariépy, Picard and others did what they could to support the French hamlets and communities on their periphery. With this support, there were some success stories. Morinville, starting with a population of only forty-nine in 1901, increased to over 200 by 1906, and doubled again in the next ten years. By 1931 it had a population just under 600. All along, the numbers showed a very strong majority French population of almost 80%.<sup>386</sup> St. Paul des Métis was equally impressive. Federal census data noted the town was 72.5% of French origin in 1931.<sup>387</sup> Other smaller French communities and hamlets did even better. In the more northern Peace River District, communities were almost exclusively French-speaking. For example, Falher in 1931 boasted 237 French-speakers in a total population of 253.<sup>388</sup>

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<sup>386</sup> There were 447 of 570 or 78% French-speakers shown in the *Census of Canada, 1931*.

<sup>387</sup> There were 680 of 938 or 72.5% French-speakers shown in the *Census of Canada, 1931*.

<sup>388</sup> Michel Bouchard considers French-speaking communities in northern Alberta in "*Ethnicité Et Identité : Le Cas Des Francophones De La Région De La Rivière-La-Paix.*" (MA Project, Université Laval, 1994).

The remainder of this dissertation will focus on what western French newspapers and associations identified as important to their situation; whether a French identity existed in the Prairie provinces, and what could be done to foster and shape one.

## Chapter 6 French-Language Newspapers in the West and French Identity

As noted in the previous chapter, Manitoba in 1870 had a non-indigenous population that was more than 50% French-speaking. With the beginning of large scale in-migration thereafter, however, this French majority in Manitoba (and the remainder of the prairie west) was quickly overwhelmed by non-French-speaking peoples. It became increasingly difficult to realize anything more than having separate and mostly independent pockets of French groups scattered across the territory. Even with church oversight, very few early connections were maintained from one French cluster to another. The Catholic Church and other French leaders realized that only through communication and the medium of newspapers and associations would they have a chance to group together, to unite as a French entity, and to survive. This chapter posits that newspapers played a critical role in creating a French identity in the West. Newspapers, along with associations (to be discussed in the next chapter), business leaders and the Catholic Church (discussed in previous chapters) helped connect local French communities to each other, and tried to create a regional French identity that was distinct from a Québécois identity. This last point is contentious and will be examined at greater length at the end of the chapter. This argument is derived from an examination of selected French-language newspapers in western Canada. In particular, I will focus on the mandates, themes, and content found in these newspapers. First, I will provide an introduction to each newspaper's ownership and the role their editors carved out for themselves. Second, I will examine the major themes expounded by these newspapers, themes that included: leadership factions, a leadership strategy, and connections to their French language. These themes, and newspapers, I argue went some way toward inventing a western French identity.

## The Newspapers

Newspapers conveyed ideas and often drove the process of promoting a French identity in the West. In 1910, the editor of *Le Patriote de l'Ouest*, A.G. Morice, wrote the paper's first article, 'Pourquoi ce Nouveau Journal'.<sup>389</sup> Morice argued for the importance of a French-language newspaper and why it was a necessity to French life in western Canada. He argued that the readers could find everything of their faith, of political parties and of private interest in the newspaper and would remain independent of mind. According to Morice, the western French needed to see the challenges facing them. The intent was to rally the French-speaking groups spread across the vast territory, keep them connected, and survive. French newspapers, Morice argued, must devote themselves to their Catholic faith and their French language in uniting and defending their own interests.<sup>390</sup>

The various early French-language newspapers in the West including *Le Métis* (1871-1881), *Le Manitoba* (1881-1925), *Le Courrier du Nord-Ouest* (1888), *L'Echo du Manitoba* (1898-1905) and *L'Ouest Canadien* (1898-1900) were the pioneers in this attempt to both preserve and create a French identity. And as the French population on the prairies increased, other French-focused newspapers would surface with similar mandates. These newspapers often promoted the teachings of the Catholic Church (like *Les Cloches de Saint-Boniface*), created national affiliations (particularly *La Liberté*), worked to assist with colonization efforts (especially *L'Ouest Canadien*), and promoted political agendas, especially in relation to the creation of the new provinces in 1905 (*Le Patriote de l'Ouest* and *Le Courrier de l'Ouest*). Each, in their own way, made attempts at salvaging a diminishing French presence and influence in the

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<sup>389</sup> Translation – 'Why a New Journal'. "Pourquoi un Nouveau Journal", *Le Patriote de l'Ouest*, vol.1, no 1, 22 aug 1910, 4.

<sup>390</sup> Ibid.

western provinces. They tried to connect French communities to each other geographically, politically, economically, and for religious purposes.

### Manitoba Newspapers

*Les Cloches de Saint-Boniface* was founded in 1902 to support the goals of the French-Catholic Church in western Canada. The Archbishop of Saint-Boniface, Adelard Langevin was its first editor. He also assumed responsibility for the journal's direction.<sup>391</sup> To help coordinate the Church's first western venture into newspapers, the Archdiocese of Saint-Boniface simultaneously created the *West Canada Publishing Company*.<sup>392</sup> This publishing company quickly became the mouthpiece of both the Church and the French and it became the first print expression of how the Church and other French elites conceptualized the place of the French in the West. The paper quickly became the communication medium of the Church's mandate. *Les Cloches de Saint-Boniface's* by-line made clear its resolve to be the "Voix de l'Église ; Voix de l'École ; Voix de la Colonie et de la Paroisse."<sup>393</sup> Its strategy reflected that of the Catholic Church in Québec by providing direction to the masses. It was a strategy to build a strong community tied to the Church and past traditions. In the paper's inaugural edition, Langevin noted that "...[*Les Cloches*] serez le cri d'amour et le chant de la prière de tout un peuple fidèle à sa foi et aux traditions sacrées du passé."<sup>394</sup>

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<sup>391</sup> After Langevin died in 1915, Archbishop Arthur Béliveau continued as the newspaper's editor. Béliveau was appointed editor June 15, 1915, five months before being consecrated as archbishop.

<sup>392</sup> In addition to the *Les Cloches de Saint-Boniface* weekly publications they also published many books and pamphlets. Jean Gaire's *Notre Plan* was on their publication list. They also published *La Liberté* newspaper.

<sup>393</sup> Translation - "Voice of the Church; Voice of the school; Voice of the colony and of the Parish." The first byline was "Organe de l'Achévêché et de toute la Province Ecclésiastique de Saint-Boniface" or "Organ of the Archbishop and the all the ecclesiastical provinces of Saint-Boniface." The byline that would be used indefinitely was first introduced in "byline - Voix de l'Église ; Voix de l'École ; Voix de la Colonie et de la Paroisse", *Les Cloches de Saint-Boniface*, vol.5, no 1, 1 jan 1906, 1.

<sup>394</sup> Translation - "... [ *Les Cloches* ] will be the cry of love and the chant of the prayer of all the people committed to their faith and to the sacred traditions of the past." "*Les Cloches de Saint-Boniface*", *Les Cloches de Saint-Boniface*, vol.1, no 1, 15 jan 1902, 3.



The Church attempted to connect with the Franco-Catholics scattered across the West, by having a newspaper readership base who covered all its missions and parishes in their ecclesiastic province.<sup>395</sup> The newspaper accepted reports from all its parishes and each residing curé had an opportunity to submit articles. Most of the editorials and articles were written by the clergy. Often, letters between curé and their Archbishop would be published. In this way, French-Catholics became invested in their own and other French parishes in the West. These articles became part of a colonization strategy that allowed French communities to showcase their French traditions and culture and to help promote their economic viability and growth. Communities that received the most coverage were those along the Red River. By the turn of the first decade of the twentieth century, the French-speakers in southern Saskatchewan would also garner a good deal of the paper's attention.

Manitoba's longest-running French-language weekly, *La Liberté* (1913-present)<sup>396</sup> was also founded by the Catholic Church and first edited by Langevin.<sup>397</sup> According to Langevin, *La Liberté* was the voice of the French-speaking population of Manitoba and defender of their linguistic and religious claims. Like *Les Cloches de Saint-Boniface*, *La Liberté* was published by the *West Canada Publishing Company*.<sup>398</sup>

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<sup>395</sup> As of 1902, the ecclesiastic Province of Saint-Boniface included three dioceses (St. Boniface, St. Albert, New Westminster), three apostolic vicariates (Saskatchewan, Athabasca, Mackenzie), and spanned three provinces (Manitoba, British Columbia, part of Ontario) and four territories (Keewatin, Assiniboia, Saskatchewan, Yukon). "La Province Ecclésiastique de Saint-Boniface", *Les Cloches de Saint-Boniface*, vol.1, no 1, 15 jan 1902, 3.

<sup>396</sup> *La Liberté's* first edition was May 20, 1913.

<sup>397</sup> Archbishop Adélard Langevin (1913-1915) acted as editor for both *La Liberté* and *Les Cloches de Saint-Boniface* newspapers until his death in 1915. He was succeeded by Archbishop Béliveau (1915-1923). Béliveau would assume this same dual responsibility.

<sup>398</sup> Beginning 1928, the publishing company was renamed *The Canadian Publishing Company*, remaining under the control of the archdiocese.

*La Liberté's* third editor was a layman, Donatien Frémont (1923-1941).<sup>399</sup> With other French newspapers also vying for his services, his hiring was lauded as a coup for the paper.<sup>400</sup> At the time of his hiring, he was already an accomplished author and defender of the French in the West, a duty he would honor throughout his professional career. The hiring became a testimony to the commitment *La Liberté* had toward uniting and defending French-Catholic Canadiens.<sup>401</sup>

*La Liberté* was established in response to the heightened political climate after the Federal election of 1911 ousted the French Liberal Prime Minister, Wilfrid Laurier, and his Liberal Government. This election, along with the re-election of Premier Whitney in Ontario, was seen as a threat to French-Canadian nationalism, and the Catholic Church in the West decided to do their part in helping protect Québec against their oppressors. According to their founder and first editor the Archbishop Langevin, “*La Liberté* est fondée pour promouvoir et défendre dans l'Ouest et surtout au Manitoba la cause Française et Catholique.”<sup>402</sup> As its by-line ‘Dieu et Mon Droit’<sup>403</sup> implied, this paper became a crusading newspaper meant to connect all French-Catholic Canadiens to their national rights as a founding partner of Canada.

*La Liberté's* strategy was focused on strengthening French rural western communities and the traditions of Québec. Langevin believed that a support network for Québec could only be accomplished by first creating a western unity among French-speakers. The early strategy of *La*

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<sup>399</sup> Donatien Frémont, born in Erbray, Loire-Atlantique, France in 1881, moved to Canada on the recommendation of Belgian priest and colonizer Jean Gaire. Huel, “*L'Association Catholique Franco-Canadienne De La Saskatchewan*”, 258.

<sup>400</sup> Frémont left Saskatchewan's *Le Patriote de l'Ouest* Newspaper to take this new position.

<sup>401</sup> Frémont would edit *La Liberté* out of Winnipeg from 1923 to 1941. He would later edit *Le Canada* in Montréal beginning in 1947. He also wrote extensively on the early history of the French-Canadian West. Among his works were *Mgr Provencher et son Temps* (1935), *Les Secrétaires de Riel* (1953), and *Les Français dans l'Ouest Canadien* (1959). See also Hélène Chaput's biography on Frémont. Hélène Chaput. *Donatien Frémont: Journaliste De L'ouest Canadien* (Saint-Boniface, Manitoba: Éditions du Blé, 1977). On the first page of *La Liberté's* first edition, Adelaar Langevin provided his overview of the purpose of the new paper. “*La Liberté*”, *La Liberté*, vol.I, no 1, 20 may 1913, 1.

<sup>402</sup> Translation - “*La Liberté* is founded to promote and defend in the West and especially in Manitoba the French and Catholic cause.” Ibid.

<sup>403</sup> Translation – ‘for God and for my rights’.

*Liberté* was to focus on rural western French centres, gain appropriate government support for the establishment of its infrastructure, and expand and build from there. Once established, they could successfully adapt to the uniqueness of the western plains. For example, the importance of mixed farming was encouraged by the Church and *La Liberté* through columns like *Autour de la Ferme* by l'Abbé Norbert Jutras. In essence, *La Liberté* wanted to build successful communities through elite leadership, a common language, a common sense of purpose, and a common foe. Langevin believed that, after a successful colonization strategy was in place, the western French could be won to this greater cause. *La Liberté* was committed to having a voice in the West that the Federal Government, 'les gouverneurs', could not easily discount.<sup>404</sup>

### Saskatchewan Newspapers

*Le Patriote de l'Ouest* (1910-1941)<sup>405</sup> was a French-Catholic regional newspaper based in central Saskatchewan. More than any other French newspaper in western Canada, this publication would quickly become a staunch defender of French western culture. It was 'le patriote' of the French cause in every respect.<sup>406</sup>

The newspaper was founded in Saskatchewan in 1910 with the encouragement of the just established Catholic Bishopric of Regina, which, at that time, regarded strength of the French language crucial to the continuation of the Catholic faith. Their byline, 'La Foi et la Langue', testified to this sentiment.<sup>407</sup> The paper was established following an initial conference of French-

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<sup>404</sup> This theme was also explained in detail in the newspaper's first edition and mandate of May 20, 1913. Ibid.

<sup>405</sup> *Le Patriote's* first edition was August 15, 1910.

<sup>406</sup> A testament to their commitment throughout the paper is found in *Le Patriote de l'Ouest's* 1928 annual front-page calendar and their title "Lisez et faites lire '*Le Patriote de l'Ouest*', le seul journal français de la Saskatchewan, votre journal, le défenseur de vos droits." Translation – "To read and have read '*Le Patriote de l'Ouest*', the only French newspaper in Saskatchewan, your newspaper, the defender of your rights." "Calendrier Pour l'Année 1928", *Le Patriote de l'Ouest*, vol.17, no 42, 28 dec 1927, 11.

<sup>407</sup> Translation – 'For the faith and for the language'.

speakers from western Canada at Duck Lake, which also became the paper's first base of operation.<sup>408</sup> The paper's first editor was A.G. Morice, Oblate priest and accomplished scholar.<sup>409</sup>

Unlike the Manitoba newspapers, *Le Patriote de l'Ouest* was not officially funded by the Catholic Church. And while the Catholic Church always had a hand in its operation, the real leadership would come from a small French-speaking business class. Throughout the paper's history, these leaders remained steadfast in what they considered the common ground that would unite all Fransaskois, the French language. *Le Patriote's* strategy hinged on their ability to save the French language, which they professed to be the heart of their French culture. French had to be retained on the farms and in their schools. They would accomplish this with membership of all Fransaskois to their sponsored *l'Action Catholique Française Canadienne*, an organization built to defend their French rights.

As a result of a shortage of funding, their publishing company *La Bonne Presse* faced constant financial difficulties. To add to the challenges of keeping the newspaper in production, some church and business leaders thought the Fransaskois were not yet ready to support such an enterprise. Subscriptions were perennially low. The immigrant French population in southern Saskatchewan preferred to spend their earnings, according to the paper's detractors, not on building a French identity through newspapers and associations, but on their farms instead. To keep the paper afloat, *La Bonne Presse* often received handouts from personal dowries of Catholic clergymen in the area. The paper would continue to experience financial difficulties until, in 1933, the Oblates of Mary Immaculate formally took over the newspaper. In 1941 *Le*

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<sup>408</sup> The paper was relocated to Prince Albert in 1913. "Le Patriote de l'Ouest sera transporté à Prince Albert", *Le Patriote de l'Ouest*, vol.2, no 42, 19 dec 1912, 1.

<sup>409</sup> Successive editors were equally connected and impactful as writers of the French language. The list of editors to 1930 included; A.G. Morice, O.M.I. (1910-1913), A.F. Auclair, O.M.I. (1913-1922, 1923-4), Donatien Frémont (1922), Abbé Langlois (1925-1930). Raymond Huel, "The French Language Press in Western Canada: 'Le Patriote de l'Ouest,' 1910-41," *University of Ottawa Quarterly* 46, no. 4 (September 1976): 476-99.

*Patriote de l'Ouest* merged with the Catholic Church's *La Liberté* newspaper of Saint-Boniface. The merger was finalized in 1943.<sup>410</sup>

During the economic boom of the early 1920s, Québec's Dr. C.J. Coulombe arrived to become proprietor, publisher, and first editor of *L'Etoile de Gravelbourg* (1921).<sup>411</sup> Also called *The Gravelbourg Star*, Coulombe envisioned a bilingual paper to accommodate the area's growing economy. In this way, southern Saskatchewan's two most influential French newspapers were diametrically opposed. Coulombe and subsequent editors and proprietors wanted the support of both French-speaking and English-speaking settlers in the area. They published articles highlighting economic opportunities, hoping to draw English businessmen to Gravelbourg, and thus ensuring an economically viable region. This strategy was clear in the newspaper's by-line of 1925. It was written in English, not French, and it claimed to be; "Published in the Most Prosperous Town of Southern Saskatchewan 'The Gravelbourg Star' A First Class Medium of Advertising for the Thrifty Business Man."<sup>412</sup> Retention of a French identity was secondary. MM. Solomon Bonneau & Joseph Lafreniere succeeded Coulombe and became co-proprietors and editors beginning in 1926. Bonneau's wife, Delisca Bonneau, would take a turn as proprietor beginning in 1929, with her husband continuing on as editor. Officially, the publishing company was called *L'Etoile de Gravelbourg Cie.*, but was renamed *S.M. Bonneau Printing* in 1930. Attracting a readership from both English and French-speakers in the

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<sup>410</sup> The merged newspaper was first called *Le Patriote de l'Ouest et La Liberté*, changing its name simply to *La Liberté* a few years later.

<sup>411</sup> The newspaper's first edition was probably in 1921, although both 1918 and 1925 are also given as start dates by other sources. The exact date was difficult to establish given the way the newspaper was archived. The Saskatchewan Archives Board (SAB) holds the only microfilmed copies available (SAB, R-1.196). The first edition available was April 30, 1925, when the newspaper was officially confirmed as a bilingual newspaper. *L'Etoile de Gravelbourg – 'The Gravelbourg Star'*, 30 apr 1925, vol.3 no 4, 1.

<sup>412</sup> Ibid.

area, the *L'Etoile de Gravelbourg / The Gravelbourg Star* newspaper's weekly circulation increased to cover nineteen communities in southern Saskatchewan. As early as 1927 only half a dozen of these same communities were a majority French-speaking population.<sup>413</sup>

### Alberta Newspapers

With a smaller French population than the other western provinces, and with fewer solidaristic French communities, Franco-Albertan leaders started at a greater disadvantage. Those who tried to unite Alberta's French-speakers, newspapermen especially, were often thwarted by their own personal and political agendas. Similar to *L'Etoile de Gravelbourg* in Saskatchewan, newspaper strategies included economic consideration. Some papers were more radical in defense of French rights, alienating the much larger English majority in the process, often to their newspaper's detriment. Few French Alberta newspapers lasted. They often struggled to gain a subscription base, or to rally French-speakers to support the French cause.

The *L'Ouest Canadien* (1898-1900)<sup>414</sup> was established by the recently arrived Québec businessman Frederic Villeneuve to be a 'social economic' platform for colonization of French Catholics in the central Alberta area. Focusing initially on the colonizing work of l'Abbé Morin, Villeneuve promoted the area as a viable option for Québeckers over the factories of the north-eastern United States. He believed that a Québec French identity could be recreated in central Alberta.

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<sup>413</sup> The communities served by *L'Etoile de Gravelbourg – 'The Gravelbourg Star'* included Coderre, St. Boswells, Gooding, Gravelbourg, Coppen, Palmer, Mazenod, Mossbank, Ponteix, Kincaid, LaFleche, Assiniboine, Verwood, Willow Bunch, Fremington, Harptree, Fife Lake, St. Victor, Rosetown and Districts. "Circulation Covering", *L'Etoile de Gravelbourg – 'The Gravelbourg Star'*, vol.5, no 51, 21 jul 1927, 1.

<sup>414</sup> "Notre Journal", *L'Ouest Canadien*, vol.1, no 1, 3 feb 1898, 1.

Villeneuve wrote that he established the paper for a noble cause – he wanted to create a paper that would provide a social and economic advantage to the settling French immigrant. He would also promote the benefits of rural farm and French life. Villeneuve believed that established communities, coupled with economic security would breed a strong French identity. Villeneuve promoted the axiom “Ubi bene, ibi patria”, or “Where there is bread, there is my homeland”.<sup>415</sup>

Yet the paper was established at a time when the territories were being partitioned, and at a time when the Alberta territory itself was in search of political representation. The Northwest Territories legislature was electing members and Villeneuve wanted a seat. Promoting his own French and Catholic roots against his opponent, an Anglo-Protestant, Villeneuve effectively used his paper in the months beforehand to win the election. The newspaper, however, did not last. Within months of having gained his seat in the territorial legislature, Villeneuve would stop publication of the paper.

The founding of *Le Courrier de l'Ouest* (1905-1916), on the other hand, was the direct outcome of the Provincial Liberal convention held in Calgary August 3, 1905, and in anticipation of Alberta becoming a province that same year.<sup>416</sup> This newspaper would support the Liberal platform for Alberta’s French-speakers.<sup>417</sup> One of the very few French language newspapers in western Canada at the time, *Le Courrier de l'Ouest* was a weekly print journal published in Edmonton from 1905 to the beginning of 1916.<sup>418</sup>

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<sup>415</sup> Villeneuve was arguing that it was more important to create a new homeland based on one’s economic situation and success than on something else, traditional or otherwise. “Ca et La”, *L’Ouest Canadien*, vol.1, no 7, 17 mar 1898, 3.

<sup>416</sup> “Assemblée Politique – Les Debuts d’une Campagne Electorale”, *Le Courrier de l’Ouest*, vol.I, no 1, 14 oct 1905, 1.

<sup>417</sup> There already existed an English newspaper, *The Edmonton Bulletin*, to represent their voice.

<sup>418</sup> The *Le Courrier de l’Ouest* newspaper moved 3 times in 10 years. The first offices on Jasper Avenue became too small in 1906, then moved to 654 2nd Street and bought new presses allowing an ability to compete with English competition. A fire in November 1911 caused a third move. The third office was located at 9334 Jasper Avenue in Edmonton.

The *Le Courrier de l'Ouest Publishing Company Limited* was established by the Calgary Liberal convention's leadership group. They began with a capital of \$10,000. Charles W. Cross (lawyer), Frank Oliver (Minister of the Interior), and French businessmen Prosper-Edmond Lessard and Philippe Roy were among its major contributors. The first issue of *Le Courrier de l'Ouest* was distributed October 14, 1905.<sup>419</sup>

The paper's shareholders believed the Conservative party was an enemy of the French people and Catholic religion and that the best way to safeguard a French identity in the West was to support their Liberal candidates for the upcoming Alberta election. Through the medium of their paper, they helped elevate the French-speaking Honorable Dr. Roy in the Federal riding of Edmonton to the Senate in 1906 and Charles Cross to a seat in Alberta's first legislative assembly in 1905.

The newspaper was born at a time when economic opportunity abounded. The newspaper's editors therefore wanted to weigh in on not just political but also economic issues. They did this, according to their first issue, in order to educate and convince those outside the West to see the economic advantages of the West for French-speakers.<sup>420</sup> They hoped this would result in more French-Catholic business-minded Liberals immigrating to Alberta. The paper's editors also promoted learning the English language in order to help create business relationships. *Le Courrier de l'Ouest* wanted to become an interprovincial and international paper to see their plans through. To this end, *Le Courrier de l'Ouest* created special issues espousing their mandate outside both province and country, including distribution to Québec, the

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<sup>419</sup> "Le Courrier de l'Ouest", *Le Courrier de l'Ouest*, vol.I no 1, 14 oct 1905, 2. The first co-editors Alex Michelet and Raymond Brutinel held their positions from 14 October 1905 to 18 July 1907. Alex Michelet occupied the position of editor alone from July 25, 1907 to July 31, 1913. He was replaced by François-Xavier Boileau in August 7, 1913 and until January 6, 1916, when the newspaper printed its last copy.

<sup>420</sup> "Et Ce Qu'il Veut Dire", Ibid.



eastern United States, and France. Their circulation reached 2300 copies in 1911. *Le Courrier* shut down in 1916 due to the economic downturn caused by the Great War.<sup>421</sup>

Wilfrid Gariépy founded the Morinville-based *Le Progrès* in 1909 during his own provincial electoral campaign.<sup>422</sup> While Gariépy did not win a seat that year, he would use his newspaper to continue to promote his political agenda in Alberta.<sup>423</sup> Much like *Le Courrier de l'Ouest's* program, Gariépy would promote not just his own political agenda but also an immigration plan for central Alberta. This changed in 1914 when Gariépy, determined to attract more than a local interest around Morinville and St. Albert, targeted an expanded audience. *Le Progrès's* motto, originally 'Notre religion, Notre langue, Nos droits' was modified to the more politically agreeable 'Je me Souviens'.<sup>424</sup> After this shift, *Le Progrès Albertain* (renamed when Gariépy moved offices to Edmonton) ceased publication on August 19, 1915. Gariépy became involved in a public scandal wherein he was accused with having done more damage to the recognition of the French language 'than the Orangists ever had.' Through his position as Municipal Affairs Minister, Gariépy was criticized for securing printing contracts from an English-based company for the benefit of his newspaper. Notwithstanding this potentially illegal business transaction, a series of articles implied that Gariépy was more focused on personal gain

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<sup>421</sup> Alice Trottier, Kenneth Munro, and Gratien Allaire. *Aspects Du Passé Franco-Albertain: Témoignages Et Études* (Edmonton : Salon d'Histoire de la Francophonie Albertaine, 1980).

<sup>422</sup> With initial ownership, Gariépy incorporated 'La Compagnie de publication du Progres, limitée'. Shares were split between himself and local businessman Omer St-Germain, whom Gariépy would later buy out to form the 'Progressive Printing Company Ltd' in 1912. "Le Progres", *Le Progres*, vol.3, no 44, 4 jan 1912, 1.

<sup>423</sup> Gariépy would be elected to city council in 1906, where he served until 1910. He also served on the school council from 1904 to 1912. He was finally elected to the provincial cabinet in 1913, where he served as the Minister of Municipal Affairs for the Liberal Government until 1918, and then as Provincial Secretary until 1921, after which he returned to Eastern Canada, where he sought to enter federal politics as a member of parliament for Trois-Rivières. He was elected in 1935 and 1945.

<sup>424</sup> Translations – "Our religion, our language, our rights"; "I remember". As it became evident that the initial goal of the paper to serve the Morinville and Saint-Albert regions could limit an economic advantage, in 1914, the name was changed to *Le Progrès Albertain* to illustrate its greater area of focus.

than on supporting French business in Alberta.<sup>425</sup> Disheartened by the lack of public support, Gariépy never published another issue.<sup>426</sup>

After both *Le Progrès (Albertain)* and *Le Courrier de l'Ouest* shut down in 1915 and 1916 respectively, the next attempt to publish a French Catholic newspaper came in 1917. Called *L'Union* and based out of Edmonton, the fledgling *Association Catholique Française de l'Alberta (A.C.F.A.)* determined they needed an 'association newspaper' comparable to Saskatchewan's *Le Patriote de l'Ouest* in order to protect French language rights and the Catholic faithful. And while l'*Association Catholique Française de l'Alberta*'s president Frederic Villeneuve initially supported the establishment of *L'Union* for this purpose, a difference of opinion prevented any formal partnership from forming.<sup>427</sup> *L'Union* continued, nonetheless. Its purpose or program was that they would "...ont l'unique souci d'affirmer hautement les droits de la langue française."<sup>428</sup> But while the proprietor and editor, Pierre Feguègne, was committed to defend the French language, he wanted independence from religious oversight and political meddling. Going against widely held French traditional norms at the time, Feguègne would focus his strategy on local communities, by protecting and defending French rights in municipal government and schools, without the support of the Catholic Church.<sup>429</sup> The newspaper would initially be

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<sup>425</sup> One article argued that Gariépy was focused most on his own financial interests specifically "Erreur...Le patriotisme de Wilfrid Gariépy est dans su poche." Translation - "Pity...The patriotism of Gariépy stays in his pocket [or wallet]." Gariépy was never officially charged with any wrong-doing. "Le Scandale Gariépy Mis a Jour", *Le Progrès Albertain*, vol.7, no 25, 19 aug 1915, 1.

<sup>426</sup> This three-page diatribe accused Gariépy of destroying hope for French instruction in education by keeping quiet when the issue was tabled in the assembly. Other factors may have influenced the decision to shut down the paper, particularly the competition in a small market during the wartime years. Ibid.

<sup>427</sup> Villeneuve, from Québec, was a staunch ultramontist. He believed that the church was required to guide a French culture.

<sup>428</sup> Translation - "... have the sole concern to assert the rights of the French language as priority." "Notre Programme", *L'Union*, vol.1, no 1, 15 nov 1917, 1.

<sup>429</sup> Feguègne used gatherings like the annual Saint-Jean-Baptiste Day to begin to organize in defense of French rights in Alberta. One example sees *L'Union* ask Franco-Albertans to gather at St. Joachim Church in Edmonton June 23, 1918 to begin to organize themselves. "Fête St-Jean-Baptiste – Canadiens-Français – Soyons Unis", *L'Union*, vol.5, no 14, 15 jun 1918, 1.

distributed free of charge and last twelve years.<sup>430</sup> Feguègne would close the doors of his newspaper in 1929.

*La Survivance* (1928-1967) was another attempt to unite and defend Franco-Albertans. The paper was conceived in 1927, and was supported by *l'Association Catholique Française de l'Alberta (l'A.C.F.A.)*. Leaving *L'Union* to help establish and edit *La Survivance* in 1928, Rodolphe Laplante wanted to connect the newspaper to the Catholic Church's teachings. Laplante thought he could best use the Church's guidance to unite the French-speakers in Alberta. Laplante pledged that every page would be 'Catholique et Française.' Published by *The Western Veteran Publishing Co. Ltd.*, the first edition of *La Survivance*, distributed on November 16, 1928, explained the newspaper's name as meant to elicit a stubborn determination they felt was needed by 'the whole of Alberta's French race'.<sup>431</sup> The paper committed itself to: membership in *l'A.C.F.A.*, fidelity to the Catholic faith, and the explicit use of the French language. It was a strategy, Laplante noted, best suited to defend against anglicization in a nation he felt apathetic to the French cause.<sup>432</sup> With these intentions, *La Survivance* would gain a committed yet small subscription base. Ironically, they struggled to keep the support of the local curés of a Church they were wholly committed to.<sup>433</sup>

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<sup>430</sup> "Notre Programme – Tribune Libre", *L'Union*, vol.1, no 1, 1 nov 1917, 1.

<sup>431</sup> Another attempt at bringing French traditions to Alberta's French, *La Survivance* newspaper may also have been named in connection with the annual 'La Survivance de la Française' or 'La Survivance' voyages of French westerners to Québec every December.

<sup>432</sup> Rodolphe Laplante came from Montréal after World War I to become editor of *L'Union* before leaving for the A.C.F.A. He then became editor and director of *La Survivance* newspaper. "Pourquoi un journal" – Quelques mots d'explication", *La Survivance*, vol.1, no 1, 16 nov 1928, 1.

<sup>433</sup> In 1929, only a handful of parish curés openly supported membership to their community A.C.F.C. cercle and *La Survivance* paper. "L'Union cesse a publication – Nous devons nous grouper l'autour de la "Survivance"", *La Survivance*, vol.1, no 24, 25 apr 1929, 1. Even without full church support, the newspaper was one of the only French language newspapers in Alberta to survive. In 1967, issues continued under the title *Le Franco-Albertain*. From 1979 onward, the newspaper continued with the name *Le Franco*.

The community of St. Paul des Métis' first foray into newspapers did not go well. The *St. Paul Star* (1920-1922) was run by English-speaking businessmen J.E. Buchanan (editor) and H.E. Diamond (manager). They established their newspaper to promote the pending railway completion to the town.<sup>434</sup> The paper was written exclusively in English and catered to the English arrivals in the community. The newspaper lasted less than two years.

The second newspaper established in St. Paul des Métis was the *St. Paul Tribune* (1925). In juxtaposition to the *St. Paul Star* the *Tribune* attempted to defend French settlers and their businesses against English incursion. The paper, written in both English and French, tried to articulate a French identity and the need to protect it.<sup>435</sup> Unfortunately for the proprietors, they immediately alienated the majority English population, and the newspaper lasted less than one month.<sup>436</sup>

Learning from past failures, St. Paul des Métis' third foray into local journalism had more success. Armed with a mandate to "...not publish articles of racial or class differences,"<sup>437</sup> *The St. Paul Journal* (1925-present) proved long-lasting. Akin to the *L'Etoile de Gravelbourg* in Saskatchewan, the paper would cater to both ethnic groups, publishing articles in English and French. In this way it would pave the way for an assimilation of French and non-French interests in the region, and eventually the cessation of the use of French in the newspaper.

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<sup>434</sup> The *St. Paul Star* operated from November 11, 1920 until November 1, 1922. "St. Paul Celebrates the Arrival of Steel", *St. Paul Star*, vol.1, no 4, 11 nov 1920, 1.

<sup>435</sup> The paper was established when a group of French business leaders acquired a printing press and determined to see a newspaper started. "St. Paul Market", *St. Paul Tribune*, vol.1, no 3, 18 sep 1925, 1.

<sup>436</sup> The *St. Paul Tribune* ran from September 4, 1925 to October 2, 1925.

<sup>437</sup> The journal continues to this day. "Progress of our Local Papers", *St. Paul Journal*, vol.1, no 16, 24 dec 1925, 3.

Within its first few months of operation, the *St. Paul Journal* announced the “Progress of our Local Paper.”<sup>438</sup> In this article, French businessman G. Larue (first editor) announced that the journal would represent what the community and its leaders were beginning to realize; that French-speakers needed their non-French counterparts in order to survive.<sup>439</sup> A 1927 article summarized the paper’s goal and intent. Larue argued that, only with an indifference to language and religion, could English Protestants and French Catholics co-exist with respect to the other. This strategy, Larue hoped, would remove a perceived inferiority complex he believed existed among Franco-Albertans.<sup>440</sup> As Larue noted, “Il faut savoir discerner et ne pas haïr.”<sup>441</sup> On November 28, 1929, ownership changed hands from Franco-Catholic businessman M. LaRue to Anglo-Protestant businessman Mr. E.C. Fletcher of Didsbury. Within weeks of new ownership, a decision was made to limit print to English only.

### **Saving the French and the French-language Press**

Challenges abounded for the French-speakers of western Canada before and after the turn of the twentieth century. These challenges included: dealing with an overwhelming non-French immigrant population, the isolation of French individuals and communities, the eventual loss of financial and spiritual support of the western Catholic Church, the paucity of French elite leadership groups, the apathy of local and community groups in retaining a French way of life, separation from a parent society in Québec, and last, the preponderance of economic and political goals over ethnic ones.

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<sup>438</sup> Ibid.

<sup>439</sup> Ibid.

<sup>440</sup> “Justice Pour Tous”, *St. Paul Journal*, vol.3, no 40, 6 oct 1927, 1.

<sup>441</sup> Translation - “You have to know how to discern differences [between the English and us] but not to hate [them].” “Le Journal Regional”, *St. Paul Journal*, vol.3, no 22, 9 jun 1927, 4.

These challenges consumed the minds of the French-speakers in the West: from curé, businessman and newspaper editor, to farmer, rural immigrant and urban settler. Some French-language newspapers and politicians focused on selling newspapers and winning elections to the detriment of the Franco-western cause. These French-language newspapers struggled with how best to merge their desire to support a western French population with their more financially tangible pursuits. The other distraction was that many of these same newspapermen harbored political aspirations, often filling their pages with political agendas rather than building and defending French communities. Thus, economic survival and political manipulation hindered the attempt by the French press to build a French identity in the West.<sup>442</sup>

While political and economic factors may have interfered with establishment of a French identity, the greatest barrier and challenge came from the vast disparity of French-speaking settlers to non-French immigrants. Newspaper editors understood these challenges would need to be mitigated. Indeed, these challenges spawned hopeful ideas, and helped develop some of the strategies these newspapers deployed. Community leaders understood that in order to mitigate the large disparity in population, a French-language press and a clear strategy was essential.

Each of the French-language newspapers focussed on similar or related themes. In two of Manitoba's Church run newspapers, *La Liberté* and *Les Cloches de Saint-Boniface*, the theme most evident was the leadership by Mother Church and its role in directing the readership. As a model for Franco-Manitobans to follow, the Church used Québec society as a guide to recreate traditions and values in the West. This, the first major theme was the necessity of 'elite leadership'. Once in place, it led to the sub-themes of: 'Church as teacher', 'Québec as la patrie'.

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<sup>442</sup> External to these newspapermen's personal and business goals, political events and related legislation would impact continued French community building attempts. Special attention will be paid in the next chapter to the connections between politics and French identity in western Canada.

The second major theme found in these newspapers and, indeed, the strategy most editors employed, was ‘group, unite, protect’. First penned in *Le Patriote de l’Ouest*, but present in all newspapers examined, was the mantra ‘Grouper, Unir, Protéger’.<sup>443</sup> This theme or strategy was all-encompassing and included a myriad of sub-themes, but most closely connected to the theme that pervades all other themes: the preservation of the French language.

To examine how the various newspapers faced the challenges of preserving the French factor in the West, each of these themes will be dealt with separately.

### Elite Leadership

The leaders who ran the newspapers were the ethnic group’s elite, and their actions were reported on incessantly. They included church elites who encompassed resident curés and local church administrators. The Church was, after all, the community’s teachers. They provided a place to pray and contribute to their communities through helping others, by collecting church tithes and bancs, and through selling and buying wares at Sunday bazars. They provided a gathering place to speak the French language and converse with others in the communities. Given the opportunity and breadth of their responsibilities, these leaders conceived of, and put into action, those strategies they thought best to preserve some semblance of a French identity, and a French value system.

The types of leaders can be broken into two groups: those belonging to the Catholic Church, and the rest. The Catholic Church would be the first driving force of a western French identity. These Catholic leaders carried with them both the word of God and an invested French culture. There was an undeniable connection between the two. They were interconnected and

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<sup>443</sup> “Grouper, unir, protéger”, *Le Patriote de l’Ouest*, vol.2, no 49, 6 feb 1913, 1.

reliant on each other. Manitoba's two main Catholic and French newspapers, *Les Cloches de Saint-Boniface* and *La Liberté*, were, indeed, owned and operated by the Archdiocese of Saint-Boniface Catholic Church.

The Catholic Church's leadership base focused on more than simply maintaining a spiritual connection. It was considered equally important that the Church teach French values and ensure French traditions. In many of the newspapers reviewed, the theme 'Church as Mother' prevailed. The implication was that the congregation, parish, and community were the children. For example, as the French settled on farms in the West, the Catholic Church provided instruction on farming and farming techniques. The strategy of mixed farming, for example, was promoted as being connected to French values, or synonymous with being French in western Canada. Church leadership, especially that offered by its resident curés, promoted this farming method by encouraging their flock to learn the different farming techniques. The Abbé Norbert Jutras, resident curé of Letellier, was especially impactful. His weekly article 'Autour de la Ferme' in *La Liberté* most often introduced his French readership to new farming techniques. In 1913, for example, Jutras wrote on the nutritional value of cheese, and how best to produce the different types. Jutras augmented this article with a lesson on the area's native plants and then on chicken coops and how to best set up a successful French farmer's homestead.<sup>444</sup> In another article later that same year, Jutras taught the importance of 'la vie pratique' and taking care of your home to make it more welcoming to French neighbours. Suggestions for social gatherings included some of the traditional card games played in Québec and France.<sup>445</sup>

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<sup>444</sup> "Autour de la Ferme" was sometimes renamed "Chronique Agricole". "Chronique Agricole – La fromage et sa valeur alimentaire", *La Liberté*, vol.I, no 7, 1 jul 1913, 4.

<sup>445</sup> "La Vie Pratique – L'entretien des meubles. Le nettoyage de l'argenterie. Les cartes à jour", *La Liberté*, vol.I, no 23, 21 oct 1913, 4. Other articles included how to choose a dairy cow and how to care for both the farm and its animals. "Choix de la Vache Laitiere", *La Liberté*, vol.I, no 38, 3 feb 1914, 4; "Les Habitations de la Ferme – Hygiene, Proprete, Lumiere, Ventilation", *La Liberté*, vol.I, no 41, 24 feb 1914, 4.



As seen in the earlier chapter on Manitoba and the area *le Mission Saint-Joseph de la Rivière aux Marais*, leadership by the Catholic Church drove the success (or allowed the failure) of Manitoba's French-speaking communities. If the Church's leaders committed resources to a French-speaking community, it would generally thrive. This leadership included support for a French-language newspaper in the community.

At the behest of the Catholic Church, much of the writing in the newspapers was meant to reinforce French traditions. Québec was the role model to be followed, as were Québec's leaders. In many cases, at least in the cases written about, Québec's leaders also saw this as their role. Omer Heroux, the celebrated writer for Québec's *Le Devoir*, wrote in 1928 how he saw this relationship, not as building a bridge to move Quebecers west, but more to continue a patriarchal bond. His argument continued that Franco-westerners must take advantage of their connection to Québec, and to use Québec as their 'patrie'. Given the great distance from France, Heroux advised that there must be a way for the western French to stay connected to Québec, so as not to lose their frenchness. As result, many western French newspapers promoted 'going home to Québec' when able, to ground their culture and language and to stay connected. An article in *Le Patriote de l'Ouest* in 1928 illustrated this concept and theme, arguing that, as Anglo-Canadians returned periodically to England, Franco-Canadiens must do the same in relation to the Province of Québec. It was argued that "C'est ici [Québec] que sont leurs parents plus ou moins éloignes, c'est ici [Québec] qu'ont leur source la plupart des souvenirs qui les émeuvent encore."<sup>446</sup>

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<sup>446</sup> Translation - "It is from here [Québec] that their parents have more or less arrived; it is here [Québec] that have as their source most of the memories that move them still." "Sur le 'Voyage de la Survivance'", *Le Patriote de l'Ouest*, vol.17, no 44, 11 jan 1928, 5.

The Oblates of Mary Immaculate, coming to the Canadian Northwest from France in the nineteenth century, promoted a different French tradition it considered to be socially, economically, and culturally superior.<sup>447</sup> The Oblate model was based on the norms, values and cultural traditions of Western Europe generally, and France specifically. Thus, one of the themes in western French-language newspapers was the concept ‘Gesta(e) Dei per Francos’. This concept would apply to lay leaders as well.

While the Québec model was followed closely in Manitoba, in Saskatchewan conditions were different. In Saskatchewan, the French were faced with two limiting factors. First, unlike insulated parts of Manitoba, the Catholic Church no longer had a purely French-Catholic membership as many non-French Catholics arrived by this time. Second, competition for land from the majority non-French immigrants overwhelmed the French. It became increasingly difficult for Catholic Church leadership to group French-speakers into communities. Church leaders had to improvise. They had to figure out whether they could build a successful French community at a time when they themselves were beginning to focus their attention elsewhere. The need for French leadership outside the Church was palpable. One way to attract this type of leadership was by using the press to remind French-speakers of their responsibilities.

The slogan used to retain both old traditions and forge a new one was ‘Gesta(e) Dei per Francos,’ literally meaning ‘the deeds of God through the French’.<sup>448</sup> The Catholic Church needed to find leaders to foster a continued interest in a western French culture, and this slogan or concept became prevalent in French-language newspapers at a time when the Catholic Church

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<sup>447</sup> Huel, *Proclaiming the Gospel to the Indians and the Metis*, xxv.

<sup>448</sup> This phrase is also the title of a narrative of the First Crusade by Guibert of Nogent, France. Guibert and Robert Levine, *The Deeds of God Through the Franks* (Middlesex, UK: Echo Library, 2008).

began to focus on non-French Catholics.<sup>449</sup> Newspapers argued that it should not matter to the French laymen that the Catholic Church had seemingly abandoned them. In a 1928 article by *Le Patriote de l'Ouest* titled 'Gesta Dei per Francos', the editor implored his readers to search for those representatives of the French race in western Canada who would replace the Catholic Church in a leadership role.<sup>450</sup> It was important that new leaders of the French western population accept this responsibility. "Il en faut profiter comme un homme qui a faim et contente de pain, faute de mieux"<sup>451</sup>

*Le Patriote de l'Ouest* reaffirmed for all French-speakers what they should be striving toward, that the 'ancient motto of France' should be applied to western Canada, and that every good French son or daughter should strive to continue (and expand on) the traditions of their 'patrie', and by "Gesta Dei per Francos ... and per Canadiennes."<sup>452</sup>

Pour eux, le poste qu'ils occupent c'est pas un poste de dévouement. Ils ont en vue la survivance de la race. Ils envisagent en face les responsabilités qui leur incombent, et ils n'ont pas peur.

Translation

For them [for these new lay leaders], the position they occupy is not a position of loyalty. They have in mind the survival of the [French] race. They face their responsibilities, and they are not afraid.<sup>453</sup>

In assuming this role, according to this article, it became critical that French leaders continue the fight on the two focused points: to ensure the French language was taught and

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<sup>449</sup> In 1983, Huel argued that the French considered themselves a superior race, destined to evangelize on behalf of the Catholic faith. Utilization of the French language was critical to this plan. Huel, *Gestae Dei Per Francos*.

<sup>450</sup> "Gesta Dei Per Francos", *Le Patriote de l'Ouest*, vol.18, no 40, 12 dec 1928, 12.

<sup>451</sup> "We must take advantage of it like a man who is hungry (but not content with bread) for want of something better." "Le But de l'A.C.F.C. – Confiance en nos chefs", *Le Patriote de l'Ouest*, vol.15, no 5, 8 apr 1925, 2.

<sup>452</sup> translation – "The deeds of God through the French... and for all French-Canadiens". Ibid. According to historian John Grant, "Christianity without European civilization, was impossible." John Webster Grant, *Moon of Wintertime: Missionaries and the Indians of Canada In Encounter Since 1534* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1984), 13.

<sup>453</sup> "Le but de l'A.C.F.C.", *Le Patriote de l'Ouest*, vol.15, no 5, 8 apr 1925, 2.

spoken, and that the Catholic faith be protected, not forgotten. Only through these connections could a western French identity survive.

It was critical for these French leaders to encourage retention of their Catholic faith. In all newspapers reviewed, including those not controlled by the Catholic Church, articles were published to promote the role of the French-Catholic Clergy in their communities. In one article, a published speech promoted the inalienable connection between the French 'race' and the Catholic Church, while at the same time encouraging its readership to keep this faith regardless of the decisions the Catholic Church had made. The speech, 'Le Rôle Patriotique du Clergé', presented by resident priest Lepage on Saint-Jean-Baptiste Day in Edmonton in the summer of 1918, was published in *L'Union* for its French readers. LePage argued that it was the Catholic Church which had first defended the rights of the French nation in Canada. LePage continued that it was time for the western French to repay their clergy for the work they had done.

Ne l'oublions jamais, Mesdames et Messieurs, nous ne resterons Canadiens et Français qu'à l'ombre du clocher et nous ne triompherons de nos ennemis qu'en restant fidèles à notre foi et au zèle éclairé et désintéressé de nos pasteurs.

#### Translation

Let us never forget, ladies and gentlemen, that we shall remain Canadiens and French only in the shadow of the steeple, and we will triumph over our enemies only by remaining faithful to our faith and to the zeal of our pastors.<sup>454</sup>

With this, LePage also promoted a love and respect for the French language. He argued that, by honoring French traditions, speaking the French language and living a French life, they could best honor one's Catholic faith.

Of the three western provinces, Manitoba had the best chance of maintaining a strong French leadership base. The newspapers conceded this point. Called the 'Founders' of the

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<sup>454</sup> "La Role Patriotique du Clerge", *L'Union*, vol.5, no 17, 1 aug 1918, 2.

Manitoba province by both French newspapers (some 445 influential French-Catholic families living in close proximity to the Forks of the Red and Assiniboine Rivers), with support and direction from both the Archdiocese of Saint-Boniface and with old money brought with them from Québec, these French leaders had successfully established themselves.<sup>455</sup> From this base a French and Catholic identity was able to grow. But for a French regional identity to emerge these successes had to expand to localities further west. As the various newspapers noted, this was the role of not only the Catholic Church but also the role of business leaders, community leaders and influential families. In order to achieve the concept of ‘Gesta(e) Dei per Francos’ all newspapers and leaders pursued a strategy of “Grouper, Unir, Protéger (group, unite, protect).

### Grouper, Unir, Protéger

In the context of massive immigration to the West after 1870, the Catholic Church and French elites needed a strategy to safeguard French culture and identity in the West. The strategy – ‘Grouper, Unir, Protéger’, was used not only by the Catholic Church, but also by other French elites, especially its business and newspaper leaders. In particular, newspapers used it as a compass to guide their mandates and inform the content of their newspapers. It became the unwritten mantra of French-language newspapers to educate and solicit support.

There were three pillars of this strategy. First, the intent was to focus on colonization and missionary efforts to bring French-speakers into one community (grouper). The second pillar would then look to unite the community and all French-speaking communities together (unir). Finally, once these first two phases were established, French leaders would try to protect and defend their French culture and language (protéger) from all internal and external threats.

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<sup>455</sup> Thirty-three of these families lived in Saint-Boniface becoming the French elite of the larger group.

While this strategy was used by French western newspapers since their outset, the strategy was first captured in 1913 by *Le Patriote de l'Ouest* in an article titled 'Grouper, Unir, Protéger'.<sup>456</sup> In this article, a hypothetical question was posed to its readers. Would the French-speakers of Saskatchewan submit to this over-arching strategy in the hope of creating a sustainable western French identity? The article continued that the reply would be overwhelmingly positive. "Pour rester Catholiques, il nous faut rester Français, il faut que nous soyons organisés, il faut nous grouper, nous nous unir et nous protéger."<sup>457</sup> This strategy, and its three pillars, can best be understood through a closer look at how the newspapers themselves implemented it.

French colonization and settlement efforts in the early years were described with a focus on the first pillar of this strategy ('grouper') as it was hoped that French enclaves would form throughout the Catholic Archdioceses. Newspapers wrote of the Catholic Church's missionary exploits and of their colonizing work as they anticipated attracting more French immigrants to the West. *Le Métis* (1871-1881), *Le Manitoba* (1881-1925), and *L'Ouest Canadien* (1898-1900) were some of the first to focus on this first pillar. The editors of *Les Cloches de Saint-Boniface* and *La Liberté* newspapers promoted the Red River Valley's early settlement gains by encouraging a concerted 'grouping' of French-speakers into communities. *La Liberté*, for example, implored its readers to share their newspapers and positive stories of settlement with their families to the East, so as to attract new settlers to their enclaves. Through sharing these newspaper stories, settlers could arrive and settle and 'group' together.

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<sup>456</sup> "Grouper, unir, protéger", *Le Patriote de l'Ouest*, vol.2, no 49, 6 feb 1913, 1.

<sup>457</sup> Translation - "To remain Catholics, we must remain French, we must be organized, we must group together, we must unite, and [then] we must protect ourselves." Ibid.

When the necessity of grouping was understood, newspapers began to introduce traditions and teachings from ‘la patrie’ in efforts to unite all French-speakers. *La Liberté* and *Les Cloches de Saint-Boniface* printed articles advocating the various ways to bring their communities together and connect them to the central hub of the Archdiocese of Saint-Boniface. *La Liberté* advertised club and association meetings and also reported on informal social gatherings and church functions. *Les Cloches de Saint-Boniface* reviewed plays and poems, and published notices of the arrival of French elites and dignitaries and their whereabouts. Articles such as these created a sense of belonging and togetherness. Both newspapers published stories glorifying past French heroes of the West: of French *coureurs des bois*, missionaries and first settlers. They also wrote of the heroism from France and Québec: of Jeanne d’Arc,<sup>458</sup> Madeleine de Verchères,<sup>459</sup> and Dollard des Ormeaux.<sup>460</sup> They wrote to create a sense of pride in what the French-speakers had accomplished in Canada. They wrote to foster a sense of joining together, of union.

While Québec was remembered in all these attempts, new organizations and associations founded in the region were not simply satellite organizations of those in Québec. Instead, newspapers promoted them as distinctly western variants altered by new geographies, climates, and their own traditions. Leaders of French communities let their surroundings dictate how their communities were moulded. This played out in the French newspapers. For example, *Les*

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<sup>458</sup> Examples included the *La Liberté* newspaper and a Jeanne d’Arc statue erected in St. Boniface’s Sacre Coeur Church, illustrating a connection to traditions from France. “Benediction d’Une Statue de Jeanne D’Arc”, *La Liberté*, vol.I, no 37, 27 jan 1914, 8. Background history on Jeanne d’Arc was also written in *La Liberté*. “Quelques Episodes de la Vie de Jeanne D’Arc”, *La Liberté*, vol.I, no 38, 3 feb 1914, 2. A statue of Jeanne d’Arc was blessed, and reported on. “Manifestation Religieuse Au Sacre-Coeur – Bénédiction solennelle d’une statue de Jeanne d’Arc. Eloquent sermon par le R.P. Duchaussois, O.M.I.”, *Ibid.*, 8. *La Liberté* reported in 1914 on the canonization of Jeanne d’Arc. “La Canonisation de Jeanne D’Arc”, *La Liberté*, vol.I, no 45, 24 mar 1914, 7.

<sup>459</sup> Example from *L’Union* newspaper in 1918 extrapolates “the land of our fore-fathers” to this connection to being French-Canadian. “La Nationalite Canadienne-Française – La Conference du R.P. Blanchin”, *L’Union*, vol.2, no 9, 1 apr 1918, 1,4.

<sup>460</sup> This example includes an April 7, 1914 *La Liberté* newspaper retelling of the Dollard Des Ormeaux story. “Dollard Des Ormeaux et ses Compagnons – Ce qu’en dit la Semaine Littéraire de Paris”, *La Liberté*, vol.I, no 47, 7 apr 1914, 2.

*Cloches de Saint-Boniface* published a series of articles on the reorganization of *L'Association Catholique de la Jeunesse Canadienne-Française* (first established in Québec) highlighting a new mandate that would work better for the French-speakers in Saskatchewan. Essentially, French local *cercles* of the association in Saskatchewan changed priorities from following a strictly religious mandate (like that established by their parent association) into one with a more agricultural focus. This was done to both mitigate the new direction of the Catholic Church (away from French control), but more to better relate to and unite the French farmers of Saskatchewan.<sup>461</sup>

In Saskatchewan, but more so in Alberta, the first two pillars of this strategy did not go as smoothly as in Manitoba. Given the more difficult conditions, Saskatchewan and Alberta leaders and newspapers became more direct in trying to ‘group’ and ‘unite’ their French brethren. By the time these newspapers gained a foothold in Saskatchewan and Alberta, (the early teens in Saskatchewan and early 1920s in Alberta), most of the land was already settled by the non-French majority, making both grouping and uniting a challenge. *L'Union* quickly moved from a colonizing strategy to uniting its French-speaking readers. To foster union, these leaders and the editors of *Le Patriote de l'Ouest* did what they could to organize their French settlers. They promoted joining clubs in their community, and they wrote about *L'Association Catholique Franco-Canadienne's* (*L'A.C.F.C.*) local membership drives and meetings. They also published articles of community events and celebrations held at *Le Collège Mathieu*.

Co-terminus with the goal of uniting French-speaking settlers, French leaders attempted to defend their French enclaves. The concept ‘protéger’ can be illustrated through an example. The annual editorial by A.F. Auclair at the beginning of the tenth year of *Le Patriote de l'Ouest*

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<sup>461</sup> “Ces Fondations... Dans L'Ouest !”, *Les Cloches De Saint-Boniface*, vol.30, no 8, aug 1931, 181-5.



spoke at length of their efforts since the Fransaskois had gained a foothold in southern Saskatchewan.<sup>462</sup> He noted the first two pillars of the strategy: the successes with colonization and the unifying influence of Saskatchewan's *l'A.C.F.C.* Given this progress, *Le Patriote de l'Ouest* demanded that their subscription base now commit to the fight against any oppressors to their faith and their language. Subsequent articles in *Le Patriote de l'Ouest* would implore the local *Cercle Mathieu de Gravelbourg* (the leading French community in southern Saskatchewan at the time) to lead the fight for "Le Foi et La Langue", the motto of the newspaper. This Gravelbourg *cercle* created their own motto to represent the cause and the time for action that needed to consume their every thought: "Je puis, je dors, je veux".<sup>463</sup> In this article written by one of their members, René Raymond, they proclaimed that, if they wanted it bad enough, if they wanted to defend their French identity, they would need to act. They would need to fight for their collective rights so fanaticism could be defeated, and all Fransaskois would be able to see the importance and realize the greatness that the French deserved.

In Alberta, French newspapers were equally adamant about following the strategy 'Grouper, Unir, Protéger'. After limited successes of the Catholic Church to establish French-speaking enclaves in central Alberta, other Franco-Albertan leaders would act. French business leader Wilfrid Gariépy of *Le Progrès Albertain* picked up the cause to both group and unite Franco-Albertans into strong local *cercles*.<sup>464</sup> *L'Union*'s editor and proprietor, Pierre Féguenne, devoted pages (and his newspaper title) to try to unite Franco-Albertans. For their part, Alberta's *La Survivance* successfully formed an alliance with *L'Association Catholique Française de*

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<sup>462</sup> "Dixième Année", *Le Patriote de l'Ouest*, vol.10, no 1, 10 mar 1920, 1.

<sup>463</sup> Translation - "I can, I sleep, I want." "Les Centres Franco-Canadiens – Gravelbourg, Sask.", *Le Patriote de l'Ouest*, vol.10, no 1, 10 mar 1920, 4.

<sup>464</sup> Regardless of the public attacks on his intentions (noted earlier), Gariépy did much for the Franco-Albertans' cause.

*l'Alberta (L'A.C.F.A.)*. More than any other newspaper in Alberta, *La Survivance* committed itself to doing whatever was necessary to ensure a continuing French culture, and to survive. It became the self-proclaimed protector of Franco-Albertans. This was the mandate and essence of *La Survivance* newspaper, just as it was for *Le Patriote de l'Ouest* (in Saskatchewan), and *La Liberté* and *Les Cloches de Saint-Boniface* (in Manitoba). All French-language newspapers embodied these aspirations and this conservative strategy, the core of which was the survival and use of the French language in the West.

### The French Language

Not surprisingly, given the various themes dealt with, French-language newspapers and newspapermen would focus much of their energy on the retention of the French language. It was a topic discussed on many levels. The French language, and what it represented, became the litmus test for French survival in the West. Curé LePage of Edmonton epitomized this overall sentiment.

O langue Française, je te salue comme la gardienne de nos croyances ! Langue de douceur [sp], de clarté, de souplesse, tu es le miroir où se réfléchit le souffle de nos âmes qui resteront d'autant plus catholiques qu'elles resteront françaises.

translation

O French language, I greet you as the guardian of our beliefs! Tongue of gentleness, of clarity, of suppleness, you are the mirror that reflects the breath of our souls and who will remain all the more Catholic as they will even more so remain French.<sup>465</sup>

Various French-language newspapers argued that the French language must be used and continued in everyday life. This was necessary for cultural survival in an overwhelmingly

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<sup>465</sup> "La Role Patriotique du Clerge", *L'Union*, vol.5, no 17, 1 aug 1918, 2.

English-speaking society.<sup>466</sup> French businessman Raymond Leduc of Gravelbourg imparted the same sentiment when writing to the editor of *Le Patriote de l'Ouest* in the spring of 1922. He argued that moral, economic and political reasons could work to the advantage of spreading the French language, and that the future of a strong and battle-tested language meant a march toward civilization, and a place where eventually millions of French-Canadiens could be welcomed:

Nous avons l'obligation morale de conserver notre langue parce qu'elle est intimement hec [sp] a nôtre religion: parce que, sans l'unité do [sp] religion des Canadiens français, la Langue, la culture, l'esprit français eussent disparu dans ce pays depuis longtemps, parce que, sans l'unité de langue chez nous, l'unité de religion, la religion elle-même, disparaîtraient ... mais que l'unité de langue chez les gens de race française s'opère par la langue française conservée et cultivée toujours davantage.

translation

We have a moral obligation to preserve our language because it is intimately connected with our religion, because, without the unity of the religion of the French-Canadiens, the French language, culture and spirit would have disappeared in this country a long time ago. Without the unity of our language, the unity of religion, religion itself would disappear... The people of the French race can only operate through the continued use of the French language as it preserves and cultivates more and more.<sup>467</sup>

### **The Western French Identity and Québec**

The western French identity was not simply a 'little Québec', even while it relied on Québec, its Church and its leaders to initiate a western French identity. In the beginning, and especially in Manitoba, old traditions from Québec gave them their start. When Manitoba's French first became established, this connection was critical to their growth. This changed later, especially in Saskatchewan and Alberta. The physical and emotional landscape of the West

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<sup>466</sup> "Pour la Langue Française – Coup d'oeil sur l'avenir et programme d'action pour le present", *Le Patriote de l'Ouest*, vol.12, no 6, 12 apr 1922, 10.

<sup>467</sup> Ibid.

changed them. The non-French factor overwhelmed them. They still needed French traditions, but they also needed to adapt to the new conditions.

As well, the French in the West were not just Québécois. They were Belgians, Swiss, and Americans, and they came from France directly. There were also the Métis. It was often the Métis French who first populated the missionary communities that initiated the French parishes. An accumulation of multi-national French-speakers was the new reality. Unable to isolate within the safety of their own legislated borders as the province of Québec could do, they had little choice but to settle internal differences and work with the English if they were to survive.

Finally, given the difference in timing in which the French in each province became established, Manitoba's French were more influenced by Québec nationalist thinking than those in Saskatchewan or Alberta. Further west, French-speakers were more independent, and more open to different influences. An examination of these various influences will conclude this chapter.

### Benjamin Sulte and the French in the West

A plethora of newspaper articles were written on the 'French language' and how it could be used as a driver to help keep a French identity in the West alive. The French language, it was argued, could best be used to defend the French against the non-French majority, to declare and celebrate their culture, and as a way to track their progress as an ethnic group. Of the many articles published in the western French-language newspapers none represented these ideals better, albeit from a Québec perspective, than those written by Benjamin Sulte.

Born in Trois-Rivières, Québec in the mid-nineteenth century, Benjamin Sulte wrote French poems, songs and a number of articles on French culture in Canada. He focused

specifically on the French language as both a symbol and driver of French culture. Although he never visited the West, Sulte would also write on the Western French during the settlement period. A number of his writings would be published by *Le Progrès Albertain* beginning in 1914. Some of these articles focused on the national French cause, written by Sulte at a time when Québec struggled for a more prominent place in Confederation, and when some of the western French looked to Québec for inspiration as a base for their own efforts. Through Sulte, *Le Progrès Albertain* emphasized the need for the French language in the West. One series of articles published on this topic was especially poignant. Beginning near the end of 1914, the series was titled ‘Notre Langue’, and it included articles entitled: ‘Notre Expansion’,<sup>468</sup> ‘Notre Langue Depuis 1760,’<sup>469</sup> ‘La Langue du Peuple’,<sup>470</sup> ‘La Langue Française, sa faiblesse parmi nous’,<sup>471</sup> and ‘Situation Actuelle de Notre Langue’.<sup>472</sup> These articles emphasized the use of the French language within the national identity of the French-Canadien. Though written by Sulte as a direct comment on the struggles of Québec, they were seen as applicable to the cause of the western French. With the series garnering attention in the papers, another partnership with Sulte was commissioned to have him write specifically for the western French and their cause. Called ‘L’Effort Français’, Sulte focused this new series of articles on the French language in the West (and specifically Alberta), at a time when the western French were trying to unite and defend themselves.<sup>473</sup> Sulte prefaced each article by explaining the importance of the French language. He argued that the origins of the French were directly connected to its language, and that,

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<sup>468</sup> “Notre Langue – Notre Expansion”, *Le Progrès*, vol.6, no 35-36, 5-12 nov 1914, 1,1.

<sup>469</sup> “Notre Langue – Notre Langue Depuis 1760”, *Le Progrès*, vol.6, no 37-38, 19-26 nov 1914, 1,1-3.

<sup>470</sup> “Notre Langue – La Langue Du Peuple”, *Le Progrès*, vol.6, no 39-40, 3-10 dec 1914, 1,1.

<sup>471</sup> Translation – “Our language – The French language, and its weakness among us”. “Notre Lanuge - La Langue Française, sa faiblesse parmi nous”, *Le Progrès*, vol.6, no 41 & 43, 10 & 31 dec 1914, 1,1.

<sup>472</sup> Translation – “Our language – the actual situation of our language”. “Notre Langue - Situation Actuelle de Notre Langue”, *Le Progrès*, vol.6, no 29, 24 sep 1914, 1.

<sup>473</sup> “L’Effort Français”, *Le Progrès*, vol.7, no 34-35, 15-22 jul 1915, 3.3.

through language, through writing, reading and speaking the language, the French in Alberta could survive. With Sulte's emphatic plea for retention of the French language in the West came an assertion that; "...la langue a besoin de défenseurs. Faisons de chaque individu un soldat de cette cause. Ceci est de première force dans les éléments de notre destinée. Tout s'y concentre..."<sup>474</sup>

One article from this second series, titled 'Notre Langue', provided a history of the French in New France, how they initially arrived from France, and how they settled together to begin work and trade. Sulte argued for a reconnection of the western French-speakers to their roots in France and to their first beginnings on this continent. Sulte noted that the first French arrivals to Canada came from a part of France that spoke the purest French language, from Normandy and from the mouth of the Loire River and the farms on the western coast. The language from this part of France became the language of New France. It was from the birth of this language, according to Sulte, that New France was born, and from where French claims to the western territory were initiated. More than just its language, Sulte connected the essence of what it meant to be French as a culture born from an elite people from Europe.

#### NÔTRE LANGUE

Il suffit de prouver que le Canadien[-Française], règle générale et très générale, possède la bonne langue et non pas une espèce de faux français.

La Normandie et le Poitou,  
La Touraine ainsi que l'Anjou,  
Voilà d'où sortent nos familles.  
Au lieu de trainer et faiblir,  
La langue n'a fait qu'embellir  
Avec la grâce de nos filles.

Si vous voulez l'entente au mieux  
Pour juger du neuf ou du vieux,

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<sup>474</sup> Translation - "...language needs defenders. Let's make each individual a soldier of this cause. This is the first force that needs to be at the basis of our destiny. Everything needs focus..." "Notre Langue", *Le Progrès*, vol.6, no 30, 1 oct 1914, 1.

Voyez nos gens de la campagne.  
On n'y trouve rien du patois  
Mais du pur français né gaulois  
Et la gaité qui l'accompagne.

translation

#### OUR LANGUAGE

It is enough to prove that the [French-]Canadien, a general rule and very general, possesses the right language and not a hope of false French.

From Normandy and Poitou,  
From Touraine and Anjou,  
That's where our families come from.  
Instead of trailing and weakening,  
The language has only improved  
With the grace of our daughters.

If you want the best  
To judge the new or the old,  
See our people in the country.  
There is nothing of the dialect  
But the French born pure Gallic  
And the gaiety that accompanies it.<sup>475</sup>

#### Newspaper Accounts of Québec Tours

From the establishment of the western Catholic Church at Saint-Boniface in the 1820s, Church dignitaries travelled back and forth between what would be Manitoba and Québec. Tours were made in these beginning years by western missionaries and colonizers to encourage a settlement plan in the West. With newspapers and newspaper subscriptions increasing at the turn of the twentieth century, articles describing these tours were published to support the colonizing efforts. These newspapers, often connected to French-speaking associations, would also promote visits for non-Church leaders between western Canada and 'la patrie' of Québec. Beginning in

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<sup>475</sup> "Notre Langue", *Le Progrès*, vol.6, no 33, 22 oct 1914, 1.

1909, *Les Cloches de Saint-Boniface* published articles describing the tours of dignitaries travelling east and Québec leaders travelling west.<sup>476</sup> And while the initial reasons for these visits were to promote colonization, often these visits served to reconnect these separated French cultures.

*La Liberté* also wrote of these early visits,<sup>477</sup> and as these tours expanded to include more than just dignitaries, they would write of community members wishing to visit their families and the mother Church in Québec. These visits were typically coordinated through their residential curé, but more and more they would be organized through western French associations and newspapers.

Essentially, these tours were made to offset the impediments to the creation of a western French identity, separation from ‘la patrie’, and the loss of culture and of French values. The intent was to foster a retention (or reabsorption) of old traditions, of French values, of the French language, and of a reconnection to family. These tours were meant to promote western settlement, but even more they were intended to foster a western identity tied to Québec.

In one example, A.-F. Auclair, the former editor/director of *Le Patriote de l’Ouest* told of his own personal pilgrimage during one such tour of Québec. He summarized his thoughts on the previous tours of the Fransaskois to the province of Québec and wrote that the groups he had spoken to in Québec were excited to continue their support of the West. Auclair wrote of visits to twenty-four colleges in Québec, having the good fortune of conversing with each college’s executive and with their students. Auclair thanked the educators of these Franco-Catholic

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<sup>476</sup> *Les Cloches de Saint-Boniface* newspaper’s first article on official tours was 1909, yet they often spoke of visits of western missionaries and colonizers from their paper’s inception in 1902. “Visite Pastorale D’Un Groupe De Paroisses de la Riviere-Rouge”, *Les Cloches de Saint-Boniface*, Vol.VIII, no 13, 1 jul 1909, 168-172.

<sup>477</sup> *La Liberté* newspaper began writing these annual tours in 1913 and would continue articles past 1930. The first article references a visit from some of Québec’s elite. “Lettres d’Excuses”, *La Liberté*, vol.1, no 6, 24 jun 1913, 10.



schools for their “gentillesse fraternelle” and for “...me trouver en contact avec l’âme apostolique de la race [Française].”<sup>478</sup>

In a second example, Rodolphe Laplante, the editor of Alberta’s *La Survivance*, argued for the continued annual tours for ‘la survivance Française’. He urged that the visits now organized by his newspaper and *L’Association Catholique Française de l’Alberta* returned Franco-Albertans to the home of their ‘race,’ to Québec. Laplante noted that the purpose of the trek east was more than simply returning Franco-Albertans to their motherland. Laplante added that the importance of going on these trips every year was not only to refresh their memories as to their origins, but to restore pride in their race and culture, especially in those who may have begun to lose their French identity.

Pour maintenir le type de la race avec toutes ses affinités, son idéal, son indéfectible foi catholique partout, son solide vouloir de survie, il est utile, indispensable même que nous allions puiser à la source de notre vie nationale.

translation

To maintain the type of race with all its affinities, its ideal, its unwavering Catholic faith everywhere, its solid desire for survival, it is useful, indispensable even that we would draw from the source of our national life.<sup>479</sup>

Laplante upheld the idea of Québec as the symbol to follow for Franco-Albertans as they fought to rediscover their own French identity in a non-French society just as Québec had done in Canada. Québeckers, according to Laplante, had succeeded – therefore so could Franco-Albertans.

Laplante further argued that, as important as it was to reconnect to the ‘cradle of the Franco-Canadien race’ in Québec, it was equally important to let their ‘patrie’ know that they

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<sup>478</sup> Translations – “brotherly kindness”, “...finding me in contact with the Apostolic Soul of the [French] race.” “Au retour de la ‘Survivance’”, *Le Patriote de l’Ouest*, vol.16, no 1, 17 mar 1926, 1.

<sup>479</sup> “Nous Partons – L’excursion de la ‘Survivance Française’ se dirige pour la quatrième fois au foyer de la race”, *La Survivance*, vol.1, no 5, 13 dec 1928, 1.

had established a new French culture for themselves in the West. These tours were also about letting those in the East know that they were doing well in the West and that they were determined to survive. Laplante tried to convey to his readers a desire to survive, to want to work towards a strong French culture, one those in Québec would be proud of.

Newspapers reported that Québec's leaders also saw these visits, and the western French-speaker, as important. These Québec leaders saw themselves as patriarchs, responsible for helping ensure a western French culture thrive, and to invariably help their own cause of wanting a stronger French nation. Trips were therefore made, not just from the West to Québec, but also by Québec's dignitaries and leaders west.<sup>480</sup> In one example from July 1924, *Le Patriote de l'Ouest* provided a list of dignitaries, journalists, and clergy from Québec as they made stops at French communities across the three western provinces. The tour was promoted to signify the importance given to the French communities. Billed as 'L'Excursion de la Liaison Française', dignitaries included representation from:

- colonizing and missionary agents from Ontario and from Boston, Massachusetts
- the association 'Les Artisans of Montréal'
- the national railway
- post-secondary institutions (L'Université de Montréal and L'Université d'Ottawa)
- Québec newspapers (*l'Action Française, Le Droit, Le Devoir, Le Soleil, Le Canada, La Patrie, La Tribune, La Presse, Le Nouvelliste*)
- clergy from Québec
- businessmen/elites from Québec communities<sup>481</sup>

### New Traditions and the Western Press

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<sup>480</sup> Henri Bourassa would visit western Canada with this goal and responsibility in mind. A 1913 tour of Alberta, partially supported by *Le Club Langue Française de l'Alberta*, included a speech by Bourassa at a congress on both colonization but more so on the importance of retaining their French language. The congress also launched the opening of St. Francis Xavier College that fall in Edmonton. "A Edmonton : La Colonisation - L'instruction; Publique - La Langue Française, Eloquent Discours", *La Liberté*, vol.I, no 5, 17 jun 1913, 1.

<sup>481</sup> "Nous connaitre pour nous unir", *Le Patriote de l'Ouest*, vol.14, no 19, 9 jul 1924, 1-2.

Québec, however, was not the only focus of a western French identity. Newspaper articles often highlighted new traditions created in the West. One example illustrates this idea: Saint-Jean-Baptiste Day, an annual celebration held every June 24 in all French-Canadian communities, originated in the seventeenth century in New France. Named for the patron Saint of all French-Canadiens, the Saint-Jean-Baptiste annual celebration would also migrate west. These celebrations were always reported on in the French-language press, and while these reports were ubiquitous across the West, the coverage of these celebrations in Manitoba were particularly highlighted.<sup>482</sup>

*Les Cloches de Saint-Boniface* and *La Liberté* regularly covered the annual event in the French communities of Manitoba and the greater archdiocese. These celebrations were reported on to emphasize both a pride in French culture but also as a show of regional unity. During the Saint-Jean-Baptiste Day celebration at Letellier in 1903, over 2500 French-speakers attended. Reports noted that the gathering celebrated old traditions, but also that new traditions were born as communication networks were put in place, and as ideas and plans to safeguard the western French were contemplated. At this event, for example, *La Liberté* reported on the creation of a new national flag (of Québec) for French-Canadiens, this flag was now celebrated by not just Québec immigrants, but those with Belgian, Swiss, and Métis lineage.<sup>483</sup> *La Ligue du Sacré-Coeur*, which was at the center of this new flag promotion was formed in Québec, and was

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<sup>482</sup> On June 16, 1898, *L'Ouest Canadien* newspaper reported on the annual Saint-Jean-Baptiste celebration in Morinville, an event put on by the French-speakers in the young community. Editor Frederic Villeneuve summarized the intent for and plight of all Franco-Albertans. "Randons nous en foule et montrons aux autres nationalités que l'union regne parmi nous; et l'union c'est la force." Translation - "Let us show the crowd and other nationalities that unity prevails among us and that this union is our strength." "Notes Locale", *L'Ouest Canadien*, vol.1, no 20, 16 jun 1898, 3.

<sup>483</sup> In the middle of the Carillon-Sacré-Coeur flag a sacred heart wears a crown of thorns, is prevailed by a cross and encircled by a garland of maple leaves. A blue background refers to Our Lady. The banner features a white cross, and a lily (a symbol of the French monarchy). In 1903, a group of Jesuits and lay people from Québec adopted this new flag as the national flag of French-Canadiens. "Notre Fete Nationale", *Les Cloches de Saint-Boniface*, vol.2, no 27, 7 jul 1903, 350-352.

promoted at this 1903 event by then Archbishop Langevin of Saint-Boniface to encourage the community to enroll in the association and to help ‘revive the Catholic [and French] feeling in people.’<sup>484</sup>

In Saskatchewan, *Le Patriote de l’Ouest* reported on Saint-Jean-Baptiste Day festivities beginning in 1911, espousing how this annual gathering of Fransaskois promoted a voice for French-speakers in the region.<sup>485</sup> According to this newspaper’s editor, the celebration melded the old traditions of ‘la patrie’ with a pride and commitment to being French-Canadien in the West. Many French-speakers in Saskatchewan and Manitoba (and later Alberta) would adopt June 24 as French-Canada’s national birthday, and as an opportunity to celebrate their own French western culture.

In 1913, at another Saint-Jean-Baptiste celebration in Manitoba, *Les Cloches de Saint-Boniface* reported that over the three days of festivities there had been a unique demonstration of French unity and strength as French-Métis, French-speaking Belgians, and French Canadiens had all celebrated together. This show of unity toward the same faith and language suggested, according to the report, hope for the French-Canadiens. A portion of the article represented this sentiment:

#### LES FETES DE LA SAINT-JEAN-BAPTISTE

Comme l'union fait la force, il est à désirer, pour l'avantage de tous, que ces liens se resserrent de plus en plus et que tous ceux qui possèdent le double trésor de la langue et des traditions françaises travaillent de concert à le conserver et à le développer. En ce faisant ils fortifieront d'autant leur foi, dont cette même langue et ces mêmes traditions françaises demeurent, comme l'expérience et les faits le prouvent, le meilleur rempart. Nos célébrations nationales sont une vivante illustration de cette vérité...

translation

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<sup>484</sup> The original text reads “Il faudrait préparer une démonstration de tout le diocèse afin de raviver le sentiment Catholique [et Française].” Translation – “We should prepare a demonstration of the whole diocese to revive the Catholic [and French] feeling.” “La Ligue du Sacre-Coeur pour les Hommes”, *Les Cloches de Saint-Boniface*, vol.2, no 13, 31 mar 1903, 181-2.

<sup>485</sup> “La Fête Nationale”, *Le Patriote de l’Ouest*, vol.1, no 14, 18 jun 1911, 1.

## THE FEASTS OF SAINT-JEAN-BAPTISTE DAY

As the union [of all western French-speakers] is strong, it is to be desired, for the benefit of all, that these bonds are increasingly tightened and that all those who possess the double treasure of possessing a French language and [French] traditions continue to work together and to preserve and develop it. In doing so they will strengthen their faith, of which the same language and the same French traditions derive, and as experience and the facts have proven, to be the best rampart. Our national celebrations are a vivid illustration of this truth...<sup>486</sup>

Preparing for a 1914 celebration, *La Liberté* announced they would be organizing a regional conference following the annual event in the town of Saint-Jean-Baptiste. Thousands were expected to attend both the celebration and conference. At the annual celebration they would announce their focus for the conference; [1] the erection of a monument to La Verendrye for his part in the discovery of the West, [2] the celebration of French colonization in Manitoba (also a theme for the Saint-Jean-Baptiste celebration), and [3] the establishment of a French-owned and run bank in all French communities of Manitoba.<sup>487</sup> *La Liberté* newspaper reported that the specific mandate of the upcoming conference would highlight the state of affairs of the French in the West (or at least Manitoba), including what still needed their attention.<sup>488</sup>

### Loosening the Ties? The Western French-language Press & Word War I

To conclude this chapter, it is important to consider the differences articulated by western newspapers between the western French and the French of Québec. While ‘la patrie’ of Québec was never denied, the western French would follow their own path. The western French-language press looked for ways to accomplish their goals by both following a traditional Québec

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<sup>486</sup> “Les Fetes de La Saint-Jean-Baptiste”, *Les Cloches de Saint-Boniface*, vol.12, no 14, 15 jul 1913, 296-304.

<sup>487</sup> “Congres Regional”, *La Liberté*, vol.II, no 3, 2 jun 1914, 1.

<sup>488</sup> “À St-Jean-Baptiste”, *La Liberté*, vol.II, no 4, 9 jun 1914, 1.

base but also forge ahead on their own. One such example related to the Conscription Crisis of World War I.

French newspapers in western Canada reported often on Québec's Henri Bourassa. He represented a French traditionalist, nationalist, anti-imperialist, and an ultramontane. He epitomized and idolized the vision of what Québec could represent for the western French. Bourassa was also a newspaperman, establishing *Le Devoir* in 1910 to represent his (and his province's) strong beliefs. Bourassa spoke widely on French national rights in Canada, and, like Québec's Sulte, was a strong proponent of French language rights in Canada.

Bourassa would also visit western Canada, and on these trips tried to garner support to the national French cause but also expounded on the role of Québec as a continuing patriarch. He promoted a Québec identity for the West, to ensure, as a parent would, that this identity be preserved. In one tour, reported as 'Bourassa at Gravelbourg', Bourassa visited southern Saskatchewan in 1927. *L'Etoile de Gravelbourg* reported specifically on the attention that the western French gave him as Bourassa spoke on the topics of 'Religion and Nationality'. At his regular Sunday evening lecture, Bourassa stressed to his audience that they not forget their 'old traditions', and that the first duty was towards Canada and harmony amongst the 'various elements'. With respect to the French language, Bourassa welcomed learning the English language, save that their mother tongue be always first in their mind. Bourassa, catering to the unique challenges for the western French, stressed the importance of French language retention in the face of an overwhelming non-French population.<sup>489</sup>

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<sup>489</sup> Celebrated during this visit, Bourassa was welcomed at Le Collège Mathieu with the singing of O Canada, and as guest of honor at a reception held at the Mayor's residence. "M. Bourassa visite a Gravelbourg", *Le Patriote de l'Ouest*, vol.17 no 32, 19 oct 1927, 4. Bourassa would continue his tour to Regina, with stopovers in French communities in both that province and into Alberta. Bourassa visited Alberta's French-speakers in Edmonton. The Alberta event, proclaimed as a great coup for Franco-Alberta's leaders, was publicized by *L'Union* in three separate articles. His message mirrored those given in Saskatchewan. "Henri Bourassa a Edmonton", *L'Union*, vol.5, no 49-51, 29 sep 1927 – 13 oct 1927, 1,1,1.

The Western French and their newspapers, however, did not slavishly follow all of Bourassa's precepts. Many considered their identity different than that of their Québec patriarchs. One way to illustrate this 'tie that was loosened?' comes in how the western French newspapers dealt with World War I and the Conscription Crisis.

Ever since the Boer War (1899-1902), Bourassa and the Québec nationalists no longer wanted any part of British imperialism. While they would defend Canadian borders, they would not fight for Britain overseas. From this position, Bourassa led the opposition to conscription in World War I, again mirroring Québec's position. Bourassa's *Le Devoir* carried these anti-imperialist and anti-conscriptionist views. The French western Press took a different position. They mostly published patriotic reports on Canada's role and that of their allies. Likewise, they glamorized the role of French-speaking nations in the war effort. The readers, many with family in these countries, revelled in reading of the valiant efforts put forth. And while some western French were against conscription and taking French sons off farms to fight,<sup>490</sup> it was not for reasons of anti-imperialist beliefs. If anything, it was so that they could do their part in support of the war effort and help provide needed food supplies (and wheat) for their comrades overseas.<sup>491</sup>

*La Liberté* produced many articles on World War I, often times dominating their print runs. And while early articles at the beginning of the War provided similarities to Québec's questioning the purpose of fighting for the protection of the English,<sup>492</sup> more articles would present news from France and Belgium on how they were doing, and later, how Franco-

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<sup>490</sup> *La Société d'Agriculture de Gravelbourg* submitted a protest to conscription to allow farmers aged 20-23 to be excluded. "Les Centres Franco-Canadiens – Gravelbourg, Sask.", *Le Patriote de l'Ouest*, vol.8, no 13, 5 jun 1918, 6.

<sup>491</sup> Farmers under 24 new law exempts from conscription and to help the war effort, requests are coming in for Manitoban farmers to produce more wheat. Instructions are given in how to prepare. "Pour Produire Plus de Ble au Manitoba", *La Liberté*, vol.II, no 20, 29 sep 1914, 4.

<sup>492</sup> "Canadiens-Français et la Guerre", *La Liberté*, vol.II, no 14, 18 aug 1914, 1.

Westerners could best support the fight.<sup>493</sup> One specific article, from *La Liberté*, spoke of the heroic stance taken by England in defense of the world's freedoms.<sup>494</sup> Another article, 'La Ténacité Belge' explained how "l'armée [Belge] toujours pleine d'entrain et continue à harasser les Allemands."<sup>495</sup> These reports often promoted the war effort and the need for it. Articles in the western newspapers also extolled 'The Superiority of the French Soldiers',<sup>496</sup> and published letters from 'un ancien soldat' on the front lines.<sup>497</sup> They also glamorized French soldiers from northern Alberta for accepting the call for conscription,<sup>498</sup> as well as reporting on the financial aid contributions by French communities along the Red River.<sup>499</sup> One newspaper even requested to have their own Fransaskois brigade in the War.<sup>500</sup>

### Conclusion – Loosening the Ties?

Western French newspapers articulated a French identity in the West that assumed more than a traditional Québec presence. Indeed, it is the newspapers' strategies themselves that were key to understanding how the West considered their ties to Québec. Understanding these strategies highlights connections between Québec and the western French but also the differences. The strategy of 'Grouper, Unir, Protégèr', can be used as a template to distinguish

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<sup>493</sup> "Les Français Résistent Toujours Victorieusement Dans Le Nord", *La Liberté*, vol.II, no 16, 1 sep 1914, 3.

<sup>494</sup> "L'Admirable Résistance des Troupes Anglaises", *La Liberté*, vol.II, no 17, 8 sep 1914, 7.

<sup>495</sup> Translation - "The [Belgian] army is always full of spirit and continues to harass the Germans." "La Ténacité Belge", *La Liberté*, vol.II, no 21, 6 oct 1914, 4.

<sup>496</sup> "La Supériorité du Soldat Français – Comment le general Joffre sauva l'armée anglaise", *La Liberté*, vol.II, no 26, 10 nov 1914, 2.

<sup>497</sup> Translation- 'an old soldier'. A letter from the front is submitted by 'un ancien soldat, J.F.R.' "Lettre du Front", *La Liberté*, vol.II, no 47, 6 apr 1915, 7.

<sup>498</sup> A list of French-Canadian soldiers are given for those entering the war in 1918. "Le 'Chez Nous Du Soldat'", *L'Union*, vol.5, no 22, 15 oct 1918, 3.

<sup>499</sup> Surnames of listed donators are also given. Letellier donates \$77.30, St. Boniface - \$130. Sainte-Agathe - \$73.50. "L'Aide a la France – Souscriptions de Letellier, Man.", *La Liberté*, vol.II, no 46, 30 mar 1915, 2.

<sup>500</sup> "Gravelbourg demande un régiment canadien français pour la Saskatchewan", *Le Patriote de l'Ouest*, vol.8, no 14, 12 jun 1918, 6.



differences in French-speakers in each of the western provinces, and how different provinces strayed further from or remained closer to their connections with Québec.

Similarities between the western French and Québec began with Québec society and traditions, the leadership of the Catholic Church and adherence to the French language. French newspapers, especially Manitoba's two leading newspapers, *La Liberté* and *Les Cloches de Saint-Boniface*, noted that traditions were adopted. These newspapers focused on leadership by the Catholic Church, the importance of community cercles, and continued oversight from and connection to Québec's French. In many ways, early western French communities relied on their connections to Québec to group together and stabilize their lives in a distant land not under the protection of Québec's provincial status.

While Québec traditions were important in the early settlement period, a new western environment altered these traditions. The intricacies and differences of how this environment imposed itself on the traditional systems of the Catholic Church and French language can be seen in the western French newspapers as they responded at different times and to different degrees. As part of their process, newspapermen looked for ways to deal with the non-French majority governing them. This strategy of 'grouper, unir, protéger' identified threats to their way of life and ways to mitigate these threats. They advocated Québec tours east (and west), they reprinted articles from *Le Devoir* in their pages, and commissioned articles from Bourassa and Sulte. This Québec model was endorsed most by Manitoba newspapers, whose editors had the closest ties to Québec. Yet the western French saw themselves also as subjects to the King of Britain. They found among themselves other French-speaking races from France and Belgium who recognized their families overseas fighting in the Great War. For them, they were not tied to what Québec

represented, but instead to Canada and to Britain. They were purposely Canadian nationalists. These views were clearly manifested in western French newspapers.

Another example is provided, illustrating again how Québec's French and those in the West differed. In 1911, at another Saint-Jean-Baptiste celebration in Manitoba, *Les Cloches de Saint-Boniface* reported that during their festivities, a special tribute was given in honor of the newly crowned King of Britain. It was reported that those gathered at the Saint-Jean-Baptiste celebration paid tribute to the King while also highlighting their own status as Canadians by singing, in English, O Canada.<sup>501</sup> This song was immediately followed up by a boys' choir repeating the anthem in French. All attendees, and associations, promised fealty to both the British crown and the French-Canadiens' role within it.<sup>502</sup>

The western French were not as insulated as Québec's French. As a result, they needed to adapt to the non-French factor and what came with it. This was the main difference between Québec and western identity. Their traditional values were challenged by a non-traditional environment. They could either assimilate, or find new ways to unite and protect their language and culture. Understanding this and understanding the environment, western French newspapers promoted a French identity more integrationist and less ultramontane. Québec was important but it did not define them.

The level of struggle required to realize this balance between following a traditional French and Catholic life and one that fit into a western Canadian multi-cultural milieu was

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<sup>501</sup> "La Celebration de la Saint-Jean-Baptiste et le Couronnement du Roi de Georges V", *Les Cloches de Saint-Boniface*, vol.10, no 14, 15 jul 1911, 229-235.

<sup>502</sup> The collection of French associations at the event included: *Le cercle l'Actionne Canadien Jeunesse Canadien, l'Association Saint-Jean-Baptiste Provinciale, La Société Saint-Jean-Baptiste, l'Union Nationale Métisse, L'Association Nationale Française, Le Club Belge, La Société du Parler Française du Canada and La Société du Parler Française du Manitoba.*

critical to a western French identity. French language newspapers were in the forefront of this struggle, and also reflected the subtle differences among the various prairie provinces.

In Manitoba, which had a stronger and infrastructurally sound Catholic Church, and more mono-cultural communities sheltered from the non-French majority, 'la patrie' could flourish. Better positioned to group as communities and to work together, made Manitoba less vulnerable to the non-French majority, and more open to a kind of Québécois identity. This connection and retention of an old French identity gives insight into how Franco-Manitobans carried themselves through their history, always with an eye on how their mother (Québec) would approve of their decisions.

Saskatchewan's French, on the other hand, needed a different response to survive. The Fransaskois were more diverse than those along the Red River and in a less stable environment, they needed to adjust their strategies to survive. In Saskatchewan, *Le Patriote de l'Ouest* and its leadership group, without direct funding from the Catholic Church, were tasked to defend themselves, and work with the majority. *Le Patriote* utilized the concept *Gesta(e) Dei per Francos*, to take charge of their struggle. It would be up to the French elite to carry and create their identity moving forward. And while they supported a continued connection to Québec (through tours east for example), they shifted their focus from religion to agriculture in their communications, emphasizing the importance of the land and economic success to their survival as 'French'.

An article in November 1922's *Le Patriote* illustrated their connections to the old but also their shift to the new. Encouraging attendance at a *Séance du Bon Parler Français au Couvent de Jesus-Marie* in Gravelbourg, the published program for the meeting included agenda items on annual crop returns and potential future yields, updates from community clubs named

‘Langevin’, ‘Taché’, ‘Madeleine de Verchères’ and ‘Joan of Arc’, a distribution of medals for community work offered by l’Abbé Gravel himself, and last, a discussion to be had entitled ‘Je suis fou de mon pays.’<sup>503</sup>

In Alberta, establishment of a French factor came later than in Saskatchewan. And with less opportunity to gather into communities, Alberta’s French newspapers were left looking for answers. Without a strong French base, they were more susceptible to assimilation by the end of the 1920s. *L’Union* newspaper tried grouping Franco-Albertans without the help of the traditional connections or at least help of the Catholic Church; to attempt something new. French-language newspapers in Alberta were more open to the use of English even as they tried to protect their own language and their identity. The struggle was difficult.

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<sup>503</sup> Translation – “I am crazy about my country.” “Les Centres Franco-Canadiens – Gravelbourg, Sask”, *Le Patriote de l’Ouest*, vol.12, no 36, 8 nov 1922, 6.

## Chapter 7 In Defense of the French Language: Organizations, Associations, and Politics

### LA LANGUE C'EST LA VIE

Arrachez sa langue a un homme vous lui ôtez la vie. Arrachez sa langue a une race, vous la tuez.

En luttant pour défendre sa langue le peuple Canadien-Français lutte pour sa vie, pour son âme, pour sa liberté : 'Struggle for life', comme disent les Anglais. Cette lutte est aussi nécessaire, aussi sacrée que la lutte pour la Foi, pour la Religion, pour Dieu.

Translation

### LANGUAGE IS LIFE

Tear off the tongue to a man and you take away his life. Tear off the tongue to his race, you kill it.

In struggling to defend one's language, the French-Canadien people struggle for life, for their soul, for their freedom: 'Struggle for life', as the English say. This struggle is as necessary, as sacred as the struggle for faith, for religion, for God.<sup>504</sup>

In 1912, the *Le Patriote de l'Ouest* newspaper published the quotation above. We saw in the last chapter how much attention newspapers gave to retention of the French language as the main route to retaining a French identity in the West. This chapter focuses on the political environment encountered by western French leaders in their efforts to protect the French language, and the political and associational organizations they initiated to do so. These leaders wanted French-language instruction protected by government legislation. It is therefore important to focus on the political climate in western Canada, and whether the initiatives of western French leaders and associations were effective in defending a French identity.

Western French-Catholic leaders became aware of the political climate when they ran for municipal, provincial, and federal posts. To be effective they created sympathetic associations at

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<sup>504</sup> "La Langue C'est la Vie", *Le Patriote de l'Ouest*, vol.1, no 50, 15 feb 1912, 1.

the community and provincial levels, often relying on Québec's parent associations and the western Catholic Church for guidance. Church gatherings, association conventions and conferences spawned mandates to reflect their ideological goals. This chapter considers the process of political engagement, associational organization and the strategies pursued to protect French language in their schools.

### **Understanding an Evolving Political Climate**

The Manitoba Act of 1870, which was the result of the Riel Resistance of 1869-70, reflected the fact that French-speakers represented approximately half of the settled population of the new province. With this Act, Manitoba became a province and French became an official language and a dual denominational school system was entrenched. The BNA Act of 1867, however, had given control over language and schools to the provinces, and this would create tension in Manitoba when its population became overwhelmingly English.

Canadian immigration policies for the West would become critical to the already identified rights of the western French. These policies meant that non-French and Protestant immigrants from Ontario and from Europe would outdistance the French-speaking and Catholic immigrants from Québec and Europe. This disparity in numbers would create the political conditions that would produce an attack on the French language and French schools by the 1890s in Manitoba.

The situation was not much different in the North-West Territories (what would become the provinces of Saskatchewan and Alberta in 1905). The North-West Territories Act of 1875 not only established responsible government in the territory, but it also created the principle of separate schools much like Manitoba (a Protestant or mostly English system and a Catholic and

mostly French system). This was buttressed by the 1884 Territorial Regulation #5 which guaranteed separate schools for religious minorities, with each school system responsible for curriculum and teacher certification.

With immigration to Manitoba and the Northwest Territories, English-speaking Protestants overtook French-speaking Catholics in population by the 1880s. This produced increasing political pressure on French and Catholic rights in schools. In Manitoba, Premier Thomas Greenway and his Liberal government passed the Manitoba Public Schools Act of 1890 which effectively abolished official bilingualism and the separate school system. Two years later, in 1892, the Northwest Territories followed suit. To add to this stream of legislation, Canada would create the new provinces of Saskatchewan and Alberta with their respective Autonomy Bills, in 1905. With precedent already set in Manitoba and with Frederick Haultain's continued efforts in the region,<sup>505</sup> these bills stipulated that French instruction in schools be limited to elementary school grades, and only for an hour per day after the first grade.

The Schools Question in Manitoba would make its way into the 1896 Federal election. The Liberal Party's Wilfrid Laurier, cognizant of the pressure felt by the western French, won on a platform of provincial rights. As Canada's first French-Catholic leader, Laurier focused on reconciling the rift between the two major linguistic groups, and struck a compromise with Premier Thomas Greenway of Manitoba. They agreed to allow religious instruction in the public-school system for a half hour each day, and when ten pupils in any school district spoke French,

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<sup>505</sup> Frederick Haultain, an Anglo-Protestant member of the Territorial Legislature, had begun a campaign in 1888 to eliminate the French-Catholic school system. House of Commons, Confederation Debate 1865-1949, *Canadian Confederation with Alberta and Saskatchewan*, March 1905. [https://hcmc.uvic.ca/confederation/en/IgHC\\_AB\\_SK\\_1905-03-28.html](https://hcmc.uvic.ca/confederation/en/IgHC_AB_SK_1905-03-28.html). See also correspondence between Haultain and Archbishop Langevin. "L'Autour D'Un Document Episcopal", *Le Courrier de l'Ouest*, vol.1, no 9, 7 dec 1905, 4.

or any language other than English, they would get bilingual instruction in that language as well as English. The Laurier-Greenway Compromise became official in 1897.<sup>506</sup>

In the Northwest Territories, the School Ordinance of 1892, more or less, transformed denominational schools into national or public schools where French language instruction was eliminated after grade two, and religious instruction was severely curtailed. This state of affairs was mostly entrenched in the Autonomy Bills of 1905. Over the following decades, attempts by French leaders to slow the process of losing their French language was undercut as non-French immigrants continued to further outdistance French-speakers in the West. In 1916, the guarantee of French instruction was removed from the Laurier-Greenway Compromise in Manitoba leaving English as the only official language in use in the province.

During and after the Great War, the French language also came under attack in Saskatchewan and Alberta. In Saskatchewan, the Schools Act would be amended in 1920 to reflect this unrelenting pressure, and in 1931, Premier William Martin passed Bill No. 1 banning not just the French language but any religious instruction in French in any of the province's public schools. For many, it was not simply an issue of English versus French language, but Protestant versus Catholic. Overall, it entailed a broad-based attack on the French language in the West. Western provincial governments invariably portrayed this removal of French language instruction as the will of the majority. This was the situation facing French leaders in western Canada in the period up to 1930, and they attempted to alleviate it with political action, and associational organizations.

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<sup>506</sup> This piece of legislation also re-established the Catholic School Board, albeit with severely limited government funding.



## A Need for Political Influence

Steve Fenton argues that in order to identify as an ethnic group, individuals must activate their ethnicity. This is most often done when the group's cultural survival is challenged. In essence, a group can be defined as being ethnic by its ability to both recognize an attack to their cultural identity and then defend itself. The struggle itself is key. When there is no challenge to one's group identity forthcoming, there is no need to promote one's own ethnic identity, and therefore, no ethnic identity need exist.<sup>507</sup> What the school and language legislation, noted above, did was activate a sense of linguistic and ethnic crisis. Western French-speakers identified events they felt attacked their French identity through limiting their ability to teach French in their schools. How they responded to these events would determine whether their ethnic identity would survive.

The ability to impact governments and rewrite school legislation was critical to the Western French. An article from *Le Patriote de l'Ouest* summarized what the resident French population would need to accomplish. Titled 'Le Réveil', the article reported on two political conferences for French-speakers held in Prince Albert and Edmonton in June 1914, and what both the reality of the present political situation was, and what the next steps would need to be.<sup>508</sup> The main premise of both conferences was that all French western speakers had to 'wake up' and take action on the political battlefield.

This initiative was supported by the French residents in Saskatchewan generally, and by a core group of French settlers around Edmonton. Taking stock of their current political strength, the article recognized that both provinces already had French politicians of influence in power.

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<sup>507</sup> Steve Fenton, *Ethnicity - Key Concepts* (Cambridge, UK: Polity; Oxford; Malden, MA: Blackwell, 2003).

<sup>508</sup> "Le Réveil", *Le Patriote de l'Ouest*, vol.4, no 17, 9 jul 1914, 1.

Responsible for two important ministries, the Honorable M. W.F.A. Turgeon (Attorney General of Saskatchewan from 1907 to 1921)<sup>509</sup> and the Honorable M. Wilfrid Gariépy (Minister of Municipalities of Alberta from 1917-1918)) were identified as role models. They needed more. Both conferences determined that “l'heure du reveil est donc bien sonnée.”<sup>510</sup>

Cette recrudescence de vie nouvelle, si clairement manifesté aux grande demonstration des derniers congrès marque bien l'action de la providence qui veut nous faire remplir dans l'Ouest le rôle de nation privilegiee et civilisatrice par excellence, role si bien joue par la France en Europe et par Québec en Amérique.

Translation

This recrudescence of new life, so clearly manifested in the great demonstrations of the last congress, clearly marked the action of providence which wants us to fulfill in the West the role of a privileged and civilizing [French] nation par excellence, a role so well played out by France in Europe and by Québec in America.<sup>511</sup>

The MLA, lawyer, author and judge, Louis-Arthur Prud'homme, was also an influential western French businessman and leader. He wrote often on Franco-Westerners' plight and the need for action. In one article in 1916, he reflected on the evolution of French cultures across the western provinces.<sup>512</sup> He posited that Manitoba had already succeeded in establishing a French identity and infrastructure, while Saskatchewan and Alberta both needed to continue to evolve. Success, in his estimation, would only come from political influence and an engaged membership. Defenders of the French language in Manitoba were already in place with judges, deputies, traders, and industrialists. Add to that their institutions and associations “...qui dressent leurs murs inébranlables sur les bords de la Riviere Rouge, nous ne pouvons douter un instant du succes ultime de la race Française au Manitoba.”<sup>513</sup> French numbers existed in the other two

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<sup>509</sup> Turgeon was Solicitor General when this article was printed.

<sup>510</sup> Translation - “The alarm clock [for action] has been sounded.” “Le Réveil”, *Le Patriote de l'Ouest*, vol.4, no 17, 9 jul 1914, 1.

<sup>511</sup> Ibid.

<sup>512</sup> “Affirmons-Nous”, *Le Patriote de l'Ouest*, vol.6, no 34, 2 nov 1916, 4.

<sup>513</sup> Translation - “... which erect their unshakable walls on the banks of the Red River. We do not doubt for a moment the ultimate success of the French race in Manitoba.” Ibid.

western provinces, but they lacked the political influence required. In his diatribe, Prud'homme pleaded for them to follow the Franco-Manitobans' lead and elect members to their legislatures. Prud'homme argued that with this beginning, French-speaking judges and civic employees and an engaged French populace would follow. Through this process they could influence the laws of the provinces, especially, according to Prud'homme, those affecting the school system.<sup>514</sup>

To create this environment in Alberta, political involvement became important. We have seen in the last chapter how French leaders running Alberta's newspapers *Le Courrier de l'Ouest*, *Le Progrès*, and *L'Union* all had political aspirations. *Le Courrier de l'Ouest*, for example, was formed specifically to help elect Liberal representatives (and French sympathizers) in Alberta's first provincial election.<sup>515</sup> Federally, Dr. Philippe Roy of Edmonton was appointed to a senate seat in 1905.<sup>516</sup> A.E. Forget, previously Lieutenant Governor of the Northwest Territories, replaced Roy as Member of Parliament in Alberta in 1911. Alberta's Provincial cabinet members included, beginning in 1909, French businessman P.E. Lessard, and there was at least one French-Canadian in cabinet until the Liberal defeat by the U.F.A. Party in 1921. *Le Courrier de l'Ouest's* support for its French leadership group had a positive effect. Unfortunately, the number of French-Catholic politicians paled in comparison to the overwhelming Anglo-Protestant members at all levels of government.

If enough seats could not be won to make effective change, then attempts at influencing those in power had to be tried. As expected, the Catholic Church in Manitoba had the greatest influence of the three western provinces in this regard. In Saskatchewan, l'Abbé Gravel had a

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<sup>514</sup> Ibid.

<sup>515</sup> "Programme Du Parti Liberal – Adopté à la Convention de Calgary, le 3 Aout 1905", *Le Courrier de l'Ouest*, vol.I, no 1, 14 oct 1905, 3.

<sup>516</sup> In 1900, out of 17 federal seats, 12 were Liberal. In 1904, 21 of 28 seats were Liberal. This trend did not continue. In the general election of 1908, Liberals held a smallest majority, 18-17. In 1911, when Laurier lost, only 17 of 35 seats remained Liberal. This began a shift toward non-Liberal majority parties in power well into the depression years, and continued difficulty for the French-speakers of the nation, and of the West in particular.

modicum of success negotiating for preferred land tracts with Ottawa. In Alberta, the Catholic Church would assume responsibility in the province's formative years. They had some success influencing government. Revisiting the shift at St. Paul des Métis from a Métis to a French immigrant enclave provides a good example of how this worked.

As the infrastructure at St. Paul des Métis grew after the turn of the twentieth century, resident curé l'Abbé Adeodat Thérien needed the support of the Federal Government to best keep the reserve land for French-Catholic settlers. Thérien worked closely with then Minister of the Interior Frank Oliver to guide the process. He secured Oliver's support and brokered a land deal with him. Oliver was running for election in a federal riding in the St. Paul des Métis area and needed backing from the community against the incumbent. Thérien supported Oliver against his opponent to help win him the riding. Oliver would repay his debt to Thérien by allowing French-Catholic settlers the first choice of land once St. Paul des Métis Reserve was opened for homesteading on April 11, 1909.<sup>517</sup>

Thérien brought as many as four-hundred French-Catholics from Québec to Edmonton days before the public opening. Thérien directed them to line-up outside the Edmonton Land Agents Office and wait for the doors to open. Those French-Catholics in line were given already assigned lot numbers and, with Oliver instructing his own agents placed within the Edmonton office, the distribution of homesteads to French-speakers at St. Paul des Métis that first day went smoothly.<sup>518</sup>

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<sup>517</sup> P.E. Breton, "Abrégé historique de la Paroisse de St-Paul", *Almanach Français De L'Alberta* (Edmonton: La Survivance, 1949), 25-27.

<sup>518</sup> *The Evening Journal* recounted the events as they unfolded earlier that day: "Homesteaders stand vigil through chilly night to file on Saddle Lake Land. Edmonton Office Scene of one more spectacular rush for homes. First Comers wait forty [sic] hours... get choice of four-hundred sixty-six homesteads in the four rich townships just opened [at St. Paul des Métis]." *The Evening Journal*", 10 April 1909, LAC, RG 15, Pt.2, D-II-1, Vol. 708, File 360530.

Figure 7-1 Québec immigrants outside Edmonton Land Agents Office April 10, 1909



source: Breton, "Abrégé historique de la Paroisse de St-Paul", 27.

Hoping to mirror the Catholic Church's ability to influence the political environment across the prairies, sympathetic associations would also be created. Of all French elite leaders and sympathizers committed to the French cause, none held more influence than those leading these groups.

### **Key Players - Private Associations**

Québec's French leaders had a direct influence in the creation of private associations in western Canada. As illustrated in the table below, Québec-based societies were often the forerunners of French-speaking associations in the West. They would help initiate first discussions and meetings in the hope of continuing a national French tradition in the West. In Saskatchewan and Alberta, as we will see, these first meetings would more often contribute to new, western-based associations being created.

Table 7-1 Prominent Western French Associations

Manitoba	abbreviation	established	founding province
<i>Société Saint-Jean-Baptiste</i> <sup>519</sup>	<i>S.S.J.B.</i>	1871	Québec (1834)
<i>Société Les Chevaliers de Colomb du Québec</i> <sup>520</sup>		1906 <sup>521</sup>	Québec (1897)
<i>Société Manitobaine de Colonisation</i>		1874	Manitoba
<i>Association Catholique de la Jeunesse Canadienne-Française</i> <sup>522</sup>	<i>A.C.J.C.</i>	1907 <sup>523</sup>	Québec (1904)
<i>Société du Parler Français au Canada</i> <sup>524</sup>	<i>S.P.F.C.</i>	1912 <sup>525</sup>	Québec (1902)
<i>Association d'Éducation des Canadiens-Français du Manitoba</i> <sup>526</sup>	<i>A.E.C.F.M.</i>	1916	Manitoba
Saskatchewan	abbreviation	established	founding province
<i>Société Saint-Jean-Baptiste de Saskatchewan</i>	<i>S.S.J.B.</i>	1903 <sup>527</sup>	Québec (1834)
<i>Société du Parler Français au Canada</i> <sup>528</sup>	<i>S.P.F.C.</i>	1912	Québec (1902)
<i>Association Franco-Canadienne de la Saskatchewan</i>	<i>A.F.C.</i>	1912	Saskatchewan
<i>Association Catholique Franco-Canadienne de la Saskatchewan</i>	<i>A.C.F.C.</i>	1912/1913	Saskatchewan
<i>Association Interprovinciale</i>	<i>A.I.</i>	1917	Saskatchewan
<i>Catholic School Trustees' Association of Saskatchewan</i> <sup>529</sup>	<i>C.S.T.A.</i>	1918	Saskatchewan
<i>Saskatchewan School Trustees' Association</i>	<i>S.S.T.A.</i>	1915	Saskatchewan
<i>Association des Commissaires d'Écoles Franco-Canadiens</i>	<i>A.C.E.F.C.</i>	1918	Saskatchewan
Alberta	abbreviation	established	founding province
<i>Société Saint-Jean-Baptiste d'Alberta</i>	<i>S.S.J.B.</i>	1885	Québec (1834)

<sup>519</sup> *La Société Saint-Jean-Baptiste* was founded in Montréal (1834). The oldest association in Canada, *La Société* focused on the retention of a French language and culture. *La Société's* first chapter came to Manitoba in 1871. *La Société* would also be used in the 1890s in Alberta to help establish some of its first French-speaking communities, Morinville among them. Association *cercles* were often reported on in French western newspapers, none more so than *La Liberté* of Manitoba where community *cercle* reports would appear in running columns throughout the years.

<sup>520</sup> *Les Chevaliers de Colomb*, considered the most powerful Catholic organization in the world at this time, would work exclusively for the French factor in addressing their needs.

<sup>521</sup> "Histoire Chronologique du Diocèse de Saint-Boniface – 1895 à 1914", SHSB, <http://shsb.mb.ca/en/node/592>.

<sup>522</sup> *Les Cercles Paroissiaux [d'Éducation]* of the *I.A.C.J.C.*, first started in Montréal. "Notes de la Semaine - Les Cercles Paroissiaux et le Congrès de l'Association", *La Liberté*, vol.XII, no 2, 17 jun 1924, 3.

<sup>523</sup> *Les Cloches de Saint-Boniface* was first to report on *I.A.C.J.C.* elections held, these at Saint-Boniface in 1907. "Association Catholique de la Jeunesse Canadienne-Française", *Les Cloches de Saint-Boniface*, vol.6, no 12, 1 et 15 jul 1907, 177. Local chapters were also first reported in Saskatchewan by 1913. "Le mouvement de l'Association Catholique Franco-Canadienne – Fondation de Cercles de l'A.C.J.C. à St Jacques, St Brieux et Saskatoon", *Le Patriote de l'Ouest*, vol.4, no 49, 19 feb 1914, 4.

<sup>524</sup> *La Société du Parler Français au Canada* was established in 1902 by two Laval Professors. Regional chapters existed throughout Canada, including in the West (Regina and Winnipeg).

<sup>525</sup> First reported by *Les Cloches de Saint-Boniface* in 1912 at Saint-Boniface College convention. "Convention des Canadiens Français du Manitoba", *Les Cloches de Saint-Boniface*, vol.11, no 6, 15 mar 1912, 66.

<sup>526</sup> This association was founded after 1916 in response to The Thornton Act (1916) that abolished the bilingual school system. "Le fonds Association d'éducation des Canadiens Français du Manitoba (AECFM)", 1948, SHSB, Le Fonds AECFM.

<sup>527</sup> The first chapter was founded at St-Isidore-de-Bellevue. Others were founded at Vonda and Wauchope in 1909, and Gravelbourg, Willow Bunch and others starting in 1911.

<sup>528</sup> *Le S.P.F.C.* had a pseudonym, *Le Comité Permanent du Parler Français de la Saskatchewan*.

<sup>529</sup> The majority of this association's members fragmented from the non-French majority *Saskatchewan School Trustees' Association* (*S.S.T.A.*).

<i>Société de Colonisation d'Alberta</i>		1912	Alberta
<i>Société Les Chevaliers de Colomb d'Alberta</i>		1918	Québec (1897)
<i>Association Canadienne-Française de l'Alberta</i>	<i>A.C.F.A.</i>	1925	Alberta

Associations starting in Manitoba carried Québec's French national sentiment into their mandates: defend our race by speaking a pure French, by keeping our younger generation in our fold (and on our farms), and by fighting the English majority. Often association meetings directly referenced 'la patrie' (the homeland) to help focus the unique challenges specific to the Franco-Manitobans and the western French. At a 1922 association meeting at Saint-Jean-Baptiste, Manitoba, their plan was clear: "*Le cercle* luttera avec ardeur contre l'anglomanie... Une forte campagne sera élaborée pour faire la toilette Française à notre village essentiellement Canadien-Français..."<sup>530</sup> For Manitoba, the *cercle* itself would hold the key to an effective association.

The hierarchical structure of each association was organized to allow the greatest opportunity for its leaders to communicate with and draw in French-speakers at the community, or *cercle* level. Associations across the prairies had different strategies to accomplish this. Some focused their efforts at the grass roots. *L'Association Catholique de la Jeunesse Canadienne-Française (L'A.C.J.C.)* of Manitoba espoused this strategy specifically as critical to their success. Other associations, especially those farther west, took more a top-down approach, with leaders making decisions for their community *cercles*. *L'Association Catholique Franco-Canadienne de la Saskatchewan (L'A.C.F.C.)*, for example, was led by twelve executive members making up *Le Comité General* and included the association's President, Vice-President, and ten other directors (five from each diocese within the association's reach). Six laymen and six clergymen also sat on

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<sup>530</sup> Translation - "The community association will fight with ardor against Anglomania... A strong campaign will be developed to make the French factor in our village mainly French Canadian once again..." "St-Jean-Baptiste – A.C.J.C.", *La Liberté*, vol.X, no 23, 14 nov 1922, 3. According to Mason Wade and Lionel Groulx, *L'Association Catholique de la Jeunesse Canadienne-Française* became wholly responsible for a revival in French nationalism. Michael Behiels, "L'Association Catholique de La Jeunesse Canadienne-Française and the Quest for a Moral Regeneration, 1903-1914," *Journal of Canadian Studies/Revue d'Études Canadiennes* 13, no. 2 (Summer 1978): 27-41.

this upper committee. The second level of this organizational structure, called *Le Bureau de Direction*, was appointed by *Le Comité General*. This level included both *le Directeur-General* and *le Tresorier-General*. The last level, *les Cercles* or *les Groups Locaux*, included all *A.C.F.C.* members in each of their communities. French-speakers over sixteen years of age would be eligible for membership at this level. Within each *cercle* there would be a responsible executive (President, Treasurer and Secretary).<sup>531</sup> As part of this organizational strategy, leaders at *l'A.C.F.C.*'s two upper levels would solicit support from resident curés to help accomplish their goals, and to establish their community Parish *cercles*. These curés would assume much of the responsibility to solicit community members, be it through speaking at Sunday mass, at weekend bazars and other functions, or in private conversations. To assist resident curés and local leaders in securing an active membership, its executive would periodically hold membership drives.

Once established, each local *cercle* would hold meetings to discuss how they could implement their association's plan. It was hoped that *cercle* members would continue a connection through the work of each association's executive and community's resident curés, and through subscriptions to French newspapers. In the larger French communities, there were often multiple associations and more than one local *cercle*. Some of the main French western associations are listed above.

### Manitoba Associations

As would be expected, many of Manitoba's associations' leaders were of the cloth and from Québec. The first French association of significance in western Canada was *La Société*

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<sup>531</sup> Raymond Huel. *"L'Association Catholique Franco-Canadienne De La Saskatchewan"* (M.A. Thesis) : University of Saskatchewan, 1969), 260-262. For an example of convention agenda and minutes, see "5eme Convention Provinciale de l'Association Catholique Franco-Canadienne de la Saskatchewan – Willow Bunch", *Le Patriote de l'Ouest*, vol.6, no 21, 3 aug 1916, 1.



*Manitobaine de Colonisation*. While it was one of the few not originating in Québec, the association was first organized in 1874 by Saint-Boniface's Archbishop and Québec-born Alexandre Taché.<sup>532</sup> Its mandate was simple: to guide immigrants, to focus on Québec colonists coming west, to employ a federal immigration agent, to focus on the distribution of French literature, and to take advantage of the patriotic zeal of all French-Canadiens to help with these objectives.<sup>533</sup>

As political pressures mounted, the focus shifted from land issues to the retention of the French language (and schools). Of the three western provinces, Manitoba's associations were the most widespread, organized and effective. Founded in response to the Thornton Act of 1916 that abolished their province's bilingual school system, *l'Association d'Éducation du Manitoba* listed resolutions reflective of what Manitoba's French associations tried to accomplish: find ways to keep teaching French in its schools, garner public approval from the non-French majority, and ensure an administrative infrastructure and communication network was in place so that their *cercles* were empowered.<sup>534</sup>

Of all Manitoban associations, probably the most impactful *cercles* were organized by *l'Association Catholique de la Jeunesse Canadienne-Française (l'A.C.J.C.)*. Re-established in Manitoba in 1907, *l'A.C.J.C.* was a Québec based association promoting French Canadian nationalism and relying heavily on church leadership, with the well-respected Québec nationalist l'Abbé Lionel Groulx as one of its founders. First associated with a movement in Québec to

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<sup>532</sup> The first archbishops of Saint-Boniface all came from Québec (Alexandre Taché from Saint-Hyacinthe, Adelard Langevin from Saint-Isidore and Arthur Beliveau from Trois-Rivières).

<sup>533</sup> Sarrasin, *Histoire De La Paroisse Saint-Joseph*, 13.

<sup>534</sup> As part of this structure, they required that an adequate administrative personnel were secured, that each French community in the province had a parish committee, that each *cercle* had executive representation at regional meetings, that there was a process in place for *cercles* to clarify decision-making power of its executive, and last, to ensure required *cercle* written updates were distributed to each sister *cercle* for their information. "Les Résolutions du Congrès", *La Liberté*, vol.XII, no 6, 15 jul 1924, 3.

engage their younger generation, Manitoba would eventually see *A.C.J.C. cercles* in every French-speaking community in their province.<sup>535</sup> *Cercle* events would often be reported on in *La Liberté* and *Les Cloches de Saint-Boniface*.<sup>536</sup>

*L'A.C.J.C.* leaders included those from Québec. Henri Bourassa often lectured that being a loyal Canadien-Français was about paying homage to the French language and the Catholic Church.<sup>537</sup> Yet none led *l'A.C.J.C.* more than their *cercle's* resident curés. In one report in *La Liberté*, it was noted that *le Cercle Saint-Norbert de Letellier* (est. 1919) was under the direction of resident curé l'Abbé Jutras. Jutras, who had grown up in rural Québec, involved the community's youth through bi-monthly meetings, always ensuring they be fully attended. In one report, Jutras' *cercle* organized a mardi gras for the community to benefit the poor of their parish.<sup>538</sup>

*L'A.C.J.C.*'s focus, more than any other led by the Catholic Church, remained on strengthening their rural *cercles*. They accomplished this by engaging their youth: promoting plays, holding music festivals, organizing card game tournaments, even sponsoring their own hockey team. In one example, a group of actors representing *l'A.C.J.C. de Saint-Boniface* travelled to Letellier to perform a play. *L'A.C.J.C. cercle* members from nearby Saint-Jean-Baptiste, Saint-Pie, and Saint Joseph were among those in attendance.<sup>539</sup> The event was attended by each community's resident curés.

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<sup>535</sup> Within my focused locality along the Red River, *Le Cercle Saint-David* (Saint-Jean-Baptiste) and *Le Cercle Saint-Norbert* (Letellier) existed. *Le Cercle La Verendrye* (Saint Boniface) was the central *cercle* for the western chapter. While many associations did not restrict themselves to provincial boundaries, provincial memberships were more prevalent. In Manitoba, as seen above, *l'A.C.J.C.* was 'mostly' in Manitoba even though they had *cercles* in Saskatchewan and Alberta.

<sup>536</sup> For example, *La Liberté*, on March 9, 1927 *L'A.C.J.C.* provided updates on all *cercles*, including Letellier's *cercle* Saint-Norbert and Saint-Jean-Baptiste's *cercle* Saint-David. "L'A.C.J.C. au Manitoba", *La Liberté*, vol.XIV, no 40, 9 mar 1927, 4.

<sup>537</sup> "Les Droits du Français – Devant un vaste auditoire, M. Henri Bourassa traite de nos droits", *La Liberté*, vol.III, no 1, 19 may 1915, 1.

<sup>538</sup> "L'A.C.J.C. au Manitoba – La vie intellectuelle chez nos jeunes. Ce que l'on fait dans leurs cercles d'étude.", *La Liberté*, vol.VIII, no 48, 10 may 1921, 9.

<sup>539</sup> "Le Train de Plaisir' A Letellier", *La Liberté*, vol.IV, no 35, 10 jan 1917, 7.

## Saskatchewan Associations

In Saskatchewan, and similar to Manitoba's associations, both Québec and church influence were apparent in its associations' origins. From these beginnings, Saskatchewan's French associations would migrate toward one more representative of both the environment and the array of French-speaking nationalities in their province. In 1910, two Québec-based associations, *La Société Saint-Jean-Baptiste (S.S.J.B.)* and *La Société du Parler Français au Canada (S.P.F.C.)* organized an initial meeting at Regina to gather Fransaskois support. The meeting had limited success.<sup>540</sup> Two years later, when *le S.P.F.C.* was promoting its annual convention in Québec, a sister convention was considered, and a meeting at Duck Lake, Saskatchewan resulted.<sup>541</sup> Later that summer, *L'Association Franco-Canadienne de la Saskatchewan (l'A.F.C.)* was established.<sup>542</sup> Purposefully, the name of the association was labelled 'Franco-Canadienne' instead of the commonly used title 'Canadienne-Française'. This was done to include non-Canadien (and thus non-Québec) French-speakers, especially those from Belgium and France.<sup>543</sup>

This French association was easily the most impactful in Saskatchewan. Renamed *L'Assocation Catholique Franco-Canadienne de la Saskatchewan* the following year to reflect their religious affiliation, *l'A.C.F.C.*'s founding members were Mgr O.-E. Mathieu (Archbishop

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<sup>540</sup> *La Société Saint-Jean-Baptiste* from Montréal was first in Saskatchewan in 1909. *La Société du Parler Français* came from France to Québec and was established in Saskatchewan in 1910. After initial meetings in Regina, these Québec-based organizations would be dropped because they did not accurately reflect western French speakers and where they came from. Saskatchewan's *La Société Saint-Jean-Baptiste* would cease as a provincial chapter in 1912. And while some *S.S.J.B. cercle* members would be absorbed by *La Société du Parler Français*, they, also being a Québec-based association with similar values, would see their chapter struggle as well. René Rottiers, *Soixante-Cinq Années De Lutttes Esquisse Historique De L'œuvre De L'A.C.F.C.* (Régina: Association Culturelle Franco-Canadienne de la Saskatchewan, 1977), 40, 189-190.

<sup>541</sup> "Grande Convention Nationale - 28 et 29 Fevrier 1912 - Pour la Langue Francaise", *Le Patriote de l'Ouest*, vol.1, no 47, 25 jan 1912, 1; "Le Comité de reception - Pour la Convention de Duck-Lake", *Le Patriote de l'Ouest*, vol.1, no 49, 8 feb 1912, 6; "A la Convention - La reception des Congressistes", *Le Patriote de l'Ouest*, vol.1, no 50, 15 feb 1912, 1.

<sup>542</sup> "Section Nord du Parler Français de la Saskatchewan", *Le Patriote de l'Ouest*, vol.2, no 6, 11 apr 1912, 1.

<sup>543</sup> The name was inverted to distinguish it from historical associations in Québec and Manitoba and labelled 'Franco-Canadienne' instead of 'Canadienne-Française'). Lapointe, *The Francophones of Saskatchewan*, 194.

of Regina), M. l'Abbé L-P Gravel (immigration agent and founder of Gravelbourg), and Mgr. Charles Maillard (future rector of *Le Collège Mathieu* at Gravelbourg). The Catholic Church, as in Manitoba's associations, remained instrumental in establishing their *cercles* and executives.

*L'A.C.F.C.*'s mandate focused on education and how best to ensure French was taught in their schools. This was accomplished, not from their traditional grass roots *cercles* as had been emphasized in Manitoba, but more by their leadership. Associations in Saskatchewan, according to Raymond Denis, later President of *l'A.C.F.C.*, were important to continue the French tradition and also to find new ways to defend themselves from its enemies. This would be accomplished within the continued guidance of the Catholic Church, through daily use of the French language and subscriptions to its sponsored newspapers. It would also be accomplished by the strength of its leaders. Different from association leaders in Manitoba, *l'A.C.F.C.* leader Raymond Denis was not born in Québec. He was born in 1885 in St-Jean-d'Angely, Charente-Maritime, France, and moved to Canada in 1904.<sup>544</sup> He would settle in the French farming village of Saint-Denis just east of Saskatoon and marry a girl also from France. They began a farming life before the end of that decade. By 1918, Denis, already an astute businessman, became vice president of *l'A.C.F.C.* In 1923, he was elected president.<sup>545</sup> Denis would be wholly responsible for many of his association's battles over school issues in the province.

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<sup>544</sup> Many immigrants from France and especially from the region Denis came from, came as result of the work by Jean Gaire. Gaire made numerous trips to Lyon and other places to do his colonizing work. Gaire was most known for his work in establishing the communities of Grande Clairiere, Manitoba, and a few communities in the southeast of Saskatchewan. Archbishop Langevin once said of Gaire: "Ten priests like Father Gaire could build a Franco-Catholic empire in this country." *Ibid.*, 117.

<sup>545</sup> Before Denis, and another migrant from France (born in Lille in 1873), Maurice Quennelle would be the founder and first president of *l'A.C.F.C.* *Ibid.*, 191.

Figure 7-2 Raymond Denis, Président de l'A.C.F.C. 1925-1935



source: "Après le Convention", *Le Patriote de l'Ouest*, vol.15, no 2, 18 mar 1925, 1.

Two other Saskatchewan associations are worth mentioning, both under the direction of Raymond Denis during the critical periods of their existence. *l'Association des Commissaires d'Écoles Franco-Canadiens (l'A.C.E.F.C.)* and *l'Association Interprovinciale (A.I.)*, were both formed in 1918, and were used by Denis and his Fransaskois to support the schools issues gripping the province.

Table 7-2 Prominent Association Presidents in Saskatchewan 1912-1935

	<b>A.C.F.C. Presidents</b>		<b>A.C.E.F.C. Presidents</b>		<b>A.I. Presidents</b>
1912-1914	Maurice Quennelle, Wauchope <sup>546</sup>	1918-1918	Emile Gravel, Gravelbourg	1918-1925	Raymond Denis, St. Denis
1914-1915	Joseph Morrier, Prince Albert	1918-1925	Raymond Denis, St. Denis		
1915-1921	Arsène Godin, Willow Bunch	1925-1929	Emile Gravel, Gravelbourg		
1921-1925	Emile Gravel, Gravelbourg	1929-1945	Samuel Bonneau, Gravelbourg		
1925-1935	Raymond Denis, St. Denis				

source: Lapointe, *The Francophones of Saskatchewan*, 217.

<sup>546</sup> Quennelle also originally from France, arrived to Wauchope on the advice of Belgian colonizer Jean Gaire.

## Alberta Associations

While Manitoba was already supporting a strong base of French associations and Saskatchewan building theirs, Alberta's French associations were not as prominent, at least in the beginning. To be fair, Alberta's French did have associations established early, but they were more used to help in colonization efforts. The Church-sponsored *La Société de Colonisation d'Alberta* (established around 1912) assumed responsibility for much of this work.<sup>547</sup> Aside from church-led associations, there were Franco-Albertan businessmen who sat on the executives of fledgling associations like *La Société Saint-Jean-Baptiste d'Alberta* (established 1885)<sup>548</sup> and *La Société Les Chevaliers de Colomb d'Alberta* (established 1918).<sup>549</sup> Still, these associations had limited membership and influence. The only real attempt to establish an influential French association that could effectively defend French language rights in the province would be under the wing of Saskatchewan's *l'A.C.F.C.*

*Le Courrier de l'Ouest* first mentioned the Alberta connection to *l'A.C.F.C.* in their 1912 newspaper.<sup>550</sup> On March 10 of that year, a meeting was held to establish *l'Association Canadienne-Française de l'Alberta (l'A.C.F.A.)*.<sup>551</sup> *Le Courrier de l'Ouest* newspaper, explained their vision: "Pour Notre Foi, Pour Notre Langue – Ce Que Sera Notre Convention."<sup>552</sup> Resolutions from this first meeting mirrored *l'A.C.F.C.*'s in Saskatchewan.<sup>553</sup> But without a stable newspaper in support, *l'A.C.F.A.* predictably struggled to hold a membership base.

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<sup>547</sup> This association was created by F. Ouellette after his turn as government repatriation agent for the Diocese of St. Albert from 1907 to 1912.

<sup>548</sup> Georges Roy was Edmonton's first president and founder. Gariépy sat on its first executive.

<sup>549</sup> *Documenter L'Alberta Francophone: Recueil Des Ressources Francophones Aux Archives Provinciales, 1965 à 2010* (Edmonton : Archives Provinciales de l'Alberta, 2012), 2.

<sup>550</sup> "La Convention de Langue Française de Saskatchewan", *Le Courrier de l'Ouest*, vol.VII, no 22, 7 mar 1912, 1.

<sup>551</sup> "L'Alberta se Rallie au Mouvement National en Faveur du Parler Français", *Le Courrier de l'Ouest*, vol.VII, no 23, 14 mar 1912, 1.

<sup>552</sup> Translation - "For our faith, for our language – what our Convention will be." Ibid.

<sup>553</sup> A Saskatchewan convention in 1914 illustrated how closely *l'A.C.F.A.* leaned on *l'A.C.F.C.* in helping them organize in Alberta. "L'Œuvre de la Société du Parler Français d'Alberta", *Le Courrier de l'Ouest*, vol.X, no 30, 14 may 1914, 1.

Attempts were renewed in the 1920s. On December 13, 1925, Edmonton's *Le Cercle Jeanne d'Arc* of *La Société Les Chevaliers de Colomb d'Alberta*, in conjunction with *l'A.C.F.A.*, held a convention at the Hotel Macdonald for all Franco-Albertans. Four hundred attended.<sup>554</sup> With this display of support, promises were made to unify their group. Organization, however, remained difficult.

As part of their updated mandate and strategy to build a strong association, *l'A.C.F.A.*'s executive directed that all newly created community *cercles* send representatives to an annual congress. For each delegate attending, their home parish would contribute \$25.00 to the central office. Understanding the need to establish financial stability, this directive exposed an organizational weakness relating to the representation of membership. With annual congresses only held in Edmonton, capital region *cercles* dominated attendance. Urban parishes, with more members and capital, would have more attendees than their rural counterparts. The result was that, especially during the early years of *l'A.C.F.A.*, urban businessmen and elites controlled the association to the detriment of the needs of the smaller rural communities. It was not until 1930 that rural communities began to have meaningful input into the direction of *l'A.C.F.A.*<sup>555</sup>

Notwithstanding inherent problems with their organizational structure, *l'A.C.F.A.* remained committed to, above all else, 'making the race grow.' Importantly, one of the first conference's main objectives was to "...détruire le complexe d'infériorité qui trop souvent existe chez les Canadiens-Français de l'Alberta comme d'ailleurs chez les groupes minoritaires."<sup>556</sup> As the leaders of *l'A.C.F.A.* understood, the feelings of inferiority among Alberta French populations would need to change if they were to succeed.

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<sup>554</sup> *Documenter L'Alberta Francophone*, 2.

<sup>555</sup> Roger Motut, *A.C.F.A. 50 Ans D'Histoire* (Edmonton : Franco-Albertain, 1976).

<sup>556</sup> Translation - "... destroy the inferiority complex that too often exists among French Canadiens in Alberta as well as in other minority groups." *Ibid.*, 5.

## Responses to the Political State

Once public representation and private associations were established, they would need to respond to the challenges of the political environment. As with most things French in the West, actions were first initiated by the Catholic Church. Before and after the West was opened for settlement, church leaders made efforts to acquire land for their flock. Taché (and other clergy) wrote incessantly to the Federal Government to secure preferred land along the Red River belt before Anglo-Protestants and Mennonites could settle on it.<sup>557</sup> The western Catholic Church also purchased land from the Government, and held on to it until French settlers arrived to buy it from them. It was through this process that the Church also realized the need for a school system and structure.<sup>558</sup>

In 1916, and after the Thornton Act repealed much of the Laurier-Greenway Compromise which had allowed some French language instruction in Manitoba, tensions grew. A large assembly was coordinated at Saint-Boniface's College in Winnipeg, inviting all western French leaders to attend.<sup>559</sup> Clear direction was given to renew their efforts against linguistic and religious oppression. Their message was to encourage existing associations, and start new associations. *La Liberté* reported that *cercles* of *L'Association d'Education du Manitoba* began gathering strength in many of its rural communities.<sup>560</sup> At their first congress months later, this

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<sup>557</sup> Mennonites, mostly from Ukraine, secured reserves on both sides of the Red River and were competition for the Catholic Church in securing a land base.

<sup>558</sup> After Taché's return from Viviers, France, and his coronation as Bishop in 1851, he began a writing campaign to secure land for his church. This third letter, written to his mother explaining the situation at the Red River, was written May 23, 1852. Taché to his mother, *Les Cloches de Saint-Boniface*, vol.33, no 7, jul 1934, 178-80. Taché would also write to his superior, the Archbishop Bourget in Montréal for guidance and support. Bourget held sway at that time with government, and Taché wanted to secure a school program in his diocese for his first settlers and the French-speaking Métis. He also wanted to ensure a French language school system was in place for the future. One published letter was written May 31, 1852. Taché to Bourget, *Les Cloches de Saint-Boniface*, vol.33 no 8, aug 1934, 204-5.

<sup>559</sup> Specific attendance numbers were not given but it was reported that the hall was so full that women were not allowed entry. "Jusqu'au Bout ! C'est la decision prise à la grande assemblée de vendredi soir au college de St-Boniface", *La Liberté*, vol.III, no 42, 29 feb 1916, 6.

<sup>560</sup> "Cercles Locaux", *La Liberté*, vol.IV, no 12, 2 aug 1916, 1.



association determined that Manitoba's French-speakers could not allow yet another affront to the hard work being done to protect their language in their schools. They would need to unite. "L'ambitions de nos compatriotes, c'était alors de rester sur leurs positions d'arracher à la tempête les débris qu'il serait possible de sauver et de s'acharner à la restauration du système détruit. Ils organisèrent *l'Association d'Education [du Manitoba]*."<sup>561</sup>

*L'Association d'Education du Manitoba* would respond by holding numerous bilingual teachers' conventions. Their programs often began with a social function, followed immediately with their elections.<sup>562</sup> Their charter included a focus on having committee members from each parish of the province, using their membership to influence the Commissioner of Schools. At a fourth congress held at Saint Boniface in 1922, one hundred sixty delegates attended, representing 'nearly all' of Manitoba's parishes.<sup>563</sup> Their numbers would continue to increase.<sup>564</sup> In Manitoba especially, association membership reflected what effect they would have. This was not always the case farther west, where a sometimes apathetic French base and a declining Church and government commitment to the French language highlighted the challenges to a French western identity. To best illustrate the political climate and how the French in the West responded, the remainder of this chapter focuses on the work and lasting effect of one of western

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<sup>561</sup> Translation - "The ambitions of our countrymen is to remain steadfast and to wrest from the storm the debris from which it would be possible to save and to restore the system now destroyed. They must organize *l'Association d'Education [du Manitoba]* for this purpose." "Discours du Président", *La Liberté*, vol.XVIII, no 6, 9 jul 1930, 1.

<sup>562</sup> "Convention des Instituteurs de Langue Francaise du Manitoba", *La Liberté*, vol.XIV, no 45, 13 apr 1927, 1.

<sup>563</sup> This specific meeting would resolve to have each member's family contribute \$5.00 toward a private school system. "Le Congrès de l'Association d'Education – Ce qu'on a fait au Congrès. Le nouvel Exécutif", *La Liberté*, vol.X, no 3, 27 jun 1922, 1,3.

<sup>564</sup> One membership list published in 1919 included 126 names from the community of Saint-Jean-Baptiste. "Pour La Defense Nationale – Association d'Education des Canadiens-Francais du Manitoba", *La Liberté*, vol.VI, no 38, 4 feb 1919, 1. Further, a 1930 *La Liberté* report listed each of *L'Association d'Education du Manitoba's cercles'* standing. The report included how many of their cercles; existed (48 in 1928), held annual meetings (27), had representation at their annual convention (42), and had filed annual financial reports (25). They also included a count of French teachers in all their parishes (25) in relation to their competition (43). "Le Congrès de l'Association d'Education du Manitoba – Les Activités de l'Association", *La Liberté*, vol.XVIII, no 7, 16 jul 1930, 1. Other times, reports were printed listing donations by its membership and associated cercles. "Jour de l'Association d'Education", *La Liberté*, vol.XVIII, no 23, 5 nov 1930, 4.

Canada's most active French associations, *L'Association Catholique Franco-Canadienne de la Saskatchewan (l'A.C.F.C.)*.

Emile Gravel, after having been elected to *l'A.C.F.C.*'s central committee, laid out a plan for the FranSaskois. Appearing in *Le Patriote de l'Ouest* in 1916,<sup>565</sup> Gravel's plan advocated a far-reaching census to record all French speakers in Saskatchewan. This *Le Recensement des Franco-Canadiens* would then provide the basis of recruitment and organization for the French associations in Saskatchewan.<sup>566</sup> He proposed that, once this list was created and non-members added, it would be easier to organize.<sup>567</sup> Gravel's plan was immediately sanctioned by *Le Patriote de l'Ouest*'s editor Donatien Frémont and approved by *l'A.C.F.C.*

An initial vision of *l'A.C.F.C.* was made clear even before the association was formally established in 1912. According to *Le Patriote*'s first edition in 1910, French-speakers were asked to live honorably in a part of the country that they could positively influence "...la disparation de notre langue à l'Ouest."<sup>568</sup> With this beginning, and after their first few years trying to recover and grow a membership base, *l'A.C.F.C.* held a congress at Lebret. A first substantial mandate was struck: to create a regional executive committee to which local *cercle* parishes would report, to have local *cercle* executives be responsible for soliciting more members, to establish *cercles* in parishes where none exist, to establish a public committee to help connect these local *cercles*

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<sup>565</sup> Emile Gravel was the brother of the founder of Gravelbourg, l'Abbé Louis-Pierre Gravel.

<sup>566</sup> The census would be initiated at the local Parish *cercle* level, completed by the residing curé. Each parish census taken within the district, once completed, would then become the property of that *cercle*'s executive. A second copy would also be held by the resident curé.

<sup>567</sup> With this knowledge, *l'A.C.F.C.* would automatically add any French-speaking person aged eighteen years or over to their local *cercle*. "Mouvement de l'A.C.F.C.", *Le Patriote de l'Ouest*, vol.6, no 33, 26 oct 1916, 5.

<sup>568</sup> Translation - "...the disrepair of our language in the West." From an initial meeting in August, 1910, this article in *Le Patriote de l'Ouest* was discussed in their first edition. "Notre Programme", *Le Patriote de l'Ouest*, vol.1, no 1, 22 aug 1910, 4.

to each other and with *Le Patriote de l'Ouest* newspaper, and last, to produce weekly reports from the executive committee on the work accomplished and projects pending.<sup>569</sup>

What values were to be instilled in their membership? In *l'A.C.F.C.*'s 1925 annual spring convention at Regina, Donatien Frémont, then editor of *Le Patriote*, revisited the reason for their association. Titled '*Que'est-ce que l'A.C.F.C.?*', Frémont answered his own question. Defining *l'A.C.F.C.* as a Catholic institution composed of Fransaskois, Frémont noted that the primary purpose of the association was to preserve the French identity through strength of membership, by honoring the French race, and by uniting their wills to succeed.<sup>570</sup> Frémont argued that only *l'A.C.F.C.* could best protect and grow this French culture and society:

Qu'ils s'engagent à installer notre langue en maîtresse dans leurs foyers, à lui donner, sans conteste, la première, à la parler en toutes occasions et à la faire parler par leurs enfants, de façon à ce qu'ils l'apprennent dès leur bas âge et grandissent avec la conviction bien arrêtée que leur langue maternelle doit être conservé au prix des plus grands sacrifices. Qu'ils voient à ce qu'elle ait une place légitime et suffisante dans l'enseignement à l'école.

translation

That they commit to install our language as mistress in their homes, to give our language unquestionable priority, to speak French on all occasions and to speak French with their children, so they learn from a young age and grow up with a settled conviction that their mother tongue should be preserved at the cost of great sacrifices. They will then see that the French language has a legitimate and important place in education at school.<sup>571</sup>

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<sup>569</sup> "Districts d'Organisation Regionale - Diocese de Regina - Diocese of Prince Albert", *Le Patriote de l'Ouest*, vol.5, no 32, 21 oct 1915, 3.

<sup>570</sup> The original text reads "Son but, vous le trouvez tout enonce dans les statuts generaux de la société ; c'est l'amour de tous les coeurs, de toutes les volontés, de toutes les intelligences, de toutes le force, de ceux qui s'honoreut [sp] d'appartenir à la race française." Translation – "Its purpose, you will find in the general statutes of the company; it is to connect the love of all hearts, of all wills, of all intelligences, of all strengths, of those honored to belong to the French race." Frémont's words from *l'A.C.F.C.* convention held March 1925. "L'Association Catholique Franco-Canadienne", *Le Patriote de l'Ouest*, vol.15, no 5, 8 apr 1925, 1.

<sup>571</sup> "Les Resolutions de la Convention Canadienne-Française de l'Alberta - La Langue Française.", *Les Cloches de Saint-Boniface*, vol.11, no 13, 1 jul 1912, 158. One of the best examples, and one *Le Patriote* newspaper spent much time reporting on, Le Collège Mathieu at Gravelbourg became the example to follow for keeping the French language alive. As noted in chapter 4, this college would be used to promote a regional French ethnic identity.

Frémont concluded that only through an active union could they accomplish their goals and stand up to the majority.<sup>572</sup>

While the intent was sincere, membership did not automatically follow. For example, while 450 Franco-Canadiens attended the first *A.C.F.C.* convention in 1912, less than half would become members in the coming months.<sup>573</sup> By 1914 there were 44 parish *cercles*, but membership barely reached 1300 paying members out of a French-speaking population of approximately 30,000.<sup>574</sup> Membership numbers would not increase through to the end of the settlement period.

### The Saskatchewan Schools Crisis – 1918

During the years of the Great War there was a growing displeasure directed at the Western French. This stemmed from many factors and would lead to a rift within the governing body of Saskatchewan's schools. This rift culminated with the majority English *Saskatchewan Schools Trustees' Association (S.S.T.A.)* push to eliminate French instruction in its schools.<sup>575</sup> At their 1918 convention over 3000 sympathetic members attended to shout down any anticipated resistance to amending *the School Act*.<sup>576</sup> The objections of the attending French-Catholic school trustees (a few hundred) were never acknowledged. With a call to suppress any 'foreign' language from being used or taught in their schools, the *S.S.T.A.* secured Saskatchewan's

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<sup>572</sup> "Impressions de la Saskatchewan", *La Liberté*, vol.XII, no 41, 18 mar 1925, 3.

<sup>573</sup> In the first two weeks in June 1913, 200 members inside nine *cercles* were created with an initial membership drive. By December 1913, thirty communities in Saskatchewan had *A.C.F.C. cercles*.

<sup>574</sup> 1911's federal census for Saskatchewan notes 25,497 French speakers in 1911 and 32,066 in 1916. *Census of Canada, 1931*. In 1914, L'A.C.F.C. counted 1309 members and total revenue of \$866.00. In 1915, membership dropped to 43 *cercles* and 1249 members. 1916 had membership receipts totalling \$1112.15. Huel, "L'Association Catholique Franco-Canadienne De La Saskatchewan", 58.

<sup>575</sup> Two of the major factors were: associating the western French with Québec's stance on conscription, and a growing xenophobic mindset to all non-Anglo-Saxon races.

<sup>576</sup> Raymond Denis' memoirs recalls what would become their slogan: 'One [English] language, one [English] school, one [English] flag'. "Mes Memoires Copie du Manuscrit de M. Raymond Denis", n.d., SAB, Fonds Raymond Denis, R500.1311-14.

Premier William Martin's support. Section 177 of *the School Act*<sup>577</sup> was amended in January 1919 to have English become the only language of instruction permitted in their schools with the exception of the first grade and for one hour in the other grades.<sup>578</sup>

### ***L'A.C.F.C.'s Response***

In response, *l'A.C.F.C.'s* leadership initiated a split of French-speaking members of the *S.S.T.A.* to create *the Catholic Schools Trustees' Association of Saskatchewan (C.S.T.A.)*.<sup>579</sup> Other associations, *l'Association des commissaires d'écoles Franco-Canadiens (A.C.E.F.C.)* and *l'Association Interprovinciale (l'A.I.)* were also created by these same leaders to help defend French instruction in their schools. *L'A.C.E.F.C.'s* first major convention was held in February 1919, with many of Saskatchewan's French elites in attendance. The man who rose to lead all four associations (*A.C.F.C., C.S.T.A., A.C.E.F.C.* and *A.I.*) was Raymond Denis.<sup>580</sup>

Denis likened the situation of the French in the West to the peasants in Russia and France prior to their revolutions and called on the elites to lead the masses. He considered this kind of organization critical to any undertaking where governments overwhelmed its citizens. With this analogy, he determined that the heart of government oppression was directed at bilingual schools, and that French elites needed to intervene directly. He began to formulate a plan for a French education committee:

Ce comité aura à visiter les écoles françaises de sa région, à organiser entre elles des concours bilingues, à faire passer des examens français (puisque pour les examens anglais nous pouvons nous en remettre en toute sécurité [sp] aux inspecteurs officiels!) Les résultats de ces examens et de ces concours seront publiés durant les assemblées

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<sup>577</sup> Lapointe, *The Francophones of Saskatchewan*, 201-202. The School Act Amendment of 1920 was assented November 10.

<sup>578</sup> The only saving grace was that French language instruction was allowed. With religious instruction now allowed for half an hour, this meant that French instruction could potentially be given for 90 minutes per day. *Ibid.*, 203.

<sup>579</sup> The *C.S.T.A.* would include not just French-Catholic trustees but also other ethnic Catholics. Raymond Huel, "*L'Association Catholique Franco-Canadienne De La Saskatchewan*", 235.

<sup>580</sup> Lapointe, *The Francophones of Saskatchewan*, 200.

mensuelles, sous forme de rapport du comité d'éducation, et les parents apprendront ainsi si le français est réellement enseigné et respecté.

Dans les écoles où, pour une raison quelconque, notre langue est maltraitée ou négligée, le comité d'éducation mettra les instituteurs ou institutrices en charge de ces écoles en demeure de changer d'attitude, et, en cas de refus ou de promesses non tenues, les noms seront publiés et cloués au pilori.

Pour arriver à ces résultats, il faut que nous soyons organisés.

translation

This committee will have to visit the French schools in each region, to organize bilingual competitions, to pass French exams (since for the English exams we can safely hand over to the official inspectors)! The results of these exams and these competitions will be published during the monthly meetings as a report of the Education Committee, and parents will learn if French is actually taught and respected.

In schools where, for some reason, our language is abused or neglected, the Education Committee will instruct the teachers in charge of these schools to change their attitude, and in case of refusals or false promises their names will be published and pilloried.

To achieve these results, we must be organized.<sup>581</sup>

*L'A.C.F.C.* (and like-minded associations), led by Denis, put in place a scheme to circumvent government legislation. Four strategies, if successful, would secure French language instruction in their schools and best safeguard a French way of life in the West. These strategies included: the use of French textbooks, recruitment of bilingual teachers, having school inspections, and last, administering French language examinations.

Denis and *L'A.C.F.C.* wanted French textbooks in their schools. With *the 1920 School Act Amendment* in place, Denis' proposed to government to have Québec school texts used in Saskatchewan (called the Magnan Readers). The proposal was accepted.<sup>582</sup> When these texts

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<sup>581</sup> "L'Association Catholique Franco-Canadienne", *Le Patriote de l'Ouest*, vol.10, no 30, 29 sep 1920, 1.

<sup>582</sup> An initial proposal to have French books encouraged in their schools came in 1913. The idea to maintain a travelling library of 200-300 French books never materialized due to funding.

were suppressed in 1928 for ‘objectionable’ wording, Denis would continue his quest to have approved text books on the list for teachers to order.<sup>583</sup> While Saskatchewan’s Government agreed, by 1929, no French books had yet been added to the teachers’ list.<sup>584</sup>

In 1917, a shortage of bilingual teachers forced the shutdown of several French schools. In response, *l’A.C.F.C.* facilitated creating *l’Association Interprovinciale (A.I.)*, conceived to help recruit bilingual teachers from Québec and other eastern provinces. Another association, *l’Association des Commissaires d’Écoles Franco-Canadiens (l’A.C.E.F.C.)* was also established with a similar purpose: to safeguard the cultural and religious interests of Saskatchewan’s French-Canadiens in their schools. As a result of their combined efforts, they were able to secure teaching certificates to allow Québec teachers into Saskatchewan. One recruitment program in 1918 sponsored thirty-two Québec teachers. During A.I.’s tenure (1917-1925), they contributed over \$10,000 to sponsor over 100 teachers.<sup>585</sup>

While the Saskatchewan Government honored Québec’s teaching certificates initially, the government revoked its acceptance by 1920.<sup>586</sup> They argued that teachers from Québec rarely spoke English making instruction for the majority of the day untenable. With limited funding to recruit and sponsor bilingual teachers, small private donations were used to sponsor a small number of Saskatchewan’s students to be trained in bilingual teaching careers. With limited funding and little interest, this concept never gained much ground.<sup>587</sup>

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<sup>583</sup> Written originally for students in Québec, the ‘objectionable wording’ glamorized French nationalism. Huel, “*L’Association Catholique Franco-Canadienne De La Saskatchewan*”, 196.

<sup>584</sup> *Ibid.*, 247.

<sup>585</sup> *Ibid.*, 150-1.

<sup>586</sup> *Ibid.*, 171.

<sup>587</sup> By 1931 the A.C.E.F.C. raised only \$1300 for six girls in ‘normal’ school in Saskatchewan to attend college for purpose of teaching in bilingual schools. *Ibid.*, 267.

With the changes to the *School Act* in 1920, *l'A.C.F.C.* decided to focus their efforts on securing school inspectors to keep an eye on the progress of French instruction in the schools.<sup>588</sup> The first school inspector approved by the government was Father A.F. Auclair, O.M.I.<sup>589</sup> Unfortunately, the school board would assign him to regular schools, not the bilingual schools and classes they wanted some influence over.<sup>590</sup> With this setback Denis devised a plan to install his own 'visiteurs d'écoles'. Knowing that any 'visiteur' was allowed in class, Denis instructed them to attend bilingual classes, take notes and make suggestions for improvement. These 'visiteurs', installed in 1925, would submit reports to *l'A.C.F.C.*'s parish cercles, their curés, and both *C.S.T.A.* and *S.S.T.A.* representatives.

In the first two and a half months of operation, 25 schools (with 777 students) were visited. In two years, the same Abbé Auclair, and his new assistant l'Abbé G. Boileau, visited 210 bilingual classes and reported on the status of 6167 students.<sup>591</sup> While this strategy was effective over the short term, an amendment would be passed by the *Saskatchewan Schools Board* in 1927 disallowing any 'visiteurs' from auditing classes without first obtaining written approval. This eliminated any further 'visiteurs' and Denis' plan was again thwarted.

While most of these strategies had a short-term impact, the one lasting effect of Denis' and *l'A.C.F.A.*'s attempts to minimize the authority of government intervention came with the idea to test French students themselves. These tests were initiated during the 'visiteurs d'écoles'

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<sup>588</sup> A list of resolutions includes Raymond Denis and Dr. Aubin propose installing a French schools inspection program. "L'Aide au 'Patriote de l'Ouest', *Le Patriote de l'Ouest*, vol.10, no 43, 29 dec 1920, 2-3.

<sup>589</sup> Archille F. Auclair, ordained in eastern Canada, and graduated from the University of Ottawa, also became the assistant editor of *Le Patriote* in 1910, and then the paper's director from 1911 until 1925. He would accept a position for *l'A.C.F.C.* as a 'visiteur d'écoles' from 1925 until 1927. Huel, "*L'Association Catholique Franco-Canadienne De La Saskatchewan*", 258.

<sup>590</sup> *Ibid.*, 180-2.

<sup>591</sup> *Ibid.*, 181.



experiment, testing their students on their understanding of the French language. Because these exams were carried out after school hours, the Saskatchewan Government could not stop them. Denis focused on putting in place a system of annual examinations, awards, and diplomas for Saskatchewan's French students. Beginning in 1925, exams, called 'Concours de Français' would be administered once each year. The idea, already used to effect in Manitoba's French schools,<sup>592</sup> helped to promote the French language and give a sense of pride in its traditions and culture. Prizes would be awarded for top marks. All students passing the exam would receive certificates from *l'A.C.F.C.* (with a picture of a Canadian maple leaf on the certificate). Students' marks would be published in *Le Patriote de l'Ouest*. It had great effect. In its inaugural year, 1061 students took part in these French exams. This increased each year and by 1929, almost 2000 students would be examined.<sup>593</sup>

### Conclusion

In the beginning, *l'A.C.F.C.* was able to generate enough interest in their association to give hope to a French identity in Saskatchewan. This hope was tempered as an Anglo-immigrant population and 'English only' campaign gripped the province. As early as 1917, French instruction was limited to the first grade. Before the turn of the upcoming decade and throughout the 1920s, schools issues relating to French instruction drew attention from the overwhelming non-French-Catholic majority. In 1929, *the School Act* would be further amended prohibiting

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<sup>592</sup> This article from *La Liberté* illustrates Manitoba's schools' positive effect. A scholarly competition (exam) took place of all French schools and on the French language. 430 French students in 88 schools took part. Some resolutions for the upcoming year were to continue to encourage rural schools to participate. Some of the benefactors of the prizes were: The Government of France, The Quebec Government, *La Société Saint-Jean-Baptiste de Montreal*, *La Federation des Femmes Canadiennes-Francaises de Winnipeg et de Saint-Boniface*, *La Société Saint-Jean-Baptiste de Saint-Boniface*, *La Société Saint-Jean-Baptiste de Winnipeg*, *La Banque Canadienne Nationale*, *L'Union Nationale Metisse*. "Le Concours de Français de l'Association d'Education", *La Liberté*, vol.XIII, no 10, 12 aug 1925, 3.

<sup>593</sup> Students were examined in 1925 (1,061 students), 1926 (1,364 students), 1927 (1,644 students), 1928 (1,953 students), and 1929 (1,975 students). Rottiers, *Soixante-Cinq Années De Lutttes*, 49.

displays of religious affiliation in schools. *Bill no. 1*, in effect July 1, 1930, decreed that religious instruction could only be given in English, breaking the once unbreakable bond between Catholic Church and French-speaker. While *l'A.C.F.C.* pleaded with their membership to ignore the new bill, fear of reprisal cemented the bill into practice. By 1931, all that was left of the strategies to keep French instruction in schools was a one-hour course in French and self-administered annual French exams.

While Manitoba's French were better positioned to respond, and Alberta's French were not yet fully established, Saskatchewan's French elites did what they could in the existing political climate. By the end of the 1920s, however, *l'A.C.F.C.* would have a funding problem. *L'A.C.F.C.*'s 1925 to 1930 financial reports illustrated their situation. In 1925, forty-three *cercles*, or just under 3000 members contributed only \$2,988.47.<sup>594</sup> This trend continued and in 1930 only twenty-three *A.C.F.C. cercles* collected \$1,298.50.<sup>595</sup> By 1933, *Le Patriote*, the official voice of *l'A.C.F.C.*, had already become the property of the Oblates of Mary Immaculate. In 1935, *Le Patriote* only had 2,300 subscribers. It would not be until the 1960s that *l'A.C.F.C.* began to grow in influence.<sup>596</sup>

These results should not diminish the effort put forward by French western associations and their leaders. For a number of reasons seen in this and previous chapters, Saskatchewan and Alberta's French could not as easily follow Manitoba's lead. These two provinces did not have the luxury of a strong French-Catholic base with which to start. And as the Catholic Church's role diminished in their protection of the French language in efforts to include other western

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<sup>594</sup> If each family paid the \$1.25 they were supposed to, they should have received \$5,386.25. Just under 3000 families cared to be members of *l'A.C.F.C.* "Séance du Mercredi Soir", *Le Patriote de l'Ouest*, vol.15, no 2, 18 mar 1925, 4-5.

<sup>595</sup> Raymond Huel, "*L'Association Catholique Franco-Canadienne De La Saskatchewan*" (1981), 64. Lapointe's view of the 1930 report was slightly different, realizing membership fees of \$2770.85. Lapointe, *The Francophones of Saskatchewan*, 213.

<sup>596</sup> Huel, "*L'Association Catholique Franco-Canadienne De La Saskatchewan*", 252.

Catholic races, the Fransaskois relied less on the strength of their *cercles*, and more on their own leaders to forge ahead. In Alberta, realizing their situation was more dire than in Saskatchewan, their leaders would try different strategies to impact their political environment, to create associations on their own, or rely on Fransaskois associations.

Saskatchewan's associations' leaders were the most active of the three provinces in blazing their own path. Their leaders would come to the fore, to create a more indigenous western French identity. Leaders born in France, Belgium and Europe, would focus on the blend of multi-racial French-speaking immigrants in protecting their rights and establishing their own identity. The Fransaskois were linked more to Europe than to Québec, and with this, the Fransaskois leadership group (also more from Europe) would do what they could to continue a French identity in Saskatchewan. Raymond Denis was one such leader. Born in France and arriving on the advice of Jean Gaire, he became a central figure in Saskatchewan forging a new identity. Others followed. For example, *La Société Permanent du Parler Français de la Saskatchewan*, while they began officially in Québec, had as its leadership group European French-speakers. Their executive was a direct product of Gaire's Saskatchewan communities. A column in *l'A.C.F.C.* in 1912, included biographies on committee members of *La Société des Parler Français de la Saskatchewan*. M. Maurice Quennelle, President of *le comité* in the beginning, was born at Armentieres, north France in 1873. He bought land first in Grande Clairière with the help of Jean Gaire, then moved to Wauchope, Saskatchewan. Quennelle would later become *l'A.C.F.C.*'s first president. *Le comité's* executive followed a similar trac:

- Vice President is R.P. Henri Delmas, O.M.I. was born in the diocese of Rodez, France in 1870. responsible for installing the French school at Duck Lake in 1911. The community of Duck Lake was instrumental in helping establish Fransaskois associations.

- Secretary of the committee is M. L'abbe Charles Maillard, born at Calais, France March 11, 1873. Maillard was curé of Wolsely in 1912.<sup>597</sup>

The birthplace of French-speakers from countries outside of Canada is telling. According to 1916 Census data, those French-speakers not born in Canada made up 1.7% of the population in Saskatchewan, 1.6% from Alberta, and less than 0.9% from Manitoba. While the total population counts may be small, they are indicative of where the French leaders in Saskatchewan hailed.<sup>598</sup> These non-Québec French speakers were more prevalent in Saskatchewan than in Manitoba (or Alberta), and they became a crucial part of a new emerging French identity in Saskatchewan.<sup>599</sup>

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<sup>597</sup> "Le Comité Permanent du Parler Français de la Saskatchewan", *Le Patriote de l'Ouest*, vol.2, no 6, 11 apr 1912, 1.

<sup>598</sup> Saskatchewan's French population in 1916 was 34,587, representing 5.3% of the total population of that province (647,835). Alberta's French population in 1916 was 26,269, also representing 5.3% of the total population of that province (496,525). Manitoba's French population in 1916 was 38,215, representing 6.9% of the total population of that province (553,860). *Census of Prairie Provinces, 1916*.

<sup>599</sup> According to the Census of Canada's definition of naturalization, naturalization "...is indicative of the permanency of the interest of foreign immigrants in the country." *Census of Canada, 1921*, 26.

## Chapter 8 CONCLUSION

My initial question of whether the western French-speakers constituted an ethnic identity and a regional French identity in the period to 1930 can be answered only tentatively or provisionally. Influenced by the changing social, economic and political environments, this French identity exhibited varying degrees of new developments in the three Prairie Provinces. As Gerard Bouchard has argued, any ‘new society’, needs two things to be productive: tradition from the mother country and innovation from its citizens. Both themes played out for the French in Western Canada.<sup>600</sup>

The Catholic Church provided a plan and structure for a French western identity as it erected a complex infrastructure to support a growing set of connected communities and localities. From the beginning, as in Québec, the Catholic Church assumed the role as French cultural leader in the West. As long as the Catholic Church remained strong, there was hope for a lasting tradition-laden French identity. First apparent in Manitoba, the Catholic Church played a major role in the French identity in all western provinces. This church influence came not only from Québec but from France and the Oblate Congregation.

The leadership of business-minded l’Abbé Louis-Pierre Gravel created a new version of a French identity among the Fransaskois locality of southern Saskatchewan. In what grew to be *Le Diocèse de Gravelbourg*, this Catholic priest would, along with concomitant leaders of newspapers and associations, articulate a different vision to unite the settling French population arriving from other regions and countries of origin. Gravel and other Fransaskois leaders argued that it mattered not where their original connections lay, whether their ‘chief nation’ was Québec

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<sup>600</sup> Gérard Bouchard, Michelle Weinroth and Paul Leduc Browne, *The Making of the Nations and Cultures of the New World: An Essay in Comparative History* (Montreal: McGill-Queen's University Press, 2008).

or France, or elsewhere.<sup>601</sup> It only mattered to make the new land their home. The concept, ‘ubi bene, ibi patria’, or, ‘home is where the heart is’ was evident and used to rally their cause to begin a new life for themselves.<sup>602</sup> *Le Patriote de l’Ouest* made this point clear; “Pour nous plus que pour tout autre le Canada c’est la patrie car nous n’en avons point d’autres.”<sup>603</sup> This concept, that the prairie west was their ‘patrie’ and not France nor Québec, became the next step to create a new way of thinking for the greater western region.

In Gravel, the Fransaskois had a leader already cognizant of a French-Catholic community needing to struggle within an English majority population (Gravel spent the first years of his resident curé tenure in New York). For Gravel, it was important to first establish a French enclave (to recreate a tradition and base) and then, when the time was right, to introduce the non-French majority into their community. Gravel knew they needed to work together with those outside their traditional way of life if they were to survive. With an initial push to secure land and then collect and unite a French base, Gravel would strive to create an infrastructure that could support a French identity but even more, be able to withstand the overwhelming influence of a non-French majority.

In Alberta, and while missionary work began early, French colonization efforts would come later than Saskatchewan and Manitoba. This made organization of a new French identity more difficult, and especially after the Catholic Church abandoned the symbiotic relationship with French settlers. As part of their strategy, Franco-Albertans chose to rely on the Saskatchewan model to help secure their plan. Alberta’s situation seemed more similar to

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<sup>601</sup> *Le Patriote* spoke of the relationship with Québec as the ‘chief nation’ or ‘home nation’ to the West. See “La nation-chef”, *Le Patriote de l’Ouest*, vol.1, no 46, 18 jan 1912, 1.

<sup>602</sup> “Ca et La”, *L’Ouest Canadien*, vol.1, no 7-8, 17-24 mar 1898.

<sup>603</sup> Translation - “For us, more than any other, Canada [and the West] is our country, for we have no other.” *Le Patriote de l’Ouest*, vol.1, no 46, 18 jan 1912, 1.

Saskatchewan than Manitoba. Franco-Albertans built communities in most regions of the province, but they were unable to secure a traditional foothold at the level Manitoba had nor formulate a coherent strategy to construct a unique identity (to the degree that Saskatchewan had). Yet Alberta's French did continue to struggle to survive well past the settlement period under investigation.

This dissertation has tried to show the challenges in grouping and uniting the French (*grouper* and *unir*) and how these challenges varied across the western provinces. French localities across the West were presented with different issues. Maintaining staunch French traditions did not work everywhere. For the most part, it worked along the Red River Valley of Manitoba where church and infrastructure was more entrenched. But in Saskatchewan, loosening the ties from an established Québec French identity was needed to allow the Fransaskois to both continue a tradition of Catholic Church leadership where possible and then adapt to a French elite leadership group and strategies where needed. In Alberta, more removed from Québec by distance and thought, Franco-Albertans would witness even more the reduced security from weakened French traditions and the Catholic Church. Differences between the western French and Québec surfaced most in Saskatchewan and Alberta. Less secured French enclaves (unlike in parts of Manitoba) meant a greater threat from the surrounding ethnic groups. This meant a greater level of struggle; a need to proclaim one's ethnicity, a need to adapt and create new identities, and therefore a need to protect (*protéger*) one's interests and to 'innovate'. Manitoba mostly succeeded in retaining settled and protected cultures more closely resembling Québec and 'la patrie' whereas Saskatchewan (and to a lesser degree Alberta) became more aggressive in constructing a different version of a French identity.

What constitutes a separate, regional identity? It is the recognition by both the group and ‘other’ that a unique identity exists.<sup>604</sup> This begs a follow-up question. How is the western region’s French identity different from Québec? There are a number of factors noted throughout my dissertation. Three are worth highlighting. The Western Catholic Church, in addressing a multitude of Catholic ethnic groups, chose, in time, to focus on more than simply their French faithful, something not seen in Québec. Second, the French in the West were not as homogenous or protected as those in Québec. They were a minority linguistic group surrounded by both Protestants and Anglo-speakers. This created the third factor distinguishing the western French: their need to struggle to retain their language and culture. This factor and decision to ‘struggle’, more than any other, identifies how the western regional French differentiated themselves from Québec. The western French identified a need to struggle in order to create a new identity indigenous to their environment.

How did they then differ from the French in Québec? In the West, leaders of newspapers and organizations focused on national issues but also on issues and events unique to their own situation – the need for new missions and parishes, and the need to protect their schools and language. They focused on issues relevant to living in a non-French western society. Franco-Manitobans, for example, were about following traditions but also about addressing their situation. Leadership from the Archdiocese of Saint-Boniface spent decades negotiating with the Federal Government for preferred land along the Red River. Challenges surrounding the *Manitoba Schools Question* would also create impediments to be overcome through effort and

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<sup>604</sup> We need look no further than federal and provincial government actions opposing a French language system in the West to confirm this supposition, that an identity exists.



struggle. Manitoba French newspapers *Les Cloches de Saint-Boniface* and *La Liberté* reported on these and other events. They helped establish associations modelled on those created in Québec to best support their struggles, but then they also formed their own. Reporting on Manitoba's association *L'A.C.J.C.*, these two newspapers focused on remembering their traditions, but also of beginning new, of creating their own communities, parishes and missions, and of building supportive western associations like *l'A.C.J.C.* These leaders (of both Manitoba newspapers and associations) were aware of what the new territory was becoming. They were different than the already established Québec and the walls that province had so carefully built.

As already noted, there were differences in how the French in the western provinces responded to the challenges. There were different degrees of struggle, of venturing further on one's own from the traditional base of Québec, and of defending their new French indigenous identity against the English majority. Manitoba had the most secure French population and constitutional tradition (Manitoba Act) and hence, they were less likely to innovate. In Saskatchewan and Alberta, it became obvious that a new course of action was required.

The need, and level, to struggle would highlight differences between the western provinces. In Alberta, as example, M. Le Cerf, the editor of *L'Union* newspaper, debated the demand to introduce non-French elements into an existing French culture. Le Cerf wrote a number of articles after the Great War ended and as large non-French populations began to arrive. He wrote on how the French should interact with the English (when it suited their financial or business interests), and when they should be steadfast in demanding their own French rights. In one specific article, Le Cerf argued that the *United Farmers of Alberta Convention* in Edmonton in 1919 demonstrated the dangers of being a French minority and

joining groups like the *U.F.A.* where the English language and English values and traditions were followed. This, according to Le Cerf, became even more dangerous when French Canadiens committed financially to these organizations. According to Le Cerf, the challenge, was to take advantage of economic opportunities without being tied to non-French mandates and cultures. Once money was involved, money of significance (simply paying membership fees was not an issue according to Le Cerf), it had the potential to be overwhelming. According to Le Cerf, money, the economy and the desire to succeed financially, could consume one's own ethnic values and ultimately one's ethnic identity.<sup>605</sup>

The variance between the western provinces, dictated by demographic and political changes across the decades, produced a more established (and more traditional) French culture in Manitoba and a more unique (and innovative) French identity in Saskatchewan and Alberta. With failing Church support, and with a settled and mostly non-French infrastructure in place in its communities across these two more western provinces, the French in Saskatchewan and Alberta needed to rely on its French newspapers and associations, and thus, its lay leaders to carry the struggle. Saskatchewan, establishing their French institutions after Manitoba yet earlier than Alberta, took this lead. With Fransaskois organizations already in place, Alberta, equally cognizant of the need to struggle, looked more to Saskatchewan's model.

There were two types of French leaders (and associations) in the West: those headed by the Catholic Church who followed the lead from Québec, and lay leaders who broke from the Québec model. Church organizations and leaders were seen more in Manitoba as has already been noted. It was the second group, lay leaders more driven by the concept 'Gesta(e) Dei per

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<sup>605</sup> "La Convention des Fermiers Unis d'Alberta à Edmonton", *L'Union*, vol.5, no 12, 30 jan 1919, 1,4.

Francos', who followed a more independent course.<sup>606</sup> Heightened by the break of the western Catholic Church's exclusive relationship with French Catholics, French leaders would need to assume responsibility for protecting both a French identity and Catholic life. This shift in leadership was most apparent in French western newspapers and associations, especially those in Saskatchewan and Alberta (Manitoba's two major newspapers were underwritten by the Archdiocese of Saint-Boniface). Lay leaders, given the uncertainty of a continuing French way of life in a sea of non-French, needed a strategy to best combat the challenges they faced.

Saskatchewan's French associations (and leaders) were unique in that they did not rely solely on the Catholic Church to solve their problems, nor did they utilize Québec's associations as models. They relied on their own leaders and associations. Men like Saskatchewan's Raymond Denis and Maurice Quennelle, would identify with French-speakers of all origins and they welcomed a more European French group.<sup>607</sup> They were determined to be Franco-Canadiens, not Canadiens-Français.<sup>608</sup> If they were to survive in a non-French society, they would need to overcome their greatest challenge, that of retaining their French language in their schools. Challenged to teach French in the schools, Fransaskois associations used unorthodox strategies. The example of *l'Association Catholique Française-Canadienne de Saskatchewan (l'A.C.F.C.)* and the leadership of Denis and Quennelle were crucial.

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<sup>606</sup> One article written in Saskatchewan's *Le Patriote de l'Ouest* in 1912, speaks to the unbreakable connection between the Catholic Church and French culture, of the essence of 'la patrie', and of allowing lay leaders to carry forward in leading a French population. A quotation in this article from Napoleon Bonaparte makes the sentiment clear. "Je veux que mon fils soit bon chrétien, autrement il ne serait pas bon Français." Translation - "I want my son to be a good Christian, otherwise he would not be a good French person." In this same article, Pope Pius X repeats the sentiment. "France et Catholicisme sont deux noms qui ne peuvent être séparés." Translation - "France and Catholicism are two names that cannot be separated." "France et Canada", *Le Patriote de l'Ouest*, vol.2, no 11, 16 may 1912, 1.

<sup>607</sup> Unlike most of the leaders in the clergy of the Catholic Church in the West, especially those based out of Manitoba, Denis and Quennelle were born in France.

<sup>608</sup> *L'Association Catholique Française-Canadienne* was so named to identify first as French-speakers and then as Canadiens. This simple name-change represented their understanding of a more diverse French-speaking population in Saskatchewan.

Two main themes emerge from this study. First, a French identity would not have continued to exist without the Catholic Church's involvement. Its innate knowledge of building French communities, of understanding French traditions and culture, of collecting and uniting a committed community population was paramount to the establishment of a French identity in the western region. Second, the opportunity to create a new French identity came through struggle. The need to declare one's ethnicity was vital. Without 'struggle', to declare oneself as being French (Franco-Manitoban, Fransaskois, Franco-Albertan), the construction of a French identity would remain in doubt. Ethnic identity is strongest when put into position to defend itself.<sup>609</sup> This, more than anything, differentiated the western French from 'la patrie', and created a new French identity in western Canada.

The struggle for the western French identity could only happen when certain conditions were met. It needed a base; one strong enough to give a sense of tradition and culture and a primordial ethnic identity. The western Catholic Church helped ensure this first condition was met. Next, this base could not be too secure, too well established. There needed to be the perfect situation where challenges to the 'partially' established French culture were both formidable yet able to be overcome. There needed to be a constant 'struggle'. Manitoba, the most established French population relied most heavily on the Québec precedent. Alberta, with the least secure base struggled and had the least success, at least until 1930. Saskatchewan, situated somewhere between the Manitoba precedent and the Alberta problems, was most successful in creating an indigenous French group identity.

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<sup>609</sup> Ethnicity theorists Glazer and Moynihan, among others, argue that a conscious activation of declaring oneself or one's group as being ethnic is critical to be an ethnic being or ethnic group. This allows the ethnic person or group to display their ethnicity (and thus self-recognize), while also allowing others external to the ethnic group to recognize them as such. Nathan Glazer, Daniel Moynihan, and Corinne Schelling, *Ethnicity: Theory and Experience* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1975).

The last critical condition needed to realize a French regional identity was that there needed to be a willingness to include the non-French factor into their communities. Again different than their 'patrie', this willingness came, not through the leadership of the Church, but instead through its French elites. At Gravelbourg, Gravel argued that economic advantage could work symbiotically with retaining and advancing a French identity. These questions of when and how to introduce a non-French majority into a French enclave was a main theme and focus in all of the French newspapers reviewed. This middle ground and opportunity existed most in southern Saskatchewan. The result was a unique Fransaskois identity. Franco-Manitobans who more closely followed Québec traditions, and Franco-Albertans, who struggled to forge their own strategies, created variations of a French regional identity. The Saskatchewan French produced the more unique and indigenous identity both in keeping with traditions of Québec and the new conditions in the West. Manitoba (and its Catholic Church) endorsed their plan. Alberta (looking for a model that would work) followed.

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