

# French Canadians

## Background

The first French visitors to what is now Vermont came with Samuel de Champlain in 1609. Early on, the French made settlements at Montreal in Canada. French trappers traveled into Vermont, where they lived alongside and traded with the Abenakis, adopting Abenaki-style clothing and survival skills and living off the land. French Catholic missionaries also came to bring their religion to the Abenaki. The French also began to move more permanently into Vermont. In 1731, they began to build a fort at Crown Point. By 1755, as many as 200-250 soliders, former soldiers, and civilians lived there.

The land and the furs of New England proved attractive not only to the French, but to the British. Clashes between the groups and their Native American allies erupted throughout 1740s and 50s as they struggled for control of territory and trade routes. The English, French, and Indian War (1754-1763), decided the conflict in favor of the British, prompting English settlers to move north into Vermont. But in Quebec and other parts of eastern Canada, a distinct French culture remained.

In the second half of the 19th century, descendants of Vermont's original settlers began to leave the state in search of opportunity, lured away by better farmland in states to the west and to factory jobs in other parts of New England. These emigrants left farmland behind, and immigrants moved in to fill the gap. Among them were French Canadians.

From 1840-1930, about 900,000 French Canadians migrated from Québec to the United States. Most came to New England, and many of those who came to Vermont were farmers. Land had become scarce in Québec due to dramatic population growth.

French Canadians also found work at textile mills such as the American Woolen Mill in Winooski, Vermont and the Chace Cotton Mill in Burlington, as well as in the quarries of Barre and the Rutland area. Children as young as eight years old worked in the mills, putting in long hours under very dangerous conditions for pennies per hour. Photographs of children at work helped reformers establish child labor laws. In 1916, Congress passed the Keating-Owens Act, which set a minimum working age of 14 for industrial jobs and 16 for mining, and set a maximum 8-hour day for children.

Throughout Vermont, French Canadians formed vibrant cultural communities. In homes, businesses, and churches, French Canadian food, music, traditions, and the French language formed the cornerstone. The French Canadian influence in Vermont also helped change the state's political landscape. As of the 1950s, Vermont had been a rock-solid Republican state for nearly a century. But French Canadians, most of whom



Vermont French Canadian musicians Louis and Willie Beaudoin, with Louis's daughter Lisa, in the mid-1970s.

Beaudoin family photo

supported the Democratic Party, play a critical role in the election of Democrat Phil Hoff, first as a Vermont representative in 1960, and two years later as Vermont's first Democratic governor since 1853.

Despite their work ethic and their cultural contributions, French Canadians in the 18th and much of the 19th century faced discrimination in Vermont. One reason was that most practiced the Catholic religion, and most of the people who already lived in Vermont were Protestant. While discrimination caused some French Canadian Vermonters to hide their cultural roots, many refused to do so. Today, discrimination against Vermonters of French Canadian descent is largely a thing of the past, and many Franco-American Vermonters are proudly displaying their heritage.

## About This Segment

Produced by Michael Couture with the assistance of Louise Michaels, Kenneth Peck, and Nora Jacobson, this segment includes commentary by Yvan Plouffe of Charlotte about his life as a farmer and music by the Beaudoin family of Burlington, a group known for its performances of traditional French Canadian music.

## Before Viewing

- What components make up a culture?
- Who were the first French people to come to Vermont? Why did they come here?
- What are some examples of the French Canadian influence on Vermont?

## Vocabulary

- French Canadian:** a person whose ancestors were French colonists who came to live in what is now Canada in the 17th and 18th centuries
- immigrant:** a person who moves into one country from another country

## After Viewing

- How have French Canadians contributed to Vermont's culture and economy?
- Why did French Canadians face discrimination?
- How is your childhood different from that of Yvan Plouffe? In what ways is it the same?
- How do cultural traditions such as music, food, and religious beliefs help to hold an immigrant community together?

## Grades 4-5

**Children at Work** In the late 19th and early 20th centuries, children as young as eight years old worked in Vermont's textile mills—and in mills throughout New England. Documentary photographers recorded some remarkable images of these young workers. Doing online and library research, find some of these arresting images. Print them out or photocopy them, and hang them in a classroom gallery. To accompany your photo show, write a short essay about young workers in the mills.

## Vermont History and Social Sciences Grade Expectations

Initiate an inquiry (3-4:1; 5-6:1); Design research (3-4:3; 5-6:3); Conduct research (3-4:4; 5-6:4); Make connections to research (3-4:6; 5-6:6); Communicate findings (3-4:7; 5-6:7); Connect past with present (3-4:8; 5-6:8); Understand how humans interpret history (3-4:9; 5-6:9); Understand how cultures change (3-4:13; 5-6:13); Understand issues of human interdependence (3-4: 16; 5-6:16); Understand how access affects justice, reward, and power (3-4:17; 5-6:17); Interaction/ interdependence between humans, environment, and economy (3-4:18; 5-6:18)

**A Classroom Concert** Today, many people across Vermont play traditional French Canadian music. With the help of your music teacher, bring one or more of these musicians to your classroom for an interview and live performance. To prepare for your interview, make a list of questions that will help you to find out more about French Canadian music. Conduct your interview first, then enjoy a short concert. Be sure to record both on digital video to share with others in your school.

*Vermont History and Social Sciences Grade Expectations*

Initiate an inquiry (3-4:1; 5-6:1); Connect past with present (3-4:8; 5-6:8); Understand how cultures change (3-4:13; 5-6:13)

**Other Immigrants** French Canadians weren't the only immigrants to come to Vermont the late 1800s and early 1900s. With the help of your local historical society, find out as much as you can about other immigrant groups. Where did they come from? Why did they immigrate to Vermont? What have they contributed to life in your community? Present your findings in the form of a short talk.

*Vermont History and Social Sciences Grade Expectations*

Initiate an inquiry (3-4:1; 5-6:1); Design research (3-4:3; 5-6:3); Conduct research (3-4:4; 5-6:4); Make connections to research (3-4:6; 5-6:6); Communicate findings (3-4:7; 5-6:7); Connect past with present (3-4:8; 5-6:8); Understand how humans interpret history (3-4:9; 5-6:9); Understand how cultures change (3-4:13; 5-6:13); Understand issues of human interdependence (3-4: 16; 5-6:16); Understand how access affects justice, reward, and power (3-4:17; 5-6:17); Interaction/interdependence between humans, environment, and economy (3-4:18; 5-6:18)



A "mule-spinner" and his young assistant Leopold Daigneau, Chace Cotton Mill, Burlington, Vermont.

National Archives

Grades 6-8

**Vermont and Québec** Most French Canadians who came to Vermont in the 19th and 20th centuries emigrated from Québec. Québec is a province of Canada. It shares a border with Vermont, and is one of our biggest trading partners, yet few Vermonters know much about it. Do some research to learn more about Québec, including its history, the people who live there, its major cities, its economy, and the languages spoken there. Present your findings in the form of a short guidebook for people from Vermont who want to know more about Québec. Be sure to include maps.

*Vermont History and Social Sciences Grade Expectations*

Initiate an inquiry (5-6:1; 7-8:1); Design research (5-6:3; 7-8:3); Conduct research (5-6:4; 7-8:4); Make connections to research (5-6:6; 7-8:6); Communicate findings (5-6:7; 7-8:7); Interpret geography/solve geographic problems (5-6:11; 7-8:11)

**Mill Diaries** Imagine you are a child whose parents have recently come to Vermont from Quebec to farm. You have grown up with farming, but to help the family economically, you have taken a job working in a textile mill in Burlington. Writing a few entries for your diary about your new life. How is it different from the farm? How have you adapted to this new culture? What dangers—and opportunities—await you in the mill? After you have written a few diary entries, read them aloud for the class.

*Vermont History and Social Sciences Grade Expectations*

Initiate an inquiry (5-6:1; 7-8:1); Design research (5-6:3; 7-8:3); Conduct research (5-6:4; 7-8:4); Communicate findings (5-6:7; 7-8:7); Understanding of human interaction with the environment (5-6:12; 7-8:12); Understand how cultures change (5-6:13; 7-8:13); Interaction/interdependence between humans, the environment, and the economy (5-6:18; 7-8:18)

**A Cemetery Search** One way to explore the influence of an ethnic group on your community's history is to visit local cemeteries. To find out the influence of French Canadians in your town, visit one or more of its burial places. During your visit, do a search for French surnames. Gather evidence by photographing those tombstones. Try to estimate the numbers of French names to those of other ethnic groups. Based on those estimates, what hypothesis can you develop about the French Canadian influence on your community? What steps would you need to make to confirm or refute this hypothesis? Present your findings in the form of a photo essay. You may wish to ask a middle school French teacher for help.

*Vermont History and Social Sciences Grade Expectations*

Initiate an inquiry (5-6:1; 7-8:1); Develop a hypothesis (5-6:2; 7-8:2); Design research (5-6:3; 7-8:3); Conduct research (5-6:4; 7-8:4); Develop reasonable supporting explanations (5-6:5; 7-8:5); Communicate findings (5-6:7; 7-8:7); Connect past with present (5-6:8; 7-8:8); Understand how humans interpret history (5-6:9; 7-8:9); Understand how cultures change (5-6:13; 7-8:13)

Grades 9-12

**A Change in Politics** For nearly a century, Vermont's voters almost universally elected Republicans to all major political posts. Then, in 1962, they elected Phil Hoff, a Democrat, as governor. French Canadians played a big role in Hoff's victory—and in the political changes that gave the Democratic Party a much larger influence in the state's politics. With the help of the group of your classmates, create a hypothesis about why this might have come to be. Then do research to find out why this transformation occurred. Present your findings in the form of a PowerPoint or slide presentation. If you can, include charts showing voting statistics.

*Vermont History and Social Sciences Grade Expectations*

Initiate an inquiry (9-10:1; 11-12:1); Develop a hypothesis (9-10:2; 11-12:2); Design research (9-10:3; 11-12:3); Conduct research (9-10:4; 11-12:4); Develop reasonable supporting explanations (9-10:5; 11-12:5); Communicate findings (9-10:7; 11-12:7); Understand how humans interpret history (9-10:9; 11-12:9); Understand how cultures change (9-10:13; 11-12:13); Understand various forms of government (9-10: 15; 11-12:15); Understand issues of human interdependence (9-10: 16; 11-12:16); Understand how access affects justice, reward, and power (9-10:17; 11-12:17)

**The French Canadian Sound** The Beaudoin Family is known for its performances of traditional French Canadian music. But they are not the only ones who can experience the fun of playing these tunes from long ago. Join together with some of your classmates who play instruments and/or sing. Collect a few arrangements of traditional French Canadian tunes. First rehearse them, then perform them for your class. Record your performance on digital video, and share it online.

*Vermont History and Social Sciences Grade Expectations*

Initiate an inquiry (9-10:1; 11-12:1); Design research (9-10:3; 11-12:3); Conduct research (9-10:4; 11-12:4); Communicate findings (9-10:7; 11-12:7); Understand how cultures change (9-10:13; 11-12:13)

**A Family History** With the help of your social studies teacher, identify a family of French Canadian origin in your community. Then make a short documentary film about the family. Include information about the family's arrival in Vermont, its history since then, the ways family members have made their livings, and how things have changed—and stayed the same—in recent years. Remember that family photos can be a

great source of film imagery. When your film is edited, show it to students from your school. Invite members of the family you documented to attend the screening.

*Vermont History and Social Sciences Grade Expectations*

Initiate an inquiry (9-10:1; 11-12:1); Design research (9-10:3; 11-12:3); Conduct research (9-10:4; 11-12:4); Communicate findings (9-10:7; 11-12:7); Connect past with present (9-10:8; 11-12:8); Understand how humans interpret history (9-10:9; 11-12:9); Understand how cultures change (9-10:13; 11-12:13); Understand issues of human interdependence (9-10: 16; 11-12:16)

***Career Corner: Photo Researcher***

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The images of child laborers in Vermont mills are powerful ones. Filmmakers, historians, and other researchers are constantly on the lookout for photos that help them tell their stories. Often, they use a photo researcher to help them. Photo researchers are experts at finding just the right photo for the job. If you are interested in history, have good organization skills, and are interested in doing research, you might consider working as a photo researcher. And remember, photo researchers don't just work on history projects. Advertising agencies and business marketing departments often call on the services of photo researchers, too.

**RESOURCES**

*Links*

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*Child Labor Photographs of Lewis Hine archives: [.gov/education/lessons/hine-photos/](http://www.gov/education/lessons/hine-photos/)*